

Family History: Research and Results for the Beginner

Prepared and Presented by Jean Wilcox Hibben – PhD, MA, CGSM;
15280 Multiview Dr., Lake Mathews, CA 92570; 951-780-1799 <jean@circlemending.org>
<www.circlemending.org> <www.circlemending.blogspot.com>

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Genealogy = names, dates, places
Family History = people, stories, interests, events, activities, etc.

Getting started:

Work from the known to the unknown

Standard charts:

Pedigree chart and Family Group sheets

Planning the research:

Decide whether you want to use paper or electronic records – which will work best for you;
consider the future, ease of handling, ease of sharing information, cost, etc.

Determine your budget for research.

Make list of people to interview and set up appointments.

Interview hints:

Plan your interview questions in advance

Bring your paperwork with you so the interviewee can see what information you already have

Use a tape, digital, or video recorder (but bring backup note paper)

Let the person tell stories – these provide clues and also put flesh on the bones of your ancestor

Do not ask inappropriate questions

Be courteous to the interviewee

Send a Thank You note afterwards and provide the interviewee with copies of the family group sheets you prepare

Sources for information:

Internet sites

Home sources – Letters, cards, bibles, diaries, school records, newspaper clippings, etc.

Church records, government documents

On-site research (cemeteries, libraries, genealogical/historical societies, etc.)

Types of sources:

Primary (original) records –

Birth certificates

Death registration (for death info)

Christening records

Marriage certificates

Military records

Probate & other court records

Naturalization records

Immigration records

Secondary (other) records –

Death certificates (for non-death info)

Family Bibles

Cemetery records/headstones

City directories and local histories

Census records

Newspaper articles

Compiled family books/websites

Family letters and diaries/journals

Family History Centers (FHCs) or FamilySearch Centers:

Check on www.FamilySearch.org

Document Documents

Proper documentation of your sources is imperative: it allows you to locate the reference again and it shows that your information came from an appropriate source.

Wrong: “death certificate”

Right: “Wisconsin. Department of Health – Bureau of Vital Statistics, *Death Registration (State Level)*, Reg. No. 2354P, 5 Mar 1981. Notarized copy of original dated 31 May 1922, held in 2005 by Jean Wilcox Hibben (15280 Multiview Dr., Lake Mathews, CA 92570).”

Helpful websites:

www.familysearch.org (for documents, trees, and catalog ordering)
www.linkpendium.com
www.rootsweb.com (for mailing lists, message boards, and more)
www.ellisland.org
www.castlegarden.org
www.cyndislist.com
www.godfrey.org (membership fee) – available for free use at Family History Centers
www.ancestry.com (membership fee) - available for free use at FHCs & NARA
www.genealogy.com (membership fee)
www.fold3.com (membership fee) – available for free use at FHCs & NARA
www.WorldVitalRecords.com (membership fee) – available for free use at Family History Centers

Centers

www.GenealogyBank.com (membership fee)

Using census records:

- Begun in 1790, taken every 10 years, but data varies by year
- 1850 was first listing of every member of household; gives occupations, ages, and general place of birth
- 1870 added if married within the year, if parents were foreign born
- 1880 also gives person's relationship to head of household, month born if born within the past year, where parents were born
- 1890 census was destroyed
- 1900 census gives address, month & year of birth, immigration year, number of years married, how many children the mother had & how many are living, birth places of parents
- 1910 census gives number of years in current marriage, year of naturalization, but not month & year of birth
- 1920 census gives a bit less than 1910 & 1900
- 1930 census gives age at first marriage, veteran status
- 1940 census gives birth place of listed individuals only (except for the rare 5%), but adds residence location for 1935. Much occupation and income data

Cautions and Considerations:

- 1) Don't believe everything you read – some websites, family history books, etc. are pure fiction.
- 2) Don't spend money on research, documents, pay websites, etc. without checking other options (many resources are available for free or for a minimal charge – check on availability of deeds, wills, vital records, etc. on microfilm at Familysearch.org).
- 3) Work one line at a time to keep from getting confused.
- 4) Don't forget the collateral lines . . . uncles, aunts, and cousins can be helpful in your direct line research.
- 5) Keep a research log of sites and records you have checked.
- 6) Even finding “nothing” is something – it rules something out!
- 7) Recheck Internet sites (especially those updated often).
- 8) **Don't ignore the living for the sake of the dead!** (This is an addictive activity but ancestors will not be any more deceased tomorrow; on the other hand, relationships with our living loved ones are to be cherished today.)