

Getting Started in Family History



330-643-9030

Akron-Summit County Public Library

Special Collections Division
60 S. High Street, Akron, OH 44326
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Genealogy is a popular hobby, with Ancestry.com commercials and television shows like *Who Do You Think You Are* creating a great deal of interest. When you discover your lineage and study the records your ancestors left behind, you can also learn a great deal about society and history. Genealogy is complex, and research takes time, patience and persistence. Each question you answer will lead you to more questions, but you may also make some remarkable discoveries. Most genealogists will say the effort is worth it. If you love to do historical detective work, you will find genealogy fascinating!

What is the difference between genealogy and family history?

We can use the terms interchangeably, but they can also mean separate things. “Genealogy” can mean the “bare bones” information of a family’s existence: dates and locations for births, marriages, migrations, deaths, and burials. “Family history” rounds out those facts with the stories behind them: How did your grandparents meet? Why did your ancestors cross the ocean to live here? What were their lives like? Both approaches are important.

Where is the best place to start?

With yourself! Begin with your own knowledge and memories about your parents and grandparents. Where and when were they born? Where have they lived? What were their occupations? Consult and copy records that your family may be keeping: obituaries, Bible records, and military documents, for example. Ask as many of your family as you can about their lives and what they remember about other family members: dates of birth, death, marriage, and immigration, burial locations, and maiden names of women are all important. Be sure to talk to the oldest members of the family about their knowledge. You may want to conduct audio or video interviews if your family is willing to be recorded. Be aware that memories can be faulty, and painful or embarrassing events can be glossed over. What people tell you may not be entirely accurate.

Don’t forget to document your own life. If it’s important to you to pass down your information to your descendants, you will need to record it so they will have access to it. You may want to record memories of your family, schools attended, occupations you’ve had, and how you’ve responded to historic events.



How do I record, organize and preserve all this information?

A crucial part of doing family history is recording, storing and organizing your information, photos and documents. There are many ways to do this; it's best to learn about the options and develop a way that works for you. You'll most likely have to modify your system from time to time as you continue to collect information. Keeping track of your sources and records and understanding where your information came from is important, especially when you pass the information on to others. Genealogists call this "citing your sources."

Forms like pedigree charts and family group sheets are the most common ways of organizing family information on paper. We offer free five-generation charts at our reference desk. You can print out free charts and forms from Ancestry.com at <http://www.ancestry.com/cs/charts-and-forms>. Three-ring binders and file folders and boxes work well for storing paper copies. You can sort information by individual, family group, or surname. If you have photos or original records such as birth certificates, consider using archival-quality storage for preservation. Polyester sheet protectors for three-ring binders, and acid-free, lignin-free folders and boxes are good choices.

Research can also be organized electronically or digitally through online services such as Ancestry.com, genealogy software, and digital file storage. Free genealogy software can be downloaded from RootsMagic (www.rootsmagic.com) and LegacyFamilyTree (www.legacyfamilytree.com). You can keep the free version or upgrade to paid versions of these, or purchase one of the many other commercial software products available. With a scanner, you can create digital copies of photographs and paper records and store them on your computer's hard drive, or use "cloud" (remote server) storage. There are a number of genealogy apps popular with tablet and smartphone owners. Recording information online or electronically can help researchers accomplish more and make their work easier to share. But the work can also be easily lost. Back up files and make multiple copies in separate places.

What's next?

Once you have gathered all the information you can from family members, the next step is to research genealogical records and reconstruct the family history for yourself. Basic records include birth and death certificates, marriage and divorce certificates, and census records. There are also many other types of genealogical sources, such as obituaries and newspaper articles, cemetery records, city directories, county histories, land deeds, and even court cases. The more records you can study and compare, the more complete the research will be.

You might find that someone else has researched your ancestors and posted it online, published it in book form, or donated it to a library or genealogical society. There are thousands of online family trees on Ancestry.com alone. It's important to remember that there are many errors and conflicts in genealogy research, so be sure to study the records these trees are based on for a more complete understanding of your lineage.

