BEGINNERS LIST FOR STARTING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Books

Books to Help You Get Started

Using a book for tips on how to get your family history started is a good way to get underway. Not sure which book to start with? Take a look at the following books in the library. Check out the ones you like and try them out. The call number for each book is the number given to it by the Newton Free Library. If you come from a different library, you can check your own library’s catalog for these and other beginners’ books. If your library uses the Dewey Decimal System of cataloging, take a look at 929 and 929.1. You may find other books you can use. If your library doesn’t own a book you want to see, you can request that it be sent from another library. If your library does not belong to the Minuteman network and does not own a book you want to see, you have your own library’s interlibrary loan system request the book from another library outside your system or from anywhere in the country.


If tracking down your family history seems overwhelming, it is with this book that you should begin. That is why I have placed it first, out of alphabetical sequence. This 62 page book lays out the basic elements you need to know for your search, both online and off. It also lists those websites you will find most useful at this stage of your research. Sometimes the sheer number of genealogy websites is daunting. This work should help you focus your search.


George Morgan is co-host with Drew Smith of “The Genealogy Guys Podcast” (http://www.genealogyguys.com) and is well versed in all things genealogical. His book is longer than the others I have chosen here (430 pp.). George Morgan is an excellent guide to more detailed information on everything from specific types of records to the how tos of genealogical research. You can approach this and other books listed here as something to be read cover to cover. Or you can use it to answer specific questions by checking the table of contents and the index (always best used together.) In other words, you can use it as a reference book.


This work has become one of my favorites. Every page of Quillen’s work is well explained, easy to follow, and illustrated with examples from his own experience. Don’t ignore this work if you feel you are an experienced family history researcher. He has a good number of tips that are useful to everyone. More than once he has reminded me of tips that I had almost forgotten.

This work was written specifically for beginners and again is an excellent resource.


In his mid-30s, Robert Marlin came to the realization that he knew absolutely nothing about his family, including his father and all of his grandparents. He needed to know who they were. He began his search with very little to go on. He did not know his father and his mother shared almost no family information with him. In this book the author brings the reader along on his journey of discovery until he ultimately finds some of his sixteen great-great-grandparents. In the process he shows others, step by step, how they can find their own sixteen.


This book is much more than a dictionary and just a little less than an encyclopedia. Stockwell has created an alphabetical listing of records, locations, and terms, each accompanied by a short (two pages or less) article. It is a great tool for clarifying unfamiliar terms, finding new records to explore, or getting a brief overview for genealogy by country. It is great for beginners, but surprisingly expensive ($49.95 in Amazon, whether new or used). You'll definitely want to take a look at the library's reference copy.

Three Key Reference Books


In genealogy you should not get stumped when you can’t find a particular record like a birth certificate. You learn to ask what exactly is the information I need and where else can I find it. To do this you need to know what records are available. This work explains many, various types of records, what they contain and how they can best be used. Each chapter is written by a different expert in the field.


Take a look here if your ancestor search is spreading into a new state or county. Different states have different ways of keeping and storing records. You will save yourself time, sometimes a lot of it, using this resource. It is arranged alphabetically by state.


When you need to write to a state or another country for copies of birth, marriage, divorce, or death records this becomes a very handy work to have.
Books to Help You Get Organized


This book is key, like that "open me first" box you got at Christmas as a kid. More time is wasted in research looking for that stray piece of paper or going through a useless source you forgot that you checked six months ago. One of the rules of computer research, especially in genealogy, is that if you find it online and it is useful or important, print it out immediately. It may not be there tomorrow. This is only one of the ways you accumulate so much paper so very quickly and get totally overwhelmed. The point of this work is to teach you to file it, forget it, and then find it again fast when you need it.


This is the most recent book I have found about organization and believe me, it is ALL about organization.

Books to Help You with Researching and Citing Sources

THE SHORT VERSION


THE REFERENCE VERSION


The first section of this work is critical for anyone wishing to do accurate research. It explains the process of analyzing evidence. “All evidence is not created equal.” It’s not unusual to find two or more sources with conflicting information. What do you trust? Do you save both? How do you analyze the evidence?

The second part of this work shows how to cite many types and varieties of evidence. Here you will find important sources not covered in other works, not even in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Citing sources is critical in genealogy. You need to record where your information came from, both for yourself and for other interested researchers. Mills’ detailed explanation of each type of record and how to use it will also prove extremely useful for another reason. When you have hit the proverbial brick wall (and you will), this is a good place to look for ideas on where else to find your information may be hiding.
Books to Help You Learn About Family from Family


In genealogy, the first line of research is the people we know. The biggest regret of most people tracking family history is not having asked family members for information while they still could. Interviewing family isn't always as easy as you might think. How do you go about it? What questions should you ask? This book will give you some tips.


