

FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

Four stages to consider: 1) pre-research thoughts 2) doing the research, 3) gathering, or packaging, what you find, and 4) distribution

I – PRE-RESEARCH

Consider

- Thinking about an objective. What do I want to accomplish?
- Developing a general approach: focus on government, church and other records. Use testimonial information to develop leads (least reliable form of information; accuracy might suffer through recollections over time and perhaps a tendency to embellish)
- Possible end-product. A written product for children, grandchildren and other relatives.
- Setting target dates for various stages of effort. (could be useful tool for meeting objectives; helpful but didn't always work for me)

II – RESEARCH

A few general thoughts:

- start with what you know and go to what you do not know
 - start with information related to parents and go to grandparents, etc.
 - do not start by going to foreign information sources and looking for records that have your surname on them; this approach would make accuracy highly unlikely
- will find conflicting information; if high level of confidence cannot be found
 - more to be accurate using the information that comes from a date closest to the event – age, date of immigration to the country, location of birth for family members; however, no guarantee
- document would you do, so you won't do it again (especially steps that are not productive)

A. In the United States

U.S. census records – excellent starting point

Censuses go back to 1790, but they are of relatively little value until 1850. In 1850, individuals were listed by name for the first time. Prior to 1850 information was only gathered by the number of household members by gender and age.

Two primary sources for researching U.S. information: 1) Ancestry, which requires an annual subscription or visits to a branch of the county library and 2) familysearch.org website, which is maintained by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints – Mormons and available on home computers.

- Conducted every 10 years and made public 72 years later
- Most helpful censuses would be those taken from 1850 to 1940. (1890 census destroyed in fire)
- Contain a wealth of information. Some of the available information included:
 - name, age, birthplaces, occupations, value of real estate, ability to read and write
 - number of years married; for married women, the number of children born and the number still living; one-time (1900) month and year of birth; whether residence was owned (with or without mortgage) or rented (amount of rent); citizenship status; year of immigration to U.S. and naturalization;
 - 1930: whether the household had a "radio set"
 - 1940: fewer questions than past years but some questions which were administered to 4 percent sample – the names that appeared of two specific lines on the form.
- Census information available in county libraries and from home computers, using your library card number (go to county library website; premium sites; genealogy; Heritage Quest Online) Will need library card number from back of card.
- U.S. Census Bureau conducted an Agriculture census since 1840
 - Some decennial census includes a citation for location of additional records for the property discussed in that census
 - Information such as number of various types of livestock owned, amount of product produced (bushels of wheat, corn, etc.) (1880 farm census: value of farm; number of acres; weeks of hired labor in 1879; grass lands; number and type of cattle, sheep, and lambs) (1870 census asked about the farm size and animals; also that amount of produce during the year ending June, 1870 – bushels of rye, corn, oats, barley, rice and much more)
 - Gives an indication of the size and nature of farm that ancestors had and a glimpse of what their lives may have been like.

State Censuses

- Majority of States conducted a census. Many were in areas prior to becoming a state. Some states conducted a single census and others conducted several.
- Some states conducted censuses to essentially supplement or update the Federal effort. For example, New York decennial censuses from 1825 to 1875, 1892 and 1905 to 1925. Several are on Ancestry and Family Search.

City Directories

- Annual directories for many cities
- Provide addresses and occupations
- Available in county libraries (on Ancestry)

Ship manifests

- Most immigration to the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s came through New York¹.

¹ Primary New York arrivals: Castle Gardens August 1, 1855 to April 18, 1890; Barge Office April 19, 1890 to December 31, 1891; Old Ellis Island January 1, 1892 to June 14, 1897; Barge Office June 14, 1897 to December 16, 1900; and New Ellis Island starting December 17, 1900 to about 1954.