Where do I look?

To do genealogy effectively today, it's necessary to go online. Websites and databases provide access to a wealth of resources. But it's also important to understand that not everything is on the internet. Genealogical information is found in many different types of institutions and organizations in many different formats.

We offer many databases available through our website using a valid library card, such as Ancestry Library Edition, HeritageQuest, and Fold3. Some databases must be used in a library location, but most can be used anywhere you have internet access.

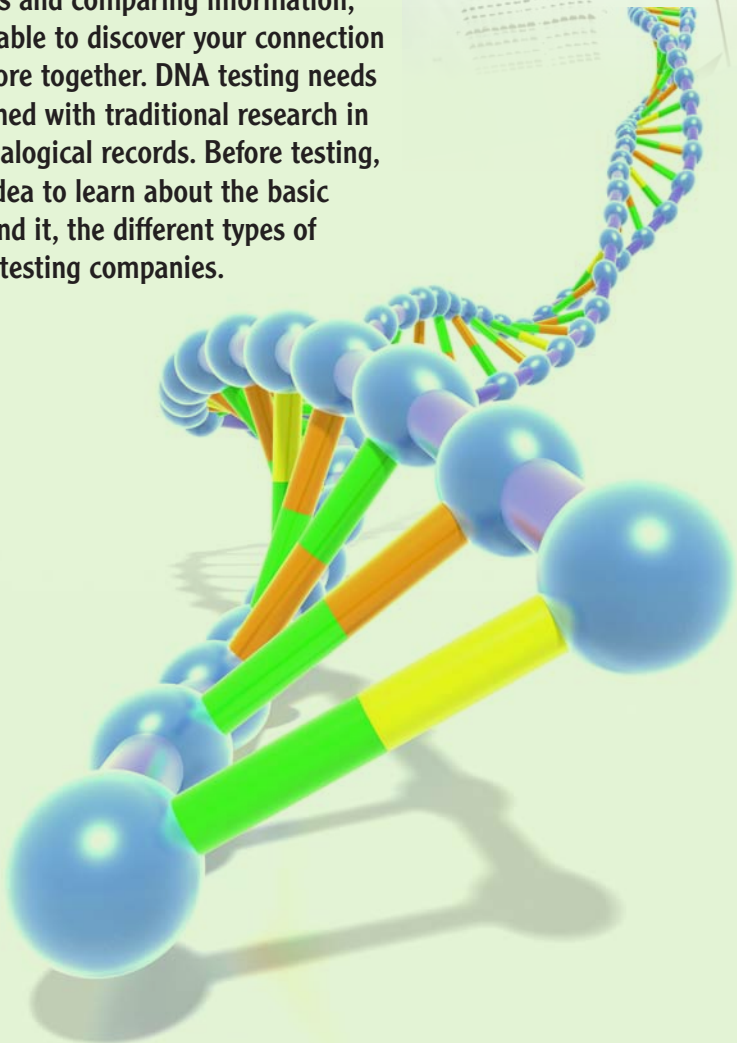
There are also many excellent free resources online. FamilySearch (www.familysearch.org) is one of the largest and most comprehensive free genealogy websites, with millions of record images and helpful research guides. Cyndi's List (<https://www.cyndislist.com/us/>) provides thousands of links to other genealogy websites. A growing number of government sites, such as the Summit County Clerk of Courts (<https://cpclerk.summitoh.net>) provide digitized images of documents. USGenWeb (www.usgenweb.com) is helpful for pointers on where to find resources. Rootsweb (www.rootsweb.com) is an online community where genealogists exchange information through message boards, mailing lists, and contributed lineages. Social networking sites such as Facebook (www.facebook.com) are also increasingly popular as a way of connecting to distant cousins and other researchers.

