

Northland Genealogy Society presentation for 2024 GenealogyKC
FINDING ANCESTORS: RESEARCH, DNA, or BOTH?

I. Interviewing Family Members as Part of Your Research

Family members can provide information to get you off to a productive start: names of parents, siblings, children, spouses; dates and places of birth, marriage, and death; education and careers. In addition, it can be thrilling to hear about our ancestors in their own words, which makes a connection across generations. Interviewing family is rewarding, but there are three common flaws to avoid:

1. Formulating questions based just on what we already know
2. Asking about others without asking the person being interviewed about him/herself. Don't wait until it's too late to ask more about their life.
3. Not getting the perspective of the person due to our discomfort with cultural and historic factors that change over the generations. This misses out on what that person saw through their own eyes during their lifetime.

Elizabeth Keating, an anthropologist has written a very helpful book for interviewing family, *The Essential Questions: Interview your Family to Uncover Stories and Bridge Generations* (Penguin Random House 2022). She provides interview questions taking on thirteen topics to elicit stories in context to avoid "genealogical amnesia." The questions in the thirteen topics in this book are designed to elicit stories that offer context for events and the perspective of the storyteller and a sense of their hopes doubts, confusion, struggles and joys. Besides basic background, topics include everyday live, rites of passage, ideas that shaped them, making of family units, treasured possessions, and memories that should be passed down to future generations

Interviews can be recorded on video, audio, or transcribed into a printed work. There are many options for preserving them for the future. See some of the popular options in the appendix for this handout.

II. How Awareness of Social Customs and Local History Helps Determine Your Research Strategies

Imagine your family tree with names only. Now, add dates and locations of vital events and you get a better picture of your family. But, with the context of the local history and social customs that they practiced, you can learn so much more about the individuals on your tree you might even recognize them if they walked in the room. How do you know where to begin to search? One of the tools is what Kathleen shared. Interview your living ancestors - and do it now!

But, lacking living elders, what is most often used to begin family history research is the **Federal Census**. Find your family. How do they look in comparison to their neighbors? How about compared to their entry on the previous Census? Or the next one? Do they move often, or do you find them in the same place for generations? To learn more about how to use the Federal Census to get to know your ancestors at a single point in time,

check the resources provided on the website of Mid-Continent Public Library's **Midwest Genealogy Center** at <https://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy/get-started> Study it carefully and be sure to watch the video on Census Research!

Then go to <https://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy/research/online-resources> There, among the "Family History Forms", you'll find, under "Census Forms", a sheet titled "Census Data Information 1790-1950". Be sure to print that and either laminate or put it in a page protector – you should be referring to it often! While the basic Census questions remain the same, many others have changed over the years, and this is your key to what prompted those changes. You'll also find blank forms for each census from 1790 to 1950 (the most recent one to be shared with the public). The best practice, while not the fastest, is to **print the blank forms for the years you are studying and manually transcribe the information from your computer screen to the corresponding blank form.** The Census gave the place or places your ancestors lived, their occupations, and other details, so you now know where to begin searching for local history and social customs.

Besides the Midwest Genealogy Center, **you can go online.** [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) is a **huge archive** of historical records, many organized by location, ancestor profiles, guides, YouTube videos, classes, wikis and so much more. Best of all, **it is FREE!** Many LDS churches have a **Family Search center** where knowledgeable individuals may be able to give you personalized guidance to the locations you are searching. To find a center near you, go to <https://locations.familysearch.org/en/search> Then scroll down to "Find a FamilySearch Center".

[Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) is **another huge database** full of important information that you can add to your ancestor's profile to see them in a larger context. **It is NOT free!** But, if you're willing to pay, there is a lot to learn here! With these and similar online resources, **try to identify your ancestor's religion, organizations, public offices held, and other aspects of his/her life** that you can research.

Two other very important sources of local history and social customs I strongly recommend are **family photographs** and **historical newspapers.** Find a class to learn how to use them to your advantage.

But the very best advice I have to bring your ancestors to life is to **get out and get social yourself.** Find a **genealogy or historical society** of like-minded researchers or a **lineage society** where you can meet other people who have ancestors that shared a similar experience. **Attend the programs** they sponsor. Check out the **resources on their website** or in **their library.** Explore **public, private or university libraries in your area that have genealogical collections or programs.** Learn **where the local history collection is kept** and specifically ask about **city or county histories.** **Find the nearest local, state, or national archives.**

With the internet, **identify similar organizations in the locations where your ancestors lived.** Are there **conferences (physical or virtual)** available to you? Take **in-person and virtual classes in local genealogy.** Do some deep diving to learn of

opportunities to **“get social” where your ancestors lived**. Those are the people who can give you the most help to find the local history and social customs on the ground where your ancestors walked. Plan a **genealogy research road trip**.

And, having done all this, you might be able to recognize an ancestor if you passed him or her on the street! That is the real test to determine if you have successfully added enough local history and social customs to an ancestor’s profile!

