The Filson Historical Society
Quick and Easy Guide to Doing Genealogy

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Step 1: Collect and Analyze Known Family History Material (What do you already know?)

- Gather all known information concerning a family group (parents and children). This includes family "word of mouth," pedigree and family group sheets, biographical sketches, certificates, letters, etc.
- Once you gather the information, organize it in a way that is helpful to you by creating a family tree. You can make a private or public tree for your family using Ancestry.com. Insert the information you already have into the tree with notes of where you found that information.
- Using your tree, analyze family relationships and date ranges. Ask questions like, "Are the children's birth years too close together?" "Is there a large gap between children's births?" "Did the mother die before her child was born?" Asking these types of question will enable you to detect holes or problem areas in a family tree.
- **Important Note:** Don't focus research on just one direct ancestor. The siblings of the direct ancestor may carry clues in their records about parentage that are not available anywhere else. This is why it is important to research all members of a family.

Step 2: Preliminary Survey (Has This Family Already Been Researched By Someone Else?)

- Before you start researching, find previous research that has already been done for the family. You don't want to repeat research that's already been done!
- A search can be conducted on public family trees under the applicable given and surnames located at:
    - The **Filson Library** catalog: http://filson.ipac.dynixasp.com/
    - http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1030
    - Family Tree at https://familysearch.org/
    - http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/
- A search on Google for the surname or individual family members should also be conducted. (i.e. "John Smith" 1829-1874).
- A search at www.worldcat.org, may pull up books and manuscripts from various repositories concerning the family.
- Even if it appears that a lot of research has already been conducted, it is still important to analyze the material and determine if the research is reliable and makes sense.

Step 3: Locality Survey (What records are available for where my ancestor lived?)

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- You need to understand the history and resources of the region/state/county where your ancestor lived.
- You also need to know the jurisdiction of your family records. **Jurisdiction** is the level at where records were kept. Some records were kept at a national level (ex. U.S. censuses) whereas some were kept at the county level (ex. marriage registers). It is your job to find out where you need to go to find your records.
- Ask yourself these questions:
    - What jurisdiction created and kept the records I'm looking for?
    - When was the county established?
    - Was the region/state/county once part of another region/state/county?
    - Are there any historical events that impacted the region/state/county where my ancestor lived? (ex. Some courthouses with records were burned down during the Civil War.)
- Use the Wiki at https://familysearch.org/wiki to help you! The Wiki contains information on the various states and their counties in the United States. This can include record loss, links to databases, county boundary changes, etc.
- Also, use *The Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources.* This book contains historical information, county maps, county formation information, and access information to local/regional records. You can access the online version of this book at https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/Red_Book:_American_State,_County,_and_Town_Sources.
- The collections at Ancestry.com can also be searched by locality as well. Go to the **Card Catalog** by clicking on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then in the **Title** search bar, type in the name of the state you are researching in to see what records are available at Ancestry.com.

Step 4: Census Survey
- The U.S. government takes **censuses** to enumerate the entire population. Originally, the purpose of censuses was to for tax and representation reasons. Over time, however, censuses have become more detailed, providing valuable information for genealogy research. The **Filson library** has access to all available U.S. census records.
- When possible, it is necessary to complete a full census survey for every member of the family throughout their lifetime. This will give you a skeletal frame of where the family is living, what they are doing, and any changes in the family dynamics. Ancestry.com has digital images of the censuses from 1790-1940.

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- Since 1790, the U.S. Federal Census has been taken every ten years. However, the amount of information available from census to census has evolved. The following are important dates to be aware of:
    - 1790: First Federal Census that was taken in the United States.
    - 1850: First census to list the names of everyone (male and female), except slaves, within the household. (Before 1850, only the head of household's name was listed with tick marks for everyone else.)
    - 1880: First census to explicitly identify relationships between the household members and the head of household.
    - 1890: A fire almost entirely destroyed this census. However, the veteran's schedule survived.
    - 1940: Most recent census available to the public.
- Census data can provide clues for where to search next. For example, in the 1910 census it asks, "whether a survivor of the Union or Confederate Army or Navy?" Depending on what you find, you should search military records as well.
- Helpful tips for finding census records:
    - Always look at the **original image** of the census, not just the abstract. This is where you will find the most clues for future research.
    - **Be flexible** with the spelling of your ancestor's name. Census-takers went door-to-door to gather household information. Sometimes they received information from the head of household, a child, or even a neighbor. For this reason, there may be inaccuracies in the record.
    - Recognize that you may have to **browse** the census page by page if you know where they were living, but the search algorithms fail to locate them.
- Besides population schedules, there are other types of federal census schedules that could be helpful. These include: mortality, slave, veteran, agriculture, etc. Some of these are available on Ancestry.com and are listed with the population schedules.
- Additionally, use state censuses when available. These can be especially useful if your family moves in between federal census years and you need to account for that gap in time. The United States Census Bureau has a comprehensive list of state censuses at: https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/other_resources/state_censuses.html