- Lesser east coast activity at Boston, Philadelphia and New Orleans
- Some immigration to Canadian ports²
- Dates and ports of entry to U.S.; name of ship; can purchase an image of many of the ships
- In early 1900s address where person was going to, and contact had to be provided
- Ellis Island data base (ellisland.org) has pages showing arrivals and copies of ship manifest page.
- Ancestry has some records
- Castle Gardens
- Newspapers, such as New York Times, contain information on dates of arrival and locations of ports visited during journey (can do a word search on the New York Times Historical Newspapers, for the name of the ship)
- U.K. recently put online it's records of departures

Naturalization

- Record consists of about 3 pages
- When and where the applicant was born
- When they came to U.S. and the name of ship
- Some records on Ancestry; if not, for a small fee copies can be obtained from The National Archives and Record Administration (NARA)

Church records

- Can contact churches and request information (some on ancestry or familysearch)
- Catholic baptisms and marriages in Ireland (Republic and Northern) now available on Ancestry and at home, by going to the website of the National Library of Ireland) Few church registers contain death listings. Most records/registers are available, though there are some gaps.

WW I Registration (Ancestry, a good source)

- States were required to conduct a registration of all males
- Information generally includes date and place of birth, employment, physical description, nearest relative, etc.

WW II Registration (Ancestry, a good source) (fold3; administered by the National Archives)

- States were required to conduct a registration of all males
- 24 million registered in 1917 and 1918
- Information generally includes date and place of birth, employment, physical description, nearest relative, etc.
- Familysearch has the cards for those ages 45 to 64 (born 1877 to 1897) – referred to as the “old man’s draft.” Ancestry has registration for 29 states

Registration of aliens for certain nationalities, such as Italian, during WW II

- Can provide birth location, date of immigration, etc.

² See the Library and Archives of Canada for 1865 to 1922 passenger lists, for arrivals by ocean and boarder ports.

Passport applications

- Applications generally contain information on date and place of birth; could be helpful in determining birthplace, if from a foreign country)
- 1795 to 1925 available at Familysearch and Ancestry³ or contact State Department

Social Security Death Records

- Available on line

Vital records from state, county or city

- Many have put records online, such as West Virginia
- Birth, marriage and death
- Contains much information, age of parents, location of event, cause of death, etc.

Land transactions

- Usually available at city or county level
- Shows amount of land owned by ancestors; when they purchased it; when they sold it
- Some older records have interesting descriptions of the boundaries of land being transferred; some refer to trees, rocks, ditches and gullies.

Maps

- City Directories often have a map of the city in the front, or back, of the book.
- The Madison Building, Library of Congress, has an extensive collection of maps of U. S. and foreign city maps.

Cemetery Markers

- www.findagrave.com
- Accessible through Ancestry

Wills and probate records

- Usually at city or county level
- Some on line
- Interesting reading to see holdings at time of death and where items went

Local libraries

- Many areas including PWC have a local history and genealogy section

B. Outside of U.S. – Prior to arriving in United States

(PRIMARY SOURCE IS FAMILYSEARCH.ORG. Search; catalog; fill in location)

³ Index and images available at www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2185145 and search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1174 (charge for accessing ancestry)

Vital records for many countries of Western Europe are available on microfilm back to about 1800.

- History Information Centers at Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS) is a major source for these records.
- Microfilm available for review at PWC library. (Request film to be sent to Bull Run Branch, on Ashton Ave. in Manassas.)
- Family Search website is starting to put information online.
- Records were filmed by LDS representatives as part of their Missions.
- Records from France are particularly interesting. Following the French Revolution (1789 to 1799), the new government abandoned the Gregorian Calendar and established their own calendar – years were expressed in the year of the revolution and the names and number days for each month changed.

III – WRAP-UP OPTIONS

- Might consider pulling together the information obtained
- Can be as little, or much, as one would like – a few pages or a book
- Organizing by the four lines (grandparents) can be a reasonable approach
 - What has been learned about each grandparent? And his/her parents? and their parents?
- Can combine written summary with available photographs
- Producing a summary of work is not difficult

IV – DISTRIBUTION

- Provide to family members
- Libraries and associations for the benefit of other researchers and family members.

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POPULATION CENSUS ITEMS

1790-1990

(Includes only those supplemental schedules still in existence; excludes questions asked on a sample basis only).

