

# Piecing Together Your Family Puzzle

By Carolyn H. Brown

Researching your family history is not really hard, but it does take patience, persistence and a desire to dig in old records. It is like doing a jigsaw puzzle with real people. Some living people will be involved, but most of them are dead.

Like a puzzle, you have to get the frame work done before you can add the pieces. In genealogy, this means that you have to identify those most closely related to you as you work your ancestry backwards in time. Trying to work forward in time, generally ends up on the wrong path.

## **GATHER YOUR FAMILY DATA**

Work with what you have in your home and from what you can gather from other family members. Look for photographs, birth, marriage and death certificates; journals; scrapbooks; old letters; family bibles; school; and military records. Look for wills; deeds; land & tax records; newspaper articles; year books; family heirlooms; county; and town histories.

Sort all of these items into four family groups based on the surname of each of your four grandparents.

Write down what you know about yourself, your parents and grandparents. If you have information on your great-grandparents include them in this early search.

Work backwards from the most recent event in each persons life. That would be in the order of death, marriage, and then birth. Get the date and location of each event. This will put each person in a time frame and place for your research.

## **USE ALL OF THE RESOURCES YOU HAVE WITHIN YOUR OWN FAMILY**

That includes talking to your parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Record all conversations if you can. As you are creating your records, note where you located or received each piece of information. Who gave it to you? When they gave it to you? You will have conflicting information, so you need to know who gave it to you and how to decide which is most probably correct. In general, information created closest to the event is usually the more accurate, but not always.

## **ANCESTRY CHART AND FAMILY GROUP SHEETS**

There are two forms you may wish to use to help you sort through the information you find. They are the Ancestry Chart and Family Group Sheet. They make great work forms and organize your data in the same format as you will enter it in your program. See copies attached.

### *Using the Ancestry Chart*

On the Ancestry Chart, fill in as much information as you can. You will be person #1 on the far left of the sheet. The lines on the sheet show the connections.

Your father is #2; his father (your grandfather) is #4; your father's mother, (your grandmother) is #5; his father (your great-grandfather) is #8; his mother, (your great-grandmother) is #9; etc. You will notice all men are even numbers and all women are odd numbers.

You will work the same format for your mother's family. Your mother is #3; her father (your grandfather) is #6; her mother (your grandmother) is number 7; follow the same format as above.

If you fill in all of your ancestors on any line of your Ancestry Chart, you will need to continue that individual on another Ancestry Chart. The first chart is always Chart 1. On the continuation charts you will use the same form, however the Chart for person #16 will be Chart 2. Person #16 on Chart 1 will become person #1 on Chart 2. Person #17 will become person #1 on Chart 3, and so forth.

### *Using the Family Group Sheet*

Create a Family Group Sheet for each couple in your Ancestry Chart—that is, one for yourself and your spouse; one for your parents; one for each set of your grandparents; and one for each set of your great-grandparents. That would be 8 Family Group Sheets to start. As you expand your ancestry you will need more Family Group Sheets. If a person married more than once and had children, you will need a separate Family Group Sheet for each family unit. Therefore, some of your ancestors may have two or more Family Group Sheets.

### *Use the proper format for dates & names*

- a. Date format - 15 JAN 1991 - NEVER use the format 1/9/91 (Is it Jan 9, 1991 or Sep 1, 1891?)
- b. Approximate dates - circa - ca. 1991 or about - abt.2003
- c. Recording names
  - Male - First Middle Last                      adopted - First Middle (Original) Last
  - Female - First Middle Maiden              adopted - First Middle (Original) MaidenSometimes in books or other materials (not 5 generation charts or family group sheets) the female may be recorded as:
  - First Middle (Maiden) (Previous Last) Last
  - adopted - First Middle (Original) (Maiden) (Previous Last) LastYou do not need to capitalize the surnames in your genealogy program. Have the program set to capitalize them when you print.
- d. Baptisms - Bap. 01 JAN 1991
- e. Places - City/Town, County, State    i.e. - Placentia, Orange, California

### **PURCHASE A GENEALOGY PROGRAM AND USE IT**

Before you gather too much information and have papers all over the place, get a genealogy program to help you see what you have and what you need to locate.

Ask your family, or the people who will be helping you with your genealogy, which program they are using. This way they can help you when you have problems or questions. It is suggested for those using PCs with Windows, you should not use any programs except *Legacy Family Tree* or *Roots Magic*, as some of the other older ones have been discontinued by their suppliers.

I personally believe *Legacy Family Tree* <[www.legacyfamilytree.com](http://www.legacyfamilytree.com)> is the best genealogy program on the market as it is easy for new users to understand and offers options not found in other programs.

Enter all of the information you have gathered with the source (exactly where the information came from) for each event. This will allow you to make lists of the people you are researching, and you can sort that information in any order you need. Lists are a great help to keep you focused on the individual or family you are working on. *Legacy* also allows you to color code your ancestors to match the colors you chose for your paper documents.