This book is simply a list of questions, by topic, relating to family history. It's a great help if you want to interview a family member and don't know what to ask.


Personal Narrative

*Every Family Has a Story: Tales from the Pages of AVOTAYNU*. Edited by Gary Mokotoff. Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2008. 929.1 E93M

This is not a book about how to do your genealogy. It is a book on how such research affects the lives of the people who do it and of the people they find.

What if I Don't Know Anything About My Family


The author began with no information. He did not know who his father was or anything about his grandparents. He takes you step by step on his journey to help you in yours.


This work began with the discovery by the author of a dresser drawer full of photographs in her parents’ home. She knew they had to be relatives, but who were they?
Books to Help You with Languages Other than English

Working with other languages may seem daunting at first. However, when you are dealing with forms from a specific time and place, they will most likely be set up the same way, using the same vocabulary. Get used to one form and you can pluck out the information that changes, information about an individual. These are four great books that will help.


Languages included are German, Swedish, French, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Czech, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, and Lithuanian. Make sure you look at the brief bibliography and list of genealogical societies at the end of the book.


**Understanding Documents for Genealogy and Local History** by Bruce Durie. Stroud, Gloucestershire, England: The History Press, 2013. 929.1 D93U

Think you have it made because your ancestors come from Great Britain? At least you don’t have a language barrier. Think again. If you are lucky enough to get back far enough, you will be dealing with Latin and perhaps even Scottish. This work deals not only with the documents, but also with how to read them.

**NEED ADDITIONAL ADDRESSES?**


**Periodicals**

These quarterly and bi-monthly journals help keep you up-to-date on new sources and developments in genealogy. Here you may find some new techniques or sites that help you discover that piece of missing information, climb over that long standing brick wall, or read a good story about what someone else is doing (that inadvertently tells you how to solve one of your genealogical problems). All issues except the most recent may be checked out.

All genealogy magazines are now kept in Special Collections. Look to your right as you first go into the room.

**Avotaynu: The International Review of Jewish Genealogy.** Published quarterly.
A patron originally donated a three year subscription of this magazine to Newton. We received the first of these issues in the Spring of 2006. When it ran out, the library continued the subscription. It is that good. Even if you are not Jewish, you should take a look at this periodical. There is a great deal of useful information that can be applied by everyone.

**Everton's Family History/Everton's Genealogical Helper.** This publication folded with the January/February 2009 issue. The issues are still extremely useful. Issues for the years from 2000 to the last issue in 2009 can be found in the Special Collections Room of the Newton Free Library. It should be to the right as you go in the door.

**Internet Genealogy.** Published bimonthly. Newton owns all issues from June/July 2007 through to the most current. Articles on numerous topics cover up-to-date sites and time saving strategies for searching your family history through the Internet.

**American Ancestors.** Original title: **New England Ancestors.** Quarterly published by the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Winter 2000 - current. This is a well written source packed with useful information. You will be tempted to read it cover to cover.

**Useful Internet Sites**

Here are sites you can begin using to start your search. Take a few minutes whenever you are working with a new website to explore its home page. Click on the various tabs. See what it offers. A perfunctory search the first time may lead you to dismiss a source, when what you need is sitting there all along just a click or two away. Remember, as well, that information is being constantly added to these sites. What is not there today may be there tomorrow, especially on the list that follows. Have a hit list of sites that you want to check periodically.

If you see this list online or as an attachment to an email, the links will be live. To get to these Internet sites, you need to hold down the Ctrl key in the lower left corner of your keyboard while you are clicking on the link. (If you are looking at a paper copy, you can type the address into your computer.) Thanks to Alfaretta for reminding me that I needed to include this tip on my lists.

**Ancestry**

[http://www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

Trying to track your ancestors? This website allows you access to more than three billion names attached to numerous types of records from all over the world. Ancestry offers photographic copies of a large number of original records—surrogates that are usually as good as having the original in front of you.

There are two ways to access this database. You can pay for a personal subscription or you can come into the library and use it for free. There is no remote access from the library.
Cyndi's List
http://www.cyndislist.com
This is the motherlode of genealogical web sites. Cyndi Howells has indexed by subject over 255,450 genealogy web sites with a little help from her friends. If you visit only one site, this is the one to check out. Cyndi's List also has a section on the left frame of her site called "Internet Stuff You Need To Know." This is extremely useful for anyone using the Internet, not only those interested in family history. Scroll down a bit. It's beneath "About Cyndi's List."