Step 5: Vital Records

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- Vital records (records of birth, marriage, and death events) are a crucial resource for genealogical research. Not only do they state the date and locations of vital events, but they also help prove family relationships.
- However, many researchers overlook the bonus details that are included in vital records. **For example**, notice that the birth certificate below states the age of the mother and the number of child the baby is to the mother.

Below is a list of resources that can aid in finding vital records:

- The **Filson library** has many Kentucky county vital records in book form and computer databases.
- State websites:
    - **Pennsylvania:** http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Vital-Statistics.aspx
    - **Ohio:** https://ohiohistory.libguides.com/vital
    - **Kentucky:** https://kdla.ky.gov/researchers/Pages/recordsrequestforms.aspx
    - **Illinois:** http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/services.html
    - **Indiana:** https://www.in.gov/iara/2497.htm
    - **West Virginia:** http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_select.aspx
- https://familysearch.org/search - Click on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then click on **Records.** On the **map** located on the **right side,** click on the **United States.** Then click on the applicable state. Search by given and surname, or scroll to the bottom of the page and search in one of the listed databases.

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- http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=34
- Also, at Ancestry.com, go to the **Card Catalog** by clicking on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then in the **Title** search bar, type in the name of the state you are researching in to see what vital records are available at Ancestry.com.

Step 6: County and Regional Histories

- County and regional histories are important because they offer historical contextual information and many of them also contain biographical sketches of people who lived in the community. This means your ancestor may have a small biography in a county history.
- Below is a list of resources where you can find county and regional histories:
    - The **Filson Library** – catalogs of titles online at: http://filson.ipac.dynixasp.com/
    - https://books.google.com/
    - https://archive.org/
    - https://www.ancestry.com/ - Go to the **Card Catalog** by clicking on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then in the **Title** search bar type in the name of the region/state/county.
    - https://familysearch.org – Click on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then click on **Books.** In the search bar type in the applicable name of the region/state/county.

Step 7: Probate Records

- Probate records are created to manage the property of an individual after their death.
- A person's probate will be either testate (a will was made), or intestate (no will was made).
- Even if a person did not make a will, intestate files can contain crucial information regarding surviving heirs, finances, or property. Often, these files will have more information than a testate probate.
- Probate records of an ancestor's relatives should be searched for as the information within the files may break open a genealogical brick wall.
- Below are some resources for finding probate records:
    - http://search.ancestry.com/search/group/US_WillsProbate
    - https://familysearch.org/ - Click on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then click on **Catalog.** In the **Place** search bar type the location/jurisdiction from biggest jurisdiction to littlest, (i.e. **United States, Kentucky, Jefferson).** Scroll

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- down and click on **Probate Records.** A drop down menu will open and will display all of the available probate records.
- Also, contact the applicable **county courthouse, county clerk's office, or state archives** to see what records are available. The **Filson Library** also has some.

Step 8: Land Records

- Land records (i.e. deeds, tax, mortgage records) provide valuable information. This can include a description of the property owned by an ancestor, names of neighbors and associates, names of buyers and sellers, an ancestor's wife's name, and occasionally information on where an ancestor moved to or from.
- Below are some resources for finding land records:
    - Most **Kentucky** land records are available at the Land Office in Frankfort, Ky.
    - **Jefferson County** Kentucky deed records are available in the Deed Room in the Jefferson County Court House.
    - http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=144
    - https://familysearch.org/ - Click on **Search** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then click on **Catalog.** In the **Place** search bar type the location/jurisdiction from biggest jurisdiction to littlest, (i.e. **United States, Kentucky, Jefferson).** Scroll down and click on **Land and Property.** A drop down menu will open and will display all of the available Land and Property records. Also, scroll down and click on **Taxation** for tax roll records.
    - https://glorecords.blm.gov/default.aspx
    - http://www.sos.ky.gov/admin/land/resources/Pages/default.aspx - Click on **Administration** in the tool bar at the top of the page. Then click on **Land Office.** Click on **Military Registers and Land Records** or **Non-Military Registers and Land Records** or **Online Resources**.
    - Also, contact the applicable **county courthouse, county clerk's office, or state archives** to see what records are available.