*Legacy Family Tree* has a free version, without the bells and whistles, but you will definitely want to buy the program as you begin working with it.

When entering data into the genealogy program, always enter the source for each item as you enter the data. In *Legacy* this means using their *Source Writer* option.

Another good genealogical program is *Roots Magic*. The choice is up to you, but it is suggested that you use the program most of your family and friends will be using.

### **GET ORGANIZED**

Organize the information you have gathered by surname and family group. To help you keep the families organized use a different color of folder for each of your four major surnames. This applies to your hard copy records and copies of those digital items you have gathered.

Use four colors; i.e., red—your father’s father’s line; blue—your father’s mother’s line; green—your mother’s father’s line; and yellow—for you mother’s mother’s line. Of course you can use any color scheme you chose, this is only an example. If you don’t use colored folders, then use colored folder labels and colored dots for the other documents where needed. File your folders by color. In this case, everyone who has a folder related to your father’s father has a red label on their folder, etc.

On your computer create a folder for all of your genealogy. You can use the *Colorize* program <[http://download.cnet.com/Folder-Colorizer/3000-2072\\_4-75609440.html](http://download.cnet.com/Folder-Colorizer/3000-2072_4-75609440.html)> to color your computer folders to match your paper folders. Within that folder create a folder for each of your four surnames. Documents for everyone related that each surname should be file in the major surname folder. It will help to make some sub-folders for the different surname under that specific ancestor.

You will also want a folder for all of the training documents you have and will gather, and one for each state you are working in. If you have two separate families with the same surname, make two separate folders and identify them by the most recent ancestor.

Use 8½ x 11 sheets of paper for your notes. Smaller notes will get lost.

### **CITE YOUR SOURCES**

Gathering the source of each piece of information, or each document you copy, is as important as gathering the data.

- a. Record the full name (maiden name of women), date and place when you talk to people. Record the conversation if possible.
- b. Copy the cover page of all books or documents and make sure that page contains the author, publisher, date and place the documents was published, and the volume and page number. Record any other information which will help you or someone else find the document.
- c. Record the library name and call numbers of the book or film used. On a film with multiple entries on the same film, record the item number as well.
- d. For Internet sources make sure you record the date it was placed on the website and the full name of the website and the document group to which the document applies.
- e. Census records: copy the page before and page after the one where you person of interest appears. They may contain more members of the same family.
- f. In courthouse records, photo copy the entire document. Note the record type, book, page or document number. Record the name of the facility where you located the records.

### **SEARCH FOR ADDITIONAL FAMILY INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET**

Start with an ancestor you want to know more about. Organize the data you have already gathered so you have an approximate death, marriage and birth date for that individual.

Use the Internet to locate documents relating to the individual. The three major websites for beginners are <[www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org)> (free), <[www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com)> (\$\$\$), and <[www.FindAGrave.com](http://www.FindAGrave.com)> (free). Google the individuals name you are researching, and see what you can locate for free. You may find a website dedicated to your family.

### **WHAT TO SEARCH FOR?**

Look for books on the family surname, followed by census records from the time and place the ancestor of interest lived. Look for legal documents and information in databases. Try to locate the original document if all you can locate online is a list.

#### *Types of documents*

Birth	Censuses	Death	Deed	Cemetery	City Directory
Marriage	Military	Insurance	Social Security	Civil Case	Taxes Will
Licenses	Pension	Naturalization	Newspaper	Passenger Lists	Court Orders

When printing documents from any web site, use the option to include source information when available.

### **MAKE COPIES OF EVERYTHING**

- a. Copy all pages of a book which applies to your subject person or family.
- b. Copy the cover page with the title, author, publisher, date.
- c. If there are photos, copy those as well.

### **WORKING WITH PHOTOS & DOCUMENTS**

Record the name of everyone in the photo and the date the photo was taken. If you know where they photo was taken, record that information. Make a digital copy of each photo. If you locate important documents, make digital copies of those as well.

#### *Scrapbooks & photo albums*

If you locate a scrapbook, take photos of all important items. It is best not to remove items from the book, as that will lower the total value of the scrapbook. If there is a photo in the scrapbook and information identifying the individuals in the photo is not written on the page, you may need to remove the photo to see what may be printed on the back. Do this with great care. Because scrapbook items were often glued to the page, take a photo of the entire page. Then very carefully try to cut the item from the page. If some of the paper remains stuck to the back, try to steam the paper off. Do not get the photo wet. A little steam and light scratching may do the trick. If you can determine that nothing is written on the photo, do not work on it further as it may damage the photo. Scan the photo.

### **WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION**

- a. Study "how-to do genealogy research" books.
- b. Take classes, attend seminars and join a genealogy society. The members can provide support when you don't know where to look next. Attend other genealogy conferences to help learn the techniques of researching beyond your immediate family.
- c. Use the Internet. Visit sites like:
  - Cyndis List* - [www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)
  - Family Search* - [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
  - Ancestry* - [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

**Genealogy is not just a pastime; it's a passion.**

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