

An Introduction to Genealogical Research and the Role of the Genealogy Librarian

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What is genealogy?

- Figuring out relationships (especially family relationships) among individuals
- Creating and telling the stories about the people we're interested in (family history)
- Using oral tradition and documents to provide evidence for the facts we share

What motivates people to engage in genealogy?

- An interest in history and geography, figuring out where our families fit
- The desire to join a heritage society
- The need to have a medical history for our relatives
- The pleasure in solving puzzles and doing it with others

Before you start to research...

- Decide what your research goals are (why are you researching, what branch of the family are you most interested in, etc.)
- Install genealogy software to keep track of what you will discover
 - Family Tree Maker (familytreemaker.com)
 - Legacy Family Tree (legacyfamilytree.com)
 - RootsMagic (rootsmagic.com)
- Decide how you will organize the papers and photos you will collect (binders? file folders?)
- Make sure that irreplaceable documents are digitized and then stored in archival-safe storage containers

As you find each new source of information...

- Determine whether the source is original (written down in its original form) or derivative (copied from another source, such as a transcript, an abstract, or an index)
- Determine whether each piece of information in the source is primary (created at or near the time of the event, usually by a participant or an eyewitness) or secondary (created by someone with second-hand knowledge, usually at a time or place removed from the event)

Put your ancestors into the context of the times and places in which they lived

- Use historic maps to understand the relationship of one place to another

Start at home

- People: Interview all relatives, especially the oldest surviving generation, and use a voice recorder or a video recorder to capture each interview
- Documents: Look in attics, basements, garages, closets, bookcases, desks, and other storage spaces to find sources of genealogical value

Do a “literature review”

- Locate published sources that may contain information on ancestors: family histories; local histories; articles from genealogical or historical journals, magazines, and newsletters
- Examine and evaluate published sources before incorporating information into your own files

Common sources of genealogical information

- Marriage certificates
- Death certificates, newspaper obituaries, and tombstones
- Family Bibles
- Photographs
- Censuses (national and state) and city directories
- Ship passenger lists and naturalization papers
- Military records (draft registration, muster rolls, pension records)
- Wills and probate records, and land records

Where to locate records

- At home (yours or that of a relative)
- Websites
- Libraries
- Archives (national, state, university, etc.)
- Courthouses
- Cemeteries

Role of the genealogy librarian

- Develop and manage the genealogy collection (both print and electronic), including digitization and preservation
- Orient the genealogy patron to the library’s resources and services
- Conduct a genealogical reference interview
- Make appropriate referrals to other repositories and services
- Create and manage educational programming
- Work with local societies and volunteers
- Market the library’s collections, services, and events
- Collaborate with local, state, national, and international organizations
- Become aware of current legal and ethical issues related to genealogical research
- Develop a basic understanding of the impact of technology on genealogical research, including DNA testing