

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

WE HAVE NO FAMILY TREE

August 2022

The Situation:

My maternal and paternal grandparent's families are very big and very close. There are lots of aunts, uncles, and cousins, and lots of combined family gatherings. However, no one has taken the time to create family trees. We really have a good time when we get together, but it bugs me that I don't have a clear understanding of where everyone fits in the family. Whenever I mention it they wave me off, and one of my cousins has even said I was "meddling". How can I convince them that putting together a family tree is a good thing—or should I just leave it alone?

The Fix:



Doug Harris

My suggestion is that you start this project and see what happens. People often lack the vision to move on something they're unfamiliar with or don't know about. It takes someone with vision (such as yourself) to take the lead. Start by creating a family tree, preferably one you can create and share online, then ask family members to fill in the missing information. Once they see it, many of the naysayers will come around and start filling in missing pieces. You may not convince everyone to participate, but once the tree is out there, it will take on a life of its own.

The Fix:



Shamele Jordan

The best way to get participation in creating a family tree is this—*create a tree without them on it*. You can also say that the tree will be included in future published family history. This will capture their attention immediately because no one wants to be left out. Following are the steps that I would follow to create a family tree.

First step: Start with what you know. Document the people, locations, and dates you have. There is no need to be exact, at this point.

Second step: Build an online tree on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.com. Use these trees to research your family history. Once you have a tree, the sites do research for you, providing hints to possible records. You will be surprised how much you will learn.

Third step: Be strategic in collecting information. This can be done by narrowing who you talk to and what information you ask for or collect. Who should you talk to? Speak to the family members who are "branch influencers." They are aware of what is going on within their family cluster. Not only do they know details about their own descendants, but they are knowledgeable of their sibling's descendants as well, and they can then lead you to other influencers.

Now that you know who to talk to, what information should you collect? What you collect and how you do it is important. My suggestion is to have a conversation instead of an interview. Allow them to talk. Guide them gently, but allow them to tell their story. You will simply sit and listen for clues. Write down questions when they come up instead of interrupting the flow. Collect names, places, time periods, and connections. *Soft* collect this information, meaning you do not have to push for exact details. For instance, "Do you know where they were born?" Knowing the town would be great, but having the county or even just the state is good too. Years are usually difficult for people to remember. Rounding to the decade will at least provide a clue. And always inquire about a female's maiden name.

Once you have covered these basics, you can go the extra mile by creating a way for family members to self-report their information using online forms like Google Forms. Either way you collect the information (on the tree, through interviews, or by form), you are now ready to present the family tree at the reunion. Everyone will look for themselves and you will receive many edits. Make a way for editing to be done on the spot in writing, or give people links to the form.

People have an existential desire to know who they are and how they are connected, but sometimes day to day life gets in the way. Because of your interest, you have been knighted the Family Historian. Enjoy (when they are not driving you crazy).