Step 9: Military Records

- The U.S. holds detailed records for those who served in the military. These are especially helpful for family history research. The U.S. been involved in many wars including:
    - French and Indian War
    - Revolutionary War
    - War of 1812

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- Civil War
- Mexican-American War
- Spanish-American War
- World War I and II
- Korean War
- Vietnam War

- Besides serving in a national/international war, you ancestor may have served in a local militia during a battle or skirmish against Native Americans.
- Military records depending on the type (registration card, service record, and pension, etc.) contain a varying range of details. For example, pension records from the Revolutionary War can include pages from a family bible with names and vital dates of relatives.
- Below are some resources that could direct you to military records:
  - The **Filson library** has some military records for most 19th century wars.
  - https://www.fold3.com
  - http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=39
  - https://www.archives.gov/research/military#page-header

African-American Research
- African-American research presents unique challenges *and* records. Use *Finding a Place Called Home: A Guide to African-American Genealogy and Historical Identity* by Dee Parmer Woodtor for African-American genealogy. The following advice and tips will help you with African-American research.
  - First (as with any other genealogical research), gather family oral tradition (or "word of mouth"), as well as documents, and pedigree/family group charts from immediate and extended family members.
  - Utilize the 1870 and 1880 censuses. **Pay close attention to details**, analyze carefully, and look for information hidden between the lines.
  - Adult family members alive during the 1870 and 1880 censuses generally experienced slavery earlier in their life.
  - A family's location in the 1870 census may be where they were living during or before the Civil War.
- Two records in particular are very important for African-American research. They cover most of the decade following the Civil War (about 1865-1874).
  - **Freedmen's Bureau**

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https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Freedmen%27s_Bureau_Records

- **Freedman's Bank**
  https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Freedman%27s_Savings_and_Trust_Company_Records
- The **Filson library** has: *Freedmen's Savings & Trust Co. Deposit Records. Lexington, 1870-1874. Louisville, 1865-1874*; and *American Freedman's Inquiry Commission, 1863-1864. Preliminary & final reports. Debates & Testimony (including Kentucky)* on microfilm.

- The following are excellent resources for African-American genealogical research:
  - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Researching_African_American_Genealogy
  - https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans
  - http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/technique/african-american-genealogy/
  - https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Quick_Guide_to_African_American_Records?cid=bl-fsb-8784
  - *Finding A Place Called Home: A Guide to African-American Genealogy and Historical Identity* by Dee Parmer Woodtor. Copy available at Filson Historical Society (call number: 929.1072 W898).

How do we prepare for the future of genealogy?

- Backup your sources, documents, photographs
- People who share and pass on their history live forever. Everything we have in our collection is because someone decided to keep it and pass it on. Some people save everything but never share it and so it gets lost or destroyed.

What are some features of the future of genealogy?

- DNA testing is amazing but is not the end all be all.
- We live in an incredibly collaborative time with public trees, blogging, messaging, the Internet, discussion boards, etc.…
- Internet Archives Wayback Machine – preserves website changes over time. For example - What did Facebook's home screen look like ten years ago? However, it doesn't really have info on individuals.

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- Preserving our emails and social media posts can be difficult because internet wasn't meant to be permanent.
- Using tools like storage clouds, genealogical software may be helpful to an extent but what about server failures?

Questions we could ask:

- What is something you wish you had from your ancestors? Could you give that item to your future descendants by preparing today?
- What items (both digital and analog) are worth preserving?
- Researching can be challenging and time-consuming. What can you do now to make it easier for your family to learn about you after you pass away?
- Our family left behind christening gowns, marriage certificates, bound journals, and headstones. What do we leave behind that is the same? Or different? What about emails, social media posts, blogs, selfies, etc....? Typically, these things are not "saved" but they are a big part of our current daily lives.