Genealogy Boot Camp

Session 1: Genealogy 101

Hallie Kirchner, Genealogist
Hallie.kirchner@nehgs.org

What is genealogy?

Genealogy comes from the Greek *genos,* meaning "being born," "producing," or "coming to be." Genealogy is also known as family history research. Genealogists study families and their histories, and the lines of descent from ancestors. Today, genealogists usually use a combination of the historic record (the paper trail, or archival documents) along with DNA research (or "genetic genealogy") to determine relationships.

Studying family history provides a window into the past and a way to learn about new people and new places. It also allows the researcher to connect their family with notable events in history.

Rule #1- Work from the known to the unknown.

Rule #2- Write it down.

Rule #3 (maybe)- Spelling doesn't count.

Methodology

Step #1- Identify what you know.

Step #2- Decide what you want to learn (research goal).

Step #3- Identify and locate your sources.

Step #4- Research!

Step #5- Analyze.

Repeat steps as needed.

Step #1- Identify what you know

Starting your genealogical documentation is as simple as purchasing a spiral bound notebook for your notes, but several standard forms greatly simplify the task of recording important genealogical information. Most genealogical software programs will generate reports in these basic formats. Plan to make liberal use of these forms.

Tools
- Pedigree Chart: Road map of your ancestors and includes basic information about each person such as full name, date and place of birth, death, and marriage. Each person on the chart receives

a number.

- Family Group Sheet: The family group sheet provides a snapshot of each nuclear family and records pertinent information about each family member.

Techniques

1. Interview Questions: Interviewing your relatives may seem like a daunting task.
2. Genealogical Recording Standards:

   - Names
     - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
     - Record a woman using her maiden name
     - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/just the given name _____
   - Dates
     - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (ex: 16 January 2016)
     - **DO NOT** use slash marks or two-digit years (ex: 1/16/2016 or 1/16/2016)
   - Places
     - Note smallest to largest geographic division (ex: Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
     - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country
     - Be sure to identify counties

Step #2 - Decide what you want to learn

Once you created a five-generation chart or a family group sheet (you may have gathered this known information from an interview, family papers, photographs, or a family bible) you must then determine what information is lacking.

1. Are there missing dates or locations?
2. How about missing names? Are parents missing? Maiden names?
3. Next, determine what individuals or families intrigue you the most? It is best to tackle one line at a time.
4. Create a list of questions or objectives to research.

Tools

- Research Plan: Your roadmap for research – your hypotheses, research objectives and where you will search.
  - Goal: What do you want to know? Anchor to a name, time and place.
  - Known Facts: What do you already know about your Research Question?
  - Working Hypothesis: What do you think the answer is? OR What is the time period and location that has the answer?
  - Sources: Which records might hold the answer? Do those records exist for my location?

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– Search Strategy: Which repositories have the sources and in what order should I search?

Tips

1. **Start slowly.** Don't rush to answer all your questions at once.
2. **Don't skip generations** in planning your research; it only leads to misattributed people.

Step #3 - Identify and Locate Your Sources

At this point, you'll want to think about how you will go about answering your question(s). What types of records and resources might contain the answer(s)? Consider what was available at the time, and where those records might be held today.

Tools

The internet and the library provide the most accessible sources of information about family history, although not everything is online or in a book. An efficient use of the internet or the library rests on understanding where the information you seek may be found.

1. Genealogical Records
   - Vital Records
   - Vital Records substitutes, e.g. church records, bible records
   - Census
   - Cemeteries
   - Immigration and Emigration Records
   - Naturalization and Citizenship Records
   - Land and Property
   - Probate
   - Taxation
   - Military
   - Newspapers

2. Other Sources of Genealogical Information
   - Compiled genealogies
   - Local histories
   - Biographies
   - How-to guides
   - Digitized Books:
     – https://www.hathitrust.org/
     – https://books.google.com/
     – https://archive.org/index.php
     – https://books.familysearch.org
     – http://library.si.edu/digital-library

3. Guidebooks:

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- Rhonda R. McClure, ed., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 6th ed. (Boston: NEHGS, 2021)
- *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2004). See also https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/Red_Book:_American_State,_County,_and_Town_Sources
- *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2006). See also https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/The_Source:_A_Guidebook_to_American_Genealogy
- *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, 1st ed. (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2017)

Step #4 - Research

1. Begin answering your questions.
2. Consult multiple sources.
3. Gather as many records as possible about a family or individual that you can find.
4. Track your work.

Tools

- Research Log: Research logs are an excellent way to keep track of the research you have already completed. They contain a list of every source you consulted—and whether your search was successful or not.

- Capture:
    - Date of search.
    - Source searched.
    - Search objective.
    - Search string (if applicable).
    - Results of search.

Step #5 - Analyze

1. Don't just read, examine.
2. Critique both the record and the source.

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Resource List

Genealogy Forms

New England Historical Genealogy Society
Pedigree chart, Family Group sheet, Research Log, Family Interview Question, Census Comparison charts: https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates

National Archives
Census and other useful forms: https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms

Midwest Genealogy Center
The usual forms, plus two unique research check lists:

- http://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy/family-history-forms
- https://www.mymcpl.org/_uploaded_resources/MGC-researchchecklist.pdf

Ancestry.com
Additional blank census forms: http://www.ancestry.com/cs/census-forms

Skills

Robert Charles Anderson *Elements of Genealogical Analysis* (Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014).

Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, Va.: National Genealogical Society, 2013).

Penelope L. Stratton and Henry B. Hoff, *Guide to Genealogical Writing* (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014).

Drew Smith, *Organize Your Genealogy*, (Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2016).

Blaine T. Bettinger, *Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy*, (Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2016).

Localities

Marie E. Daly and Judith Lucey, *Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research*, (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2016).

James M. Beidler, *Trace your German roots online* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books, 2016).

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