

# GETTING STARTED IN GENEALOGY

Basics To Help Find Your Ancestors



# Intro

## Begin with yourself, then work backwards by generation

When you start your research for family history, you will want to gather the basic information for each individual. Gather the general information starting with yourself for each of your relatives. Basic facts to identify include:

- Full name (first, middle, last) and any name changes or nicknames
- Important dates (birth, baptism, marriage/divorce, death, burial)
- Places of important events (city, county, states, country)

Our ancestors are more than just important dates and places. They had lives and stories to tell. To find some of these stories or to put flesh on bones as I like to say, you need to look beyond the vital statistics for each ancestor. Other personal facts of interest can give your ancestor personality and a life story. These facts include:

- Education (names and locations of schools, colleges or universities)
- Occupations
- Religion and churches attended
- Personal anecdotes and stories

Verify the information with more than just remembrances. Find documents and records that support the information.

# Organization

The easiest way to start keeping track of what you find is by filling out a **pedigree chart** and **4 family group sheets**.

## Pedigree Chart

A **pedigree chart** shows a person's direct ancestors – parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. To fill it out, put your name on the left most line. Add your father's information just to the right and above yours, and your mother's information below. Your father's father goes to the right and above your father, and your father's mother (paternal grandmother) is below him. A pedigree chart is at the back of this packet.

## Family Group Sheet

The **family group sheet** is a way to organize information about a nuclear family – father, mother, and their children. In the event either or both parents have additional families, complete another form for each one. Fill out as much information that you can for your parents, your siblings and yourself. (The children should be listed in birth order with eldest first.)

Start with filling out 4 of the family group sheets (at the end of the packet) before you go further. This will help ensure that you keep track of your generations. Do not skip generations as it will be hard for you to backtrack. It is critical to have a document that links the child with the parent before you move back to the next generation.

The 4 family group sheets include

1. Yourself and spouse, if you are married
2. Yourself as a child
3. Your mom as a child
4. Your dad as a child

## Research Logs

A research log can tell you what you have searched, what you found or didn't find, and save you time because you don't need to search the same source again. (See attached example of **Research Log**.) Example: When looking for John Smith in the 1870 US Census and not finding him with the primary surname spelling, you want check other alternative spellings (Schmidt, Smithe, etc.). It is good to know what and what not works. That is to say keep track of searches where nothing was found.

## Notes

Throughout your research, you will be finding a lot of great information. **Be sure to document where you get each piece of information.** This will lend credibility to all of the work that you have completed. In addition, you never know when you want to relook at the document you got the information from but if you do not cite where it is from you might be able to the original document you go the information. [Unfortunately, I have firsthand experience with this.]

You might be a little overwhelmed with the information that you are finding. To help file your information, there are a couple of methods.

## Physical Organization

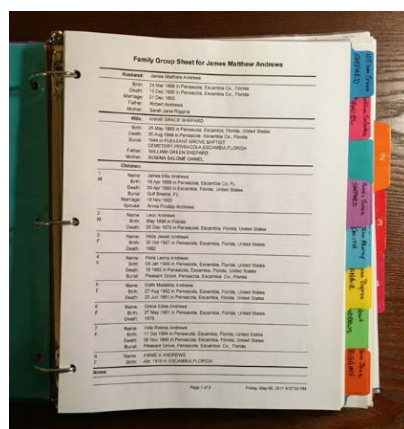
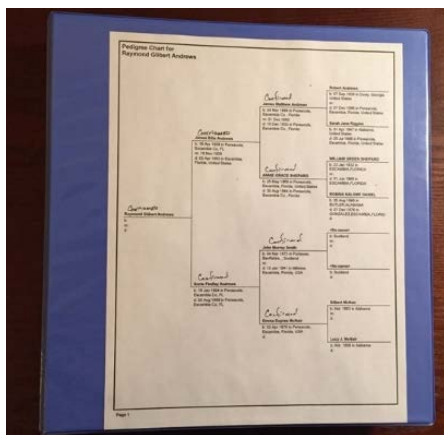
There are two common ways to physically organize the ephemera, notes and/or worksheets that you find or create while doing your research. There is no correct way to organize. It really depends upon your preferences. Your filing system may include the information needed for on-going research, such as:

- Family group records and pedigree charts
- Maps
- Research logs for the family
- Photocopies of source documents, interview notes, copies of e-mail and correspondence, Internet printouts.

