

# Chapter 5: *Gathering and Recording Information*

Gathering and recording family history information are foundational tasks. As we gather known information from relatives, we avoid duplicating previously performed research. As we organize and record the information we gather, we are able to see what information is still needed and where to focus our efforts.

## ***Gather Ancestral Information from Family Sources***

You can gather family history information from many sources. Some are easier to access than others. You may make more effective use of your time by gathering information from sources that are close at hand before you go to sources that are less accessible. For example, your own memory is an excellent source of family history information. You may also find important family information in records around your home. Follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost as you decide where to begin gathering information.

The FamilySearch Family Tree ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)) will likely already contain some information about your ancestors. Review this information at the beginning of your search to avoid duplicating work that may have already been done (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2009, 10).

Individual circumstances, resources, and abilities may determine which records are the easiest to access. Family history information is readily available from sources such as the following:

- Memory
- Records in homes
- Relatives
- FamilySearch files and other databases
- Family histories and other compiled sources
- Government offices and churches
- Genealogical websites

### **Records in Homes of Relatives**

You can begin identifying your ancestors by gathering information about yourself, your siblings, your parents, and your grandparents. Typically, information about these close relatives is readily available by simply talking to them. If you have not done so already, you should interview older family members as soon as possible to obtain their life histories and preserve their memories. Internet sites such as [www.whitepages.com](http://www.whitepages.com) and [www.peoplesearch.com](http://www.peoplesearch.com) may be helpful in locating relatives' contact information. To increase the accuracy of your records, ask family members if they have created or stored any documents containing family history information. You should compare memories and oral traditions with information from these other sources. Below is a list of records you or they may have:

*Bibles.* Historic family Bibles may contain a few pages devoted to genealogical records of the family (births, marriages, and deaths). Information found in a family Bible should be carefully

evaluated, and, if possible, confirmed with other sources.

*Diaries and journals.* Diaries and journals can be invaluable for family history. They may also be primary sources, and should be carefully studied for genealogical information.

*Biographies.* Unpublished biographies are often found among the loose papers of a relative. Unscholarly, poorly written, and illogical as they may sometimes seem, they are still priceless to the family historian because of the memories, family traditions, and nuggets of truth among the sometimes exaggerated story-telling. Biographies may also be published, and can sometimes be found in books and online databases.

*Letters.* Old letters are the most informal and intimate of family sources. Note the addresses, names of the correspondents, postmarks, and dates for useful information.

*Memorial cards and funeral programs.* Genealogical data on funeral memorabilia include date of birth, place of birth, date of death, age at death, and place of burial.

*Church records.* These records include certificates of birth, baptism (or christening), marriage, advancement, death, and funeral notices.

*Civil records.* Competent civil recorders usually prepared birth, marriage, and death certificates near the date of the event, often known as civil registration.

*Citizenship records.* The records of immigrant ancestors may contain citizenship papers, dates of arrival, ports of embarkation and debarkation, and other details.

*Fraternal records.* Freemasons, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Knights of Columbus, etc., preserve genealogical and biographical sketches of their membership.

*Genealogical records.* Family members and ancestors may have compiled genealogical records such as pedigree charts and family group sheets.

*Histories.* Occasionally, a manuscript history in the handwriting of an ancestor is found. Verification with supporting evidence is helpful in such instances.

*Legal papers.* Family members may have preserved legal documents. Included in this category are wills, deeds, mortgages, and land grants. These are valuable because of the names, dates, places, and relationships mentioned.

*Military records.* Search for discharge papers, pension records, service records, medals, ribbons, etc.

*Newspaper clippings.* Many families have collections of newspaper clippings relevant to family history.

*Occupational records.* Apprenticeship records, awards, citations, and other occupational achievements are often found in the home.

*School records.* School attendance records and graduation certificates provide genealogical data and verify residence at a specific point in time.

*Albums.* Photograph albums are among the most cherished family records. Sometimes photos may not be labeled. You may wish to take unlabeled photos to the next family reunion to show to older relatives, who may be able to identify the individuals and locations pictured.

## ***Gather Ancestral Information from LDS Church Resources***

The Family History Department of the LDS Church (FamilySearch International) provides genealogical resources containing information on approximately one billion deceased persons. Information about these persons is found on the Internet at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), [new.familysearch.org](http://new.familysearch.org), at the FamilySearch Library in Salt Lake City, and in the many LDS

FamilySearch Centers worldwide. One of the largest is the BYU Family History Library in the BYU Harold B. Lee Library.

**The FamilySearch Library Catalog(FSC)** is the official library catalog describing the records housed at the FamilySearch Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. This catalog continues to expand rapidly as additional sources are acquired by the Genealogical Society of Utah through microfilming and digitization projects around the world. In May 2008, an announcement was made of a partnership between FamilySearch and FamilyLink.com to add new features to the FSC catalog. Major online search engines will be able to search the catalog, links will be created from the catalog to online and digitized records, entries for books will allow researchers to locate the nearest copy or purchase from a publisher, and many more additional features.

## Compiled Records

Compiled records are those based on research or investigation. Examples of compiled records include genealogies, obituaries, biographies, histories, and family histories. Ancestral File, Pedigree Resource File, and the International Genealogical Index (except for the temple ordinance information) are also examples of compiled records.

Many compiled records are available through FamilySearch Centers. Each center can provide access, through microfilm loan, to the records in the FamilySearch Library collection in Salt Lake City. This collection contains numerous printed and manuscript family histories and other compiled sources.