Genealogy Software Reviews

http://genealogy-software-review.toptenreviews.com (for PCs)

http://genealogy-software-review.toptenreviews.com/mac-genealogy-software (for Macs)

A common question I get is how do you find a good computer software program to record your ever expanding family tree (and the documentation that goes with it.) Every person is different. One answer never fits all. The above site gives a listing of the top ten most currently used programs, a chart showing how they stack up against each other, and individual reviews. It's a good place to start. Many let you have a trial run for free. I'd look over the material, especially the pros and cons on the first page of each software program, read the reviews, and when you want to start using your computer to save and sort your family history, give several a brief spin.

The LDS (Mormon) Genealogy Site
https://familysearch.org
Created and maintained by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (aka LDS, aka Mormons), this is probably one of the most popular spots to start checking family surnames. It's worth some time exploring. There are often riches to be found here. More and more copies of original records and transcriptions are being added each day from all over the world. It is basically the same type of database as Ancestry with one key exception. It is absolutely free of charge. This site is only concerned with genealogy, not the LDS religion. They do not proselytize. I've been using this site for many years with great results. I highly recommend it.

National Archives--Northeast Region
http://www.archives.gov/northeast/boston/
The National Archives and Records Administration Northeast Region branch in Waltham maintains this site in conjunction with the National Archives in Washington. NARA is a treasure trove of genealogical records generated by the federal government, including census records, military records, immigration and naturalization records. Please note the word "federal" in that last sentence. The Archives does not include other types of records like birth, marriage and death records (found in local cities and towns) probate records (usually found in the country courts), etc.

American Ancestors/New England Historic Genealogical Society
http://www.americanancestors.org/home.html This is the web site of the New England Historic Genealogical Society. The free part of the site is well worth checking out from home. You can find their hours, location, free class schedules, and
subscription fees on the website. It also gives you free access to their online catalog.

The Newton Free Library subscribes to the NEHGS member’s version of the website. This version gives you access to many sources of information and to a number of databases that are unique to this Society. Check with a librarian for access. (This subscription site is only available within the library.)

Oral History at FamilyArchives

As mentioned above, interviewing family members may result in some of your most treasured memories. But it is neither an easy nor a natural thing to do. This is one site that can help you avoid common pitfalls. You want to make it a pleasant experience for both you, the interviewer, and the person you are interviewing.

Wayback Machine Internet Archive
http://www.archive.org/web/web.php

You know that old Internet adage “Print it today because it may be gone tomorrow.” Well, what if it’s gone and you didn’t print it out. Or you just found a link to the perfect website and it's defunct. Try the above website. If you have the web address or web site title, this is particularly useful. The Wayback Machine Internet Archive claims to have archived over 85 billion web pages from 1996 on. And that number just keeps on growing. You might get lucky and your lost site might be here. It's worth a look.

Here’s just one example. Rand decided to get rid of their Genealogy Club site shortly after I discovered it. I was able to pull it up again, complete with working links using this “Wayback Machine” website. I discovered this thanks to one of the patrons who took my genealogy class. To get to the Rand site, Just click on the above Wayback Machine's web address into you browser's location bar. When the Wayback Machine comes up, copy and paste Rand's Genealogy Club's site http://www.rand.org/personal/genea/other.html into their search box. Click on the last update for the Rand genealogy website.

Online Newsletter

This is absolutely the best way to stay up-to-date. Unlike the bi-monthlies and quarterlies mentioned above, this is a blog that is constantly updated and can be received as a weekly newsletter. Dick Eastman, its creator, is one of the most trusted names in genealogy.

EOGN: Eastman Online Genealogy Newsletter
http://www.eogn.com

If I only had access to one genealogy newsletter or magazine, this is the one that I could not do without. There is so much information and so little time. It is my up-to-date lifeline for what is going in our collective passion of family history. I highly recommend taking a look at the above website. Like genealogy, it is addictive.
Getting Help

Family Search Learning Center
https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/home.html
This link brings you to actual classes on video. They run anywhere from five minutes to an hour. Each should also have a printout that you can follow and use. If you scroll down, on the main part of the page you will see a section on Beginning Genealogy Courses. There are twenty-one of them, each about five minutes in length. Let me know what you think of them.

Family Search Wiki
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Main_Page
Here you will find articles by topic. Below the search area you will see boxes. The first one on the left brings you to articles for Beginning Genealogy.

American Ancestors/New England Historic Genealogical Society
Although you must pay to become a member (or use their database at the Newton Free Library at no charge) there are some services the NEHGS provides for free to non-members.
http://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/getting-started#steps
2. Learning Resources
http://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources
3. Subject Guides
http://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read
4. Archived Webinars
http://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/watch
5. Events and Programs
http://www.americanancestors.org/education/events-and-programs
If you take a morning class, you can use the Library for the rest of the day. Most, though not all, of these classes are free of charge.

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Newton Free Library
Newton, Mass.
http://newtonfreelibrary.net