**NOTE:** Keep the child's document with the parents until the child gets married. Once they get married, they will get their own protector sheet or file folder.

## Notebooks

The first possible way to organize your materials is by using 3 ring binders and sheet protectors. Each of the binders would be specific to a surname (ex. Smith and Jones). Smith would have a separate binder from Jones.



## Hanging folders

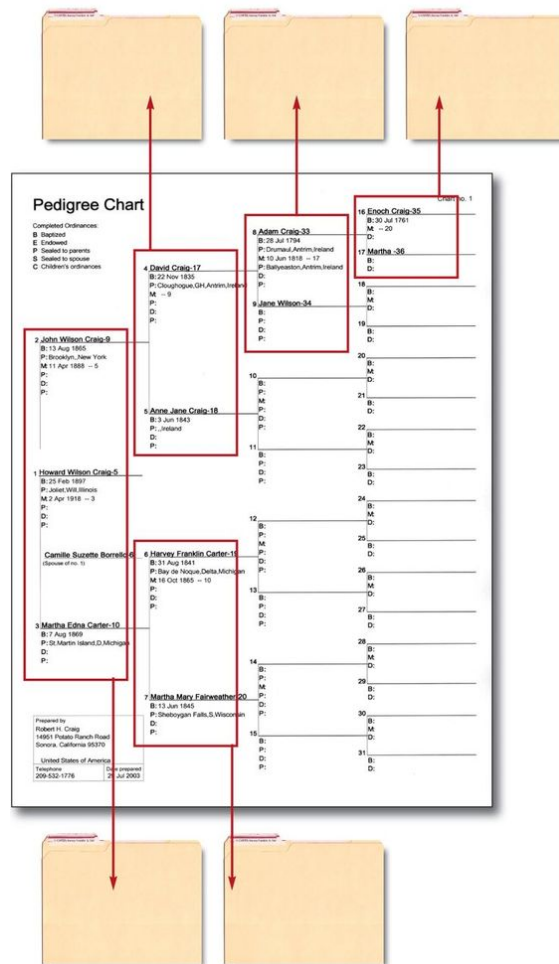
The second possible way to organize is through hanging folders. Create one file folder for each couple on your pedigree chart. One visual way to keep track is through color coding each of the family groups. For example:

- Paternal Grandfather – Blue
- Paternal Grandmother - Green
- Maternal Grandfather – Red
- Maternal Grandmother – Yellow

In this example, all of the surnames directly related to your Paternal Grandfather would have a blue label.



Create one File Folder  
for each couple on your Pedigree Charts



## Digital Organization

Organizing can also be done digitally within a database (genealogy computer program). Many documents that you might find are digitally found within online databases like Ancestry and FamilySearch however you can also scan the documents and copies that you find in books or other repositories. There are several software database options (free/paid) that you could go with including Rootsmagic, Family Tree Maker, Legacy Tree and Reunion (Mac) just to name a few. Basically, they operate similarly. They allow you to enter in facts, sources and pictures about a certain individual and connect them through family units. Many allow you to create reports, charts, and graphs of your family tree.

# Talk to Relatives

Instead of jumping straight into online resources, we first suggest that you talk with your relatives: grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins and anyone else that you think of that might know facts about your family or have artifacts from them.