## Records from Government Offices and Churches

Most original records fall under the jurisdiction of government or ecclesiastical agencies. For example, the cemetery record of a person buried in the Provo City Cemetery is housed in the sexton's office. The marriage license of a couple married in Provo is filed at the Utah County Courthouse. The birth certificate of a child born in Provo is filed with the Utah State Bureau of Vital Statistics (many counties and city halls keep copies of vital records in courthouses and also have records predating state recordings).

If you know where a family member lived at the time of an event (such as birth, marriage, or death), official records may be readily available. Multiple sources contain such information.

**FamilySearch Library.** The FamilySearch Library has a large collection of microfilmed and digitized original records and corresponding indices containing millions of civil and church records. This collection may be searched through the FamilySearch Library Catalog.

**FamilySearch Wiki.** The FamilySearch Wiki (<https://wiki.familysearch.org>) is a database of pages compiled by experienced researchers to help those who are less familiar with researching in a particular subject or area. Information regarding civil and church records in specific localities can be found here. (FamilySearch Wiki is discussed further in Chapter 11.)

**Correspondence with Government or Ecclesiastical Agencies.** Writing to archives and/or agencies in the areas your ancestors lived may yield helpful results and records. Names and addresses of places to write for family history information can be found online or through FamilySearch Wiki.

**Internet Research.** Multiple websites contain histories, biographies, indexes, transcriptions, or digitized original records. Databases containing such information include the following:

- Ancestry.com: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)
- U.S. GenWeb: [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org)
- World GenWeb: [www.worldgenweb.org](http://www.worldgenweb.org)
- Footnote.com: [www.footnote.com](http://www.footnote.com)
- World Vital Records: [www.worldvitalrecords.com](http://www.worldvitalrecords.com)
- FamilySearch.org: <https://www.familysearch.org>

## Keeping Track of Your Searches

You will need a good filing system—one that reveals at a glance what has been done and allows easy access to the details of your findings. Begin your note keeping system by using a research log (see Appendix C). Logs may be kept on paper or electronically on a computer. In the log, record the name of your ancestor, the place where you obtained the information, the dates the records were searched, letters written or received, and any other activities completed. Since many people sporadically work on family history, a record of your activities is necessary to avoid repetitive efforts.

As you fill in the research log and gather documents, place all materials in a manila file folder labeled with the name of the ancestor you are searching (if taking physical notes and records), or in a properly-labeled folder on your computer. In the folder, include a family group record of the ancestor, as well as a pedigree chart showing their relationship to you. In addition to paper copies, many people also save electronic copies of the documents they have found. Genealogical software programs, such as RootsMagic, are useful in recording notes and sources. Take time to frequently evaluate what you already know concerning this family.

## ***Recording Your Information***

### **Pedigree Charts and Family Group Records**

Family history information may be handwritten or recorded by computer, but before temple ordinances can be done for your ancestors, their information must be entered into Family Tree at <https://new.familysearch.org> (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009).

While it is important to enter information into the FamilySearch database, it is also important to create and maintain your own private electronic family tree through family tree software. This gives you complete control over one copy of the research which can't be edited by others.

## Recording Data into Information Managing Software

Multiple software programs have been developed to help individuals record, organize, and preserve their family history information. RootsMagic is one such program and can be downloaded for free at <http://www.rootsmagic.com>. However, no version of RootsMagic for the Mac is currently available.

## Analyzing Information about Ancestors

Occasionally, you will find conflicting information when recording information from various sources. A document created near the time of the event by a reliable witness takes precedence over later records, tradition, and distant memories. However, you should be aware that although clerks made every effort to talk to informed witnesses, they relied on available information. Some errors have crept into original records because of forgetful or confused witnesses who were describing events many years after they happened. Resolving these discrepancies is an important part of correctly identifying your ancestors.

### Keys to Correctly Identifying Your Ancestors

- Ancestors are commonly identified by their name, date and place of birth, relationships, and other events in their lives.
- Ancestors can be linked to a spouse, children, parents, brothers, and sisters.
- Ancestors can be identified by occupation, property ownership, and physical description.
- Does the ancestor live at the right time and in the right place?
- Is the ancestor married to the right person?
- Do the names of the ancestor's children match the names you have gathered?
- The more identifying characteristics of an ancestor you find, the greater likelihood you will be able to distinguish your ancestor from others with similar names.

## Establishing Linkages

As you begin to identify your ancestors, you may have difficulty establishing linkages. To make this task easier, think in terms of identifying your kindred dead rather than your direct-line ancestors only. Gather complete families as you extend your pedigree. Include non-ancestral spouses and half-brothers and sisters. Try to create brother and sister clusters before moving to the next generation. This will add context to your family records, and may reduce confusion. For example, if you only have the name of a great-grandfather, check the records of his siblings. Did siblings witness his marriage, or the christenings of his children? Does his obituary name siblings? If the death certificate does not include the names of his parents, check siblings' certificates. Complete a generation—a family—then move back to the next generation.

### Analyze Linkages between the Generations

- Nominal linkage—Compare names of children to names of grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.
- Chronological linkage—A child cannot be born before the parents, and a woman cannot bear children in her seventies or eighties.
- Geographical linkage—Prove claims that a family moved great distances from census or other records.
- Ancestors sometimes moved in groups or kinfolk clusters—Locate a family plot in a cemetery.
- Property—Land was often owned by the family for several generations.
- Social status/occupational—Rags to riches assumