Family History Kick Start Guide

Start with What You Know

Work Backwards

Starting with yourself and work backwards to your parents, grandparents and so on with as much information as you know. Do not skip to the next generation until you've documented *everything* you have on each person.

Collect...

- **Full names and nicknames**, as much as you know.
- Vital Statistics. **Birth, marriage, death,** and **divorce** records. You want to discover **dates** and **places** (including counties) for every event. For example, Jane Doe was born in the City of Long Beach, Los Angeles County, California on 12 March 1930.
- **Write** your **dates like this**, **12 Mar 1930, or 12 March 1930**. This way there is no confusion on the dates.
- **Military** records, photos, uniforms, medals etc.
- **Church** records or information including dates of events such as christenings, marriages, funerals, etc.
- **Write down the source of every fact** so you can confirm where you got each item. Ten years from now, when you are looking at it again and need to know where to look for the original evidence again, you will find it. You will thank me for this tip a decade from now.

INTERVIEW YOUR ELDERS A.S.A.P!

Whenever possible, **record** on **video and or audio** the conversation, **but also <u>take notes</u>**. **Do not rely on the recordings**, they fail sometimes. Turn off the TV... **interview in a quiet place**.

- Use [pedigree charts](#) and [family group sheets](#) to inspire elders and to help fill in the blanks, during your interviews. Free copies can be downloaded from [Family Search](#) and [Ancestry](#). I like to take these sheets with me when interviewing family members. Sometimes I'll type it right into my software while talking to family.
- Keep track electronically in online resources like **Ancestry.com** or **FamilySearch.org**. Consider purchasing family tree software that resides on your computer such as **Family Tree Maker** or **Roots Magic**, etc.
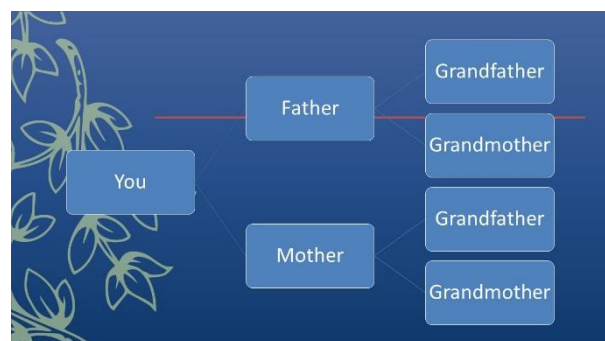
- If you feel computer-savvy, **keep notes** interconnected to all your devices on services like **Google Docs**, or electronic notebooks like **Evernote** or **OneNote**.
- **Label old photos.** Write names in pencil on the back of unlabeled photos, as you talk with your elders. **TAKE THE TIME TO DO THIS**, memories fade over time. MAKE A COPY FIRST - Number & Name Everyone
- **Name everyone in group pictures**. Make copies or use software to create a numbered template to name everyone and attach the names of everyone in the image with the image so it is not lost. **Do it now, before names are forgotten**.
- **Take pictures** of your family members, heirlooms, etc. Take pictures of the interview in progress. Pictures will help tell your story later in whatever form you choose.
- Review and **polish your notes immediately** after the interview before your memory fades.
- Copy and **archive** the information you collect in at least two different locations (not in the same house). I recommend your computer and cloud storage such as Drop Box, Crash Plan, or similar.
- Consider bringing a **DNA test for each elder** but get permission from them in advance of your visit. Make sure you get them to take the test when you visit. Do not leave it behind. It will never get done - trust me. Getting a **DNA tests on the oldest members first** is especially important in genealogy today.

Stay Organized

Keep your physical documents in **FOLDERS or Notebooks organized by Surname.**
Keep your electronic **files organized by Surname** (at birth) **within folders** and **then by document** the same way. Such as **SURNAME First Middle.** For example:

- HENLEY (folder)
  - HENLEY Mary Jane (folder)
    - HENLEY Mary Jane - Birth Certificate 1932 (document)
    - HENLEY Mary Jane - Marriage Certificate 1953 (document copy)
    - HENLEY Mary Jane - Research Notes (document)
- HENLEY John Henry
  - HENLEY John Henry- Research Notes (document)
  - HENLEY John Henry- 1880 Census (document)
 - HENLEY John Henry photo near barn ca 1885 (scanned photo)

By organizing them this way all your documents are in one place and easy to see.

Keep your **written Research Notes in chronological order**. This gives you a huge research advantage and gives perspective what you are missing, what you have already looked for, and an ancestor's timeline all in one document. This will be a working document that is always being updated.
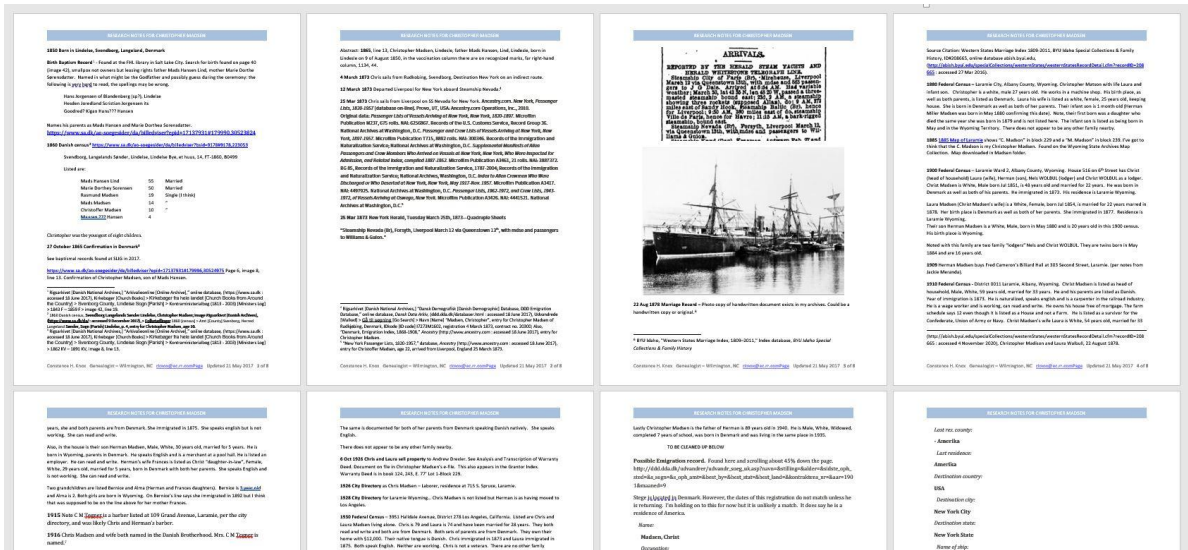
Take the time to add **source citations** to each event in your Research Notes as you go so you know where you got the information. I use footnotes for keeping sources so that my document reads simply as a timeline and not cluttered with source information.

You are off and running. These tips alone are a great start! Now... go find your ancestors!