## Artifacts

Some of the type of artifacts that you would be asking your relatives about are:

- Obituaries and funeral cards
- Photo albums and scrapbooks
- Marriage certificates
- Family Bibles
- Old letters
- Diaries and journals
- Newspaper clippings
- Military medals, uniforms, discharge papers
- Direct knowledge of major events

## Questions

Each one of your relatives had different experiences and details that might be different. (i.e. husband and wife's recollections of their wedding) They were at the same place and experienced the same thing; but I am sure had different impressions and details about that experience. These conversations are just as important as the dates. **Take NOTES!** If you are able, record or videotape the interviews. A few basic questions to get the conversation started are:

- Where and when were you born? What was happening at the time of your birth? What was the name given at birth? (These questions might be obvious but the name that you know the individual by might not be their real name. i.e. "Peggy" might be "Margaret".)
- What are your parent's names and maiden names? When and where were they born? How many children did your parents have and what were their names?
- Do you recall when and where your grandparents died? Where are they buried?
- How did your parents and grandparents earn a living?
- Do you know any stories they told about what life was like?
- What religion did your parents and grandparents practice?
- Do you know the names of the first ancestors who came to America? Do you know why they left their homeland to come to America?
- Where did they live prior to coming to this country? Name of the town or village they lived in?
- Do you know any stories they told about life in their homeland? What were their occupations?
- Did any family members follow them to America at a later date?
- Did you ever hear of anyone in your family serving in any wars? What was the soldier's name?
- Describe some of your family's customs and traditions

At the end of your interview, compile information and complete pedigree charts and family group sheets.

**NOTE:** Please remember that our relatives' memories can be flawed or skewed so you will want to make sure you try to document the facts that they share to lend credibility to them.

# Research

After you have gotten some leads from your relatives, it is now time to do some digging in the records and documents of different repositories to find your ancestors. You can start researching in physical locations such as your local libraries, museums, archives, and churches as well as using online resources like [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org), [Findmypast.com](https://www.findmypast.com) and [MyHeritage.com](https://www.myheritage.com).

**NOTE:** You may be tempted to copy the information from the online trees on sites like Ancestry/FamilySearch/MyHeritage. However, I would take these “facts” as a lead, not an absolute, because many do not have sources to corroborate the facts.

You might be asking yourself “What types of facts should I look for?” A selection of facts are as follows:

- Name
- Nicknames
- Birth date
- Marriage date
- Death date
- Baptism date
- Military service
- Place(s) of residence
- Occupation

Another question you might be asking is “Where might I find these facts?” There are many record types that you can look for that might have the information you are looking for. Here is a short list of sources that you can look for:

- Birth/marriage/death certificates
- Church records (baptism, confirmation, marriage, death)
- Government records (census, tax, land grants, etc.)
- Wills/probate/estate records
- Military records (draft registration, pension, service records, etc.)
- Court records
- City Directories
- School records (diploma, yearbooks, grade books, etc.)
- Employment records
- Diaries/Letters/Journals
- Handwritten family trees

For a more comprehensive list, see attached **Source Checklist**. You might want to keep one of these for each of your ancestors as this will give you a direction to go.

Short descriptions from FamilySearch.org Wiki of some of the most important record types:

1. **Death records** – Death records are kept in the state where your ancestor died, not where they were buried. However these records can provide a burial location. Death records are especially helpful because they may provide important information on a person's birth, spouse, and parents. Some researchers look first for death records because there are often death records for persons who have no birth or marriage records. Prior to death registers being recorded at the local county court house, a record of burial may be found in Church records.
2. **Marriage records** -- For every household change, you will need to be able to find a record that will state the mother and father. The marriage records generally list these names. These records are usually stored with the clerk of the town or county where the bride resided, but some particularly early ones may be housed in the state’s archives and more recent ones may be found in the state’s Division of Vital Records.
3. **Birth records** – Mandatory birth records were not kept by all of the states until well into the 1900s. Some early records of births and christenings or baptism dates were kept in local church records. But, it is not unusual for birth records to be entirely missing.

4. **US Census** – The census records are available from 1790 -1940 (with exception of 1890 census which burned). Prior to the 1850 census, the record only contained the name of the head of the household. From 1850 forward, the record listed every member of the household which allows us to track households from place to place.
5. **Wills** – A *will* is a written and legal expression of the individual's instructions regarding his or her property at the time of their death. The will usually describes the estate and often gives the names and relationships of heirs or beneficiaries. The affidavit of the witnesses includes the date or proof of death. If accepted by the court, a copy of the will was recorded in a will book or register kept by the clerk of the court. The clerk may have made errors when he transcribed the will, but the original will is often kept in the probate packet. Probate laws vary by state, but generally a will is valid if the testator was of legal age, of a sound mind, and was free from restraint when he or she wrote the will.
6. **Probate** – Probate records are court records created after an individual's death that relate to a court's decisions regarding the distribution of the estate to the heirs or creditors and the care of dependents. This process took place whether there was a will (testate) or not (intestate). Various types of records are created throughout the probate process. These may include bonds, petitions, accounts, inventories, administrations, orders, decrees, and distributions.
7. **Pension** – The federal government and some state governments granted pensions or bounty land to officers, disabled veterans, needy veterans, widows or orphans of veterans, and veterans who served a certain length of time. Pension records usually contain more genealogical information than service records. However, not every veteran received or applied for a pension.
8. **Military Service records** – Service records for militia, volunteer, or regular forces document that an individual served in the military and can provide your ancestor's unit or organization.
9. **Court records** – Court records are usually searched after other records have already been investigated, but they should not be overlooked. Court records can establish family relationships and places of residence. They often provide occupations, descriptions of individuals, and other excellent family history information. Many of your ancestors' names will be found in court records—perhaps as defendants, plaintiffs, witnesses, or jurors. They may have participated in cases involving:

Probate	Naturalization	Licenses	Appointment to public offices
Divorce	Debt	Taxes	Civil and criminal lawsuits
Adoption	Guardianship	Property disputes	Crimes

10. **Church records** -- The information kept in a church record by a specific church depended largely on the denomination of the church and the record keeper. Each denomination may have recorded different information. Church records contain additional information when they recorded church sacraments or ceremonies. For example, christenings or baptisms often included the birth information of a child, parents of the child, and witnesses or godparents, which were often relatives.

**Check out the Chatham Area Public Library's shelves for these helpful Books:**

- *Organize your genealogy: strategies and solutions for every researcher* by Drew Smith (929.1 SMITH)
- *How to Do Everything Genealogy* by George G Morgan (929.1072 MOR)
- *The Everything Guide to Online Genealogy* by Kimberly Powell (929.1072 POW)
- *Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques* by George G. Morgan and Drew Smith (929.1072 MOR)

# Illinois Fast Facts and Key Resources

Lisa A. Alzo June 1, 2006 updated on August 18, 2017

*Learn more about the Prairie State.*



- **Statehood:** 1818
- **US territory status:** 1809
- **First available federal census:** 1820
- **State censuses:** 1820, 1825, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1845, 1855, 1865
- **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1916
- **Statewide marriage records:** none
- **Public-land state**
- **Counties:** 102

**Contact for vital records:** Illinois Department of Public Health Division of Vital Records 605 W. Jefferson St. Springfield, IL 62702 (217) 782-6553 [www.idph.state.il.us/vitalrecords](http://www.idph.state.il.us/vitalrecords)

## Web Sites

- **Cyndi's List: Illinois** [cyndislist.com/il.htm](http://cyndislist.com/il.htm)
- **Federal Township Land Plats of Illinois, 1804-1891** [landplats.ilsos.net/](http://landplats.ilsos.net/)
- **Genealogy in the Illinois State Archives** [www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/services.html](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/services.html)
- **Illinois Cemeteries** [freepages.military.rootsweb.com/~xander/illinois.htm](http://freepages.military.rootsweb.com/~xander/illinois.htm)
- **FamilySearch Wiki Illinois Online Genealogy Records**  
[www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Illinois,\\_United\\_States\\_Genealogy](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Illinois,_United_States_Genealogy)
- **Illinois State Archives' Online Databases** [www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/home.html](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/home.html)
- **Illinois Trails** [www.iltrails.org](http://www.iltrails.org)
- **IllinoisAtlas.com** [www.illinoisatlas.com](http://www.illinoisatlas.com)

## Organizations and Archives

- **Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum** 112 N. Sixth St., Springfield, IL 62701, (217) 558-8844, [www2.illinois.gov/alplm/Pages/default.aspx](http://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/Pages/default.aspx)
- **Bureau of Land Management** Eastern States Office, 7450 Boston Blvd., Springfield, VA 22153, (703) 440-1600, [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)
- **Illinois State Archives** Reference Unit, Norton Building, Capitol Complex, Springfield, IL 62756, (217) 782-3556, [www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/)
- **Illinois State Genealogical Society** Box 10195, Springfield, IL 62791, (217) 789-1968, [ilgensoc.org/](http://ilgensoc.org/)
- **Illinois State Historical Society** 2101/2 S. Sixth St., Springfield, IL 62701, (217) 525-2781, [www.historyillinois.com](http://www.historyillinois.com)
- **Illinois State Library** Gwendolyn Brooks Building, 300 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62701, (217) 785-5600, [www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/)
- **NARA Great Lakes Region** 7358 S. Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60629, (773) 581-7816, [www.archives.gov/chicago](http://www.archives.gov/chicago)
- **Newberry Library** 60 W. Walton St., Chicago, IL 60610, (312) 943-9090, [www.newberry.org](http://www.newberry.org)

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<https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/illinois-fast-facts-and-key-resources/>



Chart #

# 6 Generation Pedigree Chart

No. 1 on this chart is same  
as #\_\_\_ on Chart #\_\_\_.

The boxes by the male names may be  
filled in with a color or mark to indi-  
cate when all the work has been com-  
pleted for that family.

## Parents (3rd Generation)

2 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Married  
Place  
Death  
Place

## (2nd Generation)

1 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Married  
Place  
Death  
Place

SPOUSE  
Birth  
Death

## Children of #1 (1st Generation)

3

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

## Grandparents (4th Generation)

4 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Married  
Place  
Death  
Place

5

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

6 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Married  
Place  
Death  
Place

7

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

## Great Grandparents (5th Generation)

8 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

9

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

10 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

11

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

12 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

13

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

14 ☐

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

15

Birth  
Place  
Death  
Place

## 2nd Great Grandparents (6th Generation)

16 ☐

Birth

17

Birth

18 ☐

Birth

19

Birth

20 ☐

Birth

21

Birth

22 ☐

Birth

23

Birth

24 ☐

Birth

25

Birth

26 ☐

Birth

27

Birth

28 ☐

Birth

29

Birth

30 ☐

Birth

31

Birth



## GENEALOGY LOG OF DOCUMENTS SEARCHED AND/OR SEARCH PLAN

**Researcher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Family/Person** \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

Page \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]



# Family Group Sheet

Husband			Occupation(s)	
	Date	Place	Immigration	
Born			Naturalization	
Christened			Military Service	
Died			Cause of Death	
Buried			Date of Will	
Married			Other Marriages	
Father				
Mother				

Wife (maiden name)			Occupation(s)	
	Date	Place	Immigration	
Born			Naturalization	
Christened			Military Service	
Died			Cause of Death	
Buried			Date of Will	
Father			Other Marriages	
Mother				

Other Information/Records (ie. Census, Passports, etc...)	

Children						
*	Sex M/F	Name	Birth		Date of first marriage	Date of Death/ Cause
			Date	Place	Name of Spouse	Place
		1				
		2				
		3				
		4				
		5				
		6				
		7				
		8				
		9				
		10				
		11				
		12				
		13				
		14				
		15				

\* = Direct Ancestor