

How to begin tracing your family tree

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If you like jigsaw puzzles, detective novels, Cluedo and the thrill of a chase, you'll love genealogy.

Genealogy means tracing your ancestors' names, dates and places.

Family history is finding out what they did in between their birth, marriage and death.

Tracing both genealogy and family history can be very satisfying hobbies, especially when you realise that the people you are investigating once lived and that you may have inherited their characteristics and physical features. Genealogists also make excellent local historians. Once you know which town or village your ancestors came from, you begin to feel a sense of belonging and often develop a deep interest in the area.

People with Australian ancestors have the chance to delve into the history of townships. Excellent collections of historic photographs and maps have been gathered by hard-working local historical societies. Many of these societies and family history groups are conscientiously transcribing graveyards and collecting and preserving documents and other local material.

Genealogy should be a family project. Children benefit from a knowledge of their ancestors. History becomes more meaningful when they realise that their ancestors were involved in certain battles, or lived through significant historical periods.

Tracing one's ancestors can be a thrilling and rewarding experience for all the family – but it can also be frustrating and expensive. I love genealogy and hope that you will also gain an appreciation of your ancestors as you delve into your family's roots. And don't forget that you can't change what has already happened!

If you could see your ancestors all standing in a row
Would you be proud of them or not, or don't you really know?
Some strange discoveries are made in climbing family trees
But some of them, perhaps, do not really please.
If you could see your ancestors all standing in a row
There might be some of them, perhaps, you wouldn't care to know.
But there's another question which requires a different view
If you could meet your ancestors, would they be proud of you?

What you need

1. Get yourself a black pen, pencils, a Pedigree Chart, a quiet room, spare time and your research notebook.
2. Round up all your personal papers and certificates.
3. On the Pedigree Chart, write your name in the space marked '1'. If you are a married female, you must record your *maiden* name, not *SMITH née JONES*, just *JONES*.
4. Fill in your birthplace and details.
5. Fill in your father's name and details in number 2 on the Pedigree Chart.
6. Your mother goes in under her maiden name at number 3.
7. Your father's father is number 4 and your father's mother is number 5.
8. Put your mother's father in at number 6 and his wife at number 7.
9. Don't forget to use *maiden* names.

10. The rule generally is *odd* numbers for females, *even* numbers for males (except, of course, for number 1).
11. If you can complete more generations on your Pedigree Chart, put them in their respective spaces.
12. There is no room for your brothers and sisters on a Pedigree Chart. This information goes on a different form called a Family Record Sheet.
13. A Family Record Sheet has spaces allotted for details about a husband, wife and children. *Every* couple on your Pedigree Chart should appear as a child on a Family Record Sheet. For instance, you would complete a Family Record Sheet showing yourself as a child with your brothers and sisters and your parents. Another sheet would show your father as a child with his brothers and sisters. A third would show his father as a child with his brothers and sisters, and so on.
14. If you are married, you should fill in a Family Record Sheet showing yourself as a spouse, with your children and their details. You will end up needing more Family Record Sheets than Pedigree Charts.
15. The next step is to find out what information you are lacking.
16. When you have listed your information on Pedigree Charts and Family Record Sheets you should contact the relatives concerned.
17. You will also need to purchase Birth, Death and Marriage certificates to help you get to the next generation.

How to research

It is important to remember that you must always work backwards from the known (i.e. yourself) to the unknown (i.e. the previous generation), one generation at a time, proving each step along the way by obtaining copies of:

- a. Your own Birth certificate
- b. Marriage certificate of your parents
- c. Birth certificate of your father
- d. Birth certificate of your mother
- e. Marriage certificate of your father's parents
- f. Birth certificate of your father's father (your paternal grandfather)
- g. Birth certificate of your father's mother (your paternal grandmother)
- h. Birth certificate of your mother's father (your maternal grandfather)
- i. Birth certificate of your mother's mother (your maternal grandmother)
- j. And so on, for each previous generation, plus death certificates

What to do next

If there is a Family History, Genealogy or Historical Society near where you live you should join it, at least for a year. As well as being shown how to research accurately and for the least cost, you will also have access to many of the records you need in your research.

Some societies hold classes for Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level researchers which could be of interest as you make progress with your research.

Acknowledgement

Based on information contained in *The A to Z of Genealogy* published by the late Janet Reakes in 1986, this article has been compiled with the kind permission of Janet's family.

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