

BEGINNING YOUR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

- 1 Write down what you know. Use an ancestor chart (also called a pedigree chart) to record in pencil or on the computer what you believe to be the facts. Start with yourself and work backward through your parents, grandparents, etc. Even if you are guessing, you can change it later. Fill out family group sheets for each generation, adding in what you think you think is correct. These forms are available free on Ancestry and FamilySearch.
- 2 ***Don't start doing broad searches on the Internet!*** That would be like studying a subject by opening a book in the middle. You may find huge amounts of material — much of it irrelevant, inaccurate or inapplicable to your family. Without a basic understanding of how to do research, you really won't be able to recognize the good from the bad. The Internet will prove to be a very valuable resource in the long run but until you know what you are looking for, it will be the proverbial needle in a haystack.
- 3 Talk to other family members and see what they know. If their recollections are different, note that. One of you might be right and one of you might be wrong but right now you might not know for sure which one.
- 4 What do you have at home that might yield clues? A family Bible? A marriage certificate? Family photos? Baptismal certificates? Baby books, scrapbooks, diplomas, newspaper clippings? You may be surprised by what you already have.
- 5 Take the time to read a self-help guide on doing genealogical research or make use of Ancestry or FamilySearch research guides. They will set you on the right path. Many experienced researchers will tell you they wish they had done that from the beginning. You will avoid having to do a lot of work all over again.
- 6 Purchase a genealogical software program. It will help you organize your research, including your resources. You can save information in digital form or paper. You will be amazed at how quickly your research will expand and figuring a method of controlling it, early on, will be of great help. You may change your system later but if you have no system at all, you will find yourself buried in very short order.
- 7 Keep a research log for each family you are researching. Note to whom you spoke or the resource you used and the date you did it. This will prevent you from repeating research. When you find a new fact, record where you found it. Every fact you locate should have a source attached. That is the only way you can show someone your research is accurate. It is the only way you will remember where it came from and if it is trustworthy. Undocumented research might as well be fiction because you will not be able to prove it's true. Honor your ancestors by doing clear and careful research that future generations can rely on.
- 8 Begin searching for vital records (birth, marriage, death), beginning with your parents. Those records will have a lot of valuable information.
- 9 Become familiar with the resources of the LDS Church's Family History Centers and their website FamilySearch.org. They have microfilmed or digitized records from all over the world. And it is all free. Much is now on their website and more appears almost every day.
- 10 Start doing census research. The U.S. has conducted a population census every 10 years since 1790. You may access census records from 1790 through 1930. (Privacy concerns keep more recent records closed.) Census records will show you household composition and much more. And since you've read your research guides, you'll understand how to use the census.