

The Amateur Genealogist

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Begin In Your Own Home To Research Your Family Tree

When you begin to build your family tree, you may not be aware of the wonderful sources of information to be found in your own home, or in relatives' homes. Follow the *Genealogist #1 Rule: Start with what you know*, and work backwards from there as you search through your attic, basement, cupboards, closets, drawers, and find various genealogy treasures.

Start with your own **BIRTH CERTIFICATE** to see what specific information is included. If you only have a small wallet-sized version, try to find the "official" long version - families usually filed away this form in a baby book, or photograph album, or with other official family documents. On the full form will be both parents' full names including your mother's maiden name, birthplaces and father's occupation at the time. Do you have a **BABY BOOK** with your first few months or years? One of my friends has hers, listing three generations of relatives including maiden names for the women and their birthplaces. Sometimes families have **BAPTISM** certificates and/or Confirmation certificates filed away. Start digging for such treasure.

Probably your parents saved your **SCHOOL REPORTS** and **YEARBOOKS**. You'll be looking at these for hours – what a trip down memory lane!

Move on, and start looking for **PHOTO ALBUMS**, and **SCRAPBOOKS** for various purposes (trips, events, projects. Make it this year's project to go through all of these, sort, label carefully and lightly; you could number each item, then use a master list with your guesses of possible names/years/places/events.



Some photographs may be unlabelled or be of groups of unknown people. Don't make the mistake of throwing them out, even if you know no one in the photo, don't recognize any details and can't figure out the year let alone the decade! A cousin or aunt may be able to identify all the details with ease. Make your best guess and keep notes; perhaps that group of men were colleagues of your grandfather, or those 3 women in very old-fashioned clothing may be sisters since they look to be similar. In the latter case, you may be looking for an ancestor who had several sisters in roughly 1880-1900. Check in with cousins later.

Do you have **COLLECTIONS** of documents or memorabilia? As you find items, this is your opportunity to study them as a serious researcher would, looking for all possible clues to follow in searching out your distant ancestors. You may well remember **STORIES** or have other **MEMORIES** pop up as you find items. For instance, photographs or names may trigger memories of when Great-Aunt Elizabeth came from England to visit Vancouver in 1958; as your father's father's only sister, Great-Aunt Elizabeth would have been about 70 or thereabouts, giving you more clues to find more details. Another photo: "Oh, look at this, there's a photo of mom's older sister Andrea, and the back says Jordan NY, 6 yrs". Now you know the family was either living in or visiting Jordan NY in about 1921, and you can search the 1920 NY Census for more details. If they were visiting, who could it have been they were visiting? A Grandmother? Aunt & Uncle?

Did your mother or aunt or grandmother save **FUNERAL CARDS** and **OBITUARIES** of all relatives? If so, there's a tremendous amount of detail you will be able to follow up in your researches.

Here are more **SOURCES** you may find in your own home, or at a close relative's home: Grandma's cookbook with her notes and other details including her signature; letters; postcards; occasion cards (celebrations); death records and burial certificates; old wedding albums of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles; copies of wills, marriage certificates; old cheque books or bank statements (check their addresses for past residences); lists of heirlooms, jewellery or art work with all the details of when/where/why purchased. You may also find expired Passports, cruise or other travel tickets and memorabilia, copies of citizenship papers, and more.



Start digging and delving right at home, and you will begin to add richness and long-term value to your family tree. Enjoy your searches for treasure right in your own home!

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