All that and **now we have DNA to add to our toolkit!** It’s a whole new ball game! So, it’s your turn at bat – step up to the plate and hit a genealogical “home” run!

III. Boots on the Ground: In Person Research

The number of digitized documents in the United States is at best only the tip of the iceberg of records retained at repositories around the country.

NARA – 2% of their 13 billion pages on documents/images
 FamilySearch – 5.19 billion digital images and still growing!
 Missouri State Archives – 9 million digitized images
 County Level – Platte County --Land records only
 County Level – Johnson County – Tax records only

What else is out there to be found?

- Newspapers hard copy and microfilm at local libraries
- Obituary collections at local historical societies
- Burial information/copies of death certificates at local funeral homes
- Baptism/marriage/membership records at churches
- Burial information at the office of cemeteries
- Military records at WWI, WWII, National Park Service sites
- School records (yearbooks, attendance, etc.) with time limitations

What is my best plan? Create a locality guide and gather all the information in the area you want to research including the addresses/phone numbers/websites of the court houses, repositories, libraries, etc. Be prepared by bringing a notebook and pencil and most places allow you to photograph documents with your phone or tablet. Call ahead and get a contact person for when you arrive.

Research what types of records were available in the years you are looking for records. The best resource as a starting point is the FamilySearch Wiki.

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page

1. Enter the county you wish to visit to research
2. Choose the “Genealogy” page
3. Drill down to various topics with hyperlinks

Some counties have more robust links based on input from fellow researchers.

Don't lose out on finding all the records and information you need in your research by attempting to do it all "online".

IV. Using DNA to Find Ancestors and Extended Family

The following table shows the five best DNA testing companies for genetic genealogy and the types of DNA testing they offer.

Company	Y-DNA Test	mtDNA Test	atDNA Test
Family Tree DNA	Yes	Yes	Family Finder
Ancestry.com	No	No	AncestryDNA
23andMe	No	No	23andMe
My Heritage	No	No	MyHeritage DNA
Living DNA	No	No	Living DNA

APPENDIX

Journaling and Story Preservation

Dayoneapp.com – to dictate, create text, add photos, videos, drawings, and audio.

EphemeraSearch.com is an online database of digitized old postcards, letters, telegrams.

Legacy Lab, a free 30-day email course with weekly meetings at permanent.org
 Storyworth.com prompts weekly topics for a printed book.

Popular Providers of Storage in the Cloud:

Carbonite, Microsoft DropBox, Evernote, Google Drive and Google One, OneDrive, Backblaze, Google Photo Scan App (storage), MemoryWeb (digitized photos)

Check Cyndi's List for other resources that may be helpful in your research

DNA Resources

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Testing the FAN Principle Against DNA: Zilphy (Watts) Price Cooksey Cooksey of Georgia and Mississippi." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 102 (June 2014): 129–52. PDF download. Elizabeth Shown Mills. *Historic Pathways*. <https://www.historicpathways.com>

Perl, Jonny. "Eight ways you can use ancestral trees at DNA Painter." *DNA Painter Blog*, posted 11 March 2018. <https://dnapainter.com/blog/eight-ways-you-can-use-ancestral-trees-at-dna-painter/>

Dyer, Nicole. "How to Write and Publish a Proof Argument with DNA Evidence." *Family Locket*, posted 8 Nov 2020. <https://familylocket.com/how-to-write-and-publish-a-proof-argument-with-dna-evidence/>

"Guidelines Using DNA Evidence for DAR Applications." D.A.R. 2014
<https://www.dar.org/sites/default/files/GuidelinesUsingDNAEvidenceDARApplications.pdf>

Garrett-Nelson, LaBrenda. "Parents for Isaac Garrett of Laurens County, South Carolina: DNA Corroborates Oral Tradition." *NGSQ* 108 (June 2020): 85–112.

Henningfield, Melinda Daffin. "A Family for Mary (Jones) Hobbs Clark of Carroll County, Arkansas." *NGSQ* 107 (March 2019): 5-30.

Hobbs, Patricia Lee. "DNA Identifies a Father for Rachel, Wife of James Lee of Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania." *NGSQ* 105 (March 2017): 43-56.

Jones, Thomas W. "Too Few Sources to Solve a Family Mystery? Some Greenfields in Central and Western New York." *NGSQ* 103 (June 2015): 85-10.

DNA Webinars

Jones, Thomas W., PhD, CG. "Systematically Using Autosomal DNA Test Results to Help Break Through Genealogical Brick Walls." Legacy Family Tree Webinars, 6 October 2017. <https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/systematically-using-autosomal-dnatest-results-to-help-break-through-genealogical-brick-walls/>

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "FAN + GPS + DNA: The Problem-Solver's Great Trifecta." Legacy Family Tree Webinars, posted 7 October 2016.
<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/fan-gps-dna-the-problem-solvers-greattrifecta/>