Special Collections offers a large collection of print and microfilm resources that are not available online. These include sources such as books of transcribed vital records, local histories, maps, cemetery transcriptions, funeral home records, newspapers, and genealogical society publications, to name a few. Our collection is always growing, but we won't have every resource you need for your research. To do in-depth research, you may need to contact other libraries, government agencies, historical or genealogical societies, religious institutions, or cemeteries in different locations. You may even want to travel to the places your ancestors lived, both to find records and to understand their lives more clearly.



Can DNA testing help me?

DNA testing is becoming increasingly important to genealogists. Many have found it to be helpful, including adoptees who want to identify unknown parents. But results will vary with each individual. In addition to ethnicity estimates, test results can identify “matches,” or individuals with whom you share a segment of DNA. This means that you share an ancestor. Testing alone doesn’t identify the common ancestor, but by contacting and corresponding with your matches and comparing information, you may be able to discover your connection and learn more together. DNA testing needs to be combined with traditional research in written genealogical records. Before testing, it’s a good idea to learn about the basic science behind it, the different types of testing, and testing companies.



How can the library help me?

We can help in a number of ways:

- Search records for you on a limited basis (see our correspondence service guidelines on our website under “Requests & Lookups”)
- Assist you in finding and interpreting resources both in our collections and online
- Help you find where resources are kept in other institutions
- Assist with interlibrary loan (ILL) requests for materials not available in Special Collections
- Show you basic searching techniques in our genealogy databases
- Help you work with our equipment, including microfilm reader/printers, copiers, and scanners
- Order specific genealogical resources, if available, at your request

We actively work on projects to help researchers find information, such as indexing and digitization of our sources. In addition, we offer free basic genealogy classes. Check our website for our current schedule.

Hints for beginners:

- It’s natural to have lots of questions, but answering them may take several steps. It’s better to go slowly and focus your research by concentrating on one task at a time.
- Use online family trees only as ways to gather clues and find records. Rather than simply copying what you find, take the time to seek out the information in actual sources.
- Don’t assume all the information you find is correct – whether online or in print. There will be conflicts and mistakes.
- Information you’re looking for will be in many different places and in many different formats.
- Expect to spend some time with your research. Genealogy can be a lifelong hobby.
- Work from the known to the unknown. Information you collect will likely have clues to help you find more.
- Record your sources as you’re working with them.
- Start a system of storage and organization early. You can always change things as you go along.
- Be patient. There’s a lot to learn. Enjoy the challenge and have fun!

Helpful resources for beginners:

- Unpuzzling Your Past by Emily Croom
- How to do Everything: Genealogy by George G. Morgan
- Black Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African-American Family Tree by Tony Burroughs
- Genealogy Online by Elizabeth Powell Crowe
- Organize Your Genealogy: Strategies and Solutions for Every Researcher by Drew Smith
- The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy by Blaine Bettinger
- Explore our website, www.akronlibrary.org/specialcollections, to learn more about our resources.
- Explore our many genealogy databases available through the Library's website, <http://www.akronlibrary.org/research/databases-by-subject>, under "Genealogy & Local History."



KITTINGER REUNION.

A Family Gathering at Springfield Lake, Near Akron.

The ninth annual reunion of the Kittinger family was held at Springfield Lake, Akron, on August 2. It was a beautiful one and relatives and friends began to arrive with their baskets at an early hour. A long time was spent in renewing old acquaintances and having a social talk with relatives not seen since the last reunion. By this time the noon hour had arrived and the guests found their way to the tables along the lake. After dinner the president, J. N. Kittinger,



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Hours:

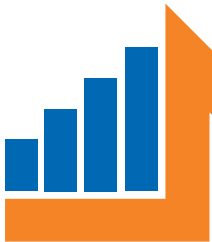
Monday – Thursday 10 am–8 pm

Friday 10 am–6 pm

Saturday 10 am–5 pm

Sunday 1 pm–5 pm

Closed major holidays. Call ahead to confirm.



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