1790

Name of family head; free white males of 16 years and up, free white males under 16; free white females; slaves; other persons.

1800

Name of family head; if white, age and sex; race; slaves.

1810

Name of family head; if white, age and sex; race; slaves.

1820

Name of family head; age; sex; race; foreigners not naturalized; slaves; industry (agriculture, commerce, and manufactures).

1830

Name of family head; age; sex; race; slaves; deaf and dumb; blind; foreigners not naturalized.

1840

Name of family head; age; sex; race; slaves; number of deaf and dumb; number of blind; number of insane and idiotic and whether in public or private charge; number of persons in each family employed in each of six classes of industry and one of occupation; literacy; pensioners for Revolutionary or military service.

1850

Name; age; sex; race; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic; value of real estate; occupation; birthplace; whether married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether a pauper or convict.

Supplemental schedules for slaves, and persons who died during the year.

1860

Name; age; sex; race; value of real estate; value of personal estate; occupation; birthplace; whether married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether deaf and dumb; blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict; number of slave houses.

Supplemental schedules for slaves, and persons who died during the year.

1870

Name; age; race; occupation; value of real estate; value of personal estate; birthplace; whether parents were foreign born; month of birth if born within the year; month of marriage if married within the year; school attendance; literacy; whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic; male citizens 21 and over, and number of such persons denied the right to vote for other than rebellion.

Supplemental schedule for persons who died during the year.

1880

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; month of birth if born within the census year; occupation; months unemployed during the year; sickness or temporary disability; whether blind, deaf and dumb, idiotic, insane, maimed, crippled, bedridden, or otherwise disabled; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and parents.

Supplemental schedules for persons who died during the year.

1890

General schedules—destroyed. Supplemental schedules for Union veterans of the Civil War and their widows.

1900

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; number of years married; for women, number of children born and number now living; birthplace of person and parents; if foreign born, year of immigration and whether naturalized; occupation; months not employed; school attendance; literacy; ability to speak English; whether on a farm; home owned or rented and if owned, whether mortgaged.

1910

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; number of years of present marriage; for women, number of children born and number now living; birthplace and mother tongue of person and parents; if foreign born, year of immigration, whether naturalized, and whether able to speak English, or if not, language spoken; occupation, industry, and class of worker; if an employee, whether out of work during year; literacy; school attendance; home owned or rented; if owned, whether mortgaged; whether farm or house; whether a survivor of Union or Confederate Army or Navy; whether blind or deaf and dumb.

1920

Address; name; relationship to family head; sex; race; age; marital status; if foreign born, year of immigration to the U.S., whether naturalized, and year of naturalization; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and parents; mother tongue of foreign born; ability to speak English; occupation, industry, and class of worker; home owned or rented; if owned, whether free or mortgaged.

1930

Address; name; relationship to family head; home owned or rented; value or monthly rental; radio set; whether on a farm; sex; race; age; marital status; age at first marriage; school attendance; literacy; birthplace of person and parents; if foreign born, language spoken in home before coming to U.S., year of immigration, whether naturalized, and ability to speak English; occupation, industry, and class of worker; whether at work previous day (or last regular working day); veteran status; for Indians, whether of full or mixed blood, and tribal affiliation.

1940

Address; home owned or rented; value or monthly rental; whether on a farm; name; relationship to household head; sex; race; age; marital status; school attendance; educational attainment; birthplace; citizenship of foreign born; location of residence 5 years ago and whether on a farm; employment status; if at work, whether in private, or nonemergency government work, or in public emergency work (WPA, CCC, NYA, etc.); if in private or nonemergency government work, hours worked in week; if seeking work or on public emergency work, duration of unemployment; occupation, industry, and class of worker; weeks worked last year; income last year.

1950

Address; whether house is on farm; name; relationship to household head; race; sex; age; marital status; birthplace; if foreign born, whether naturalized; employment status; hours worked in week; occupation, industry, and class of worker.

1960 and 1970

Address; name; relationship to household head; sex; race; age; marital status.

1980 and 1990

Address; name; household relationship, sex; race; age; marital status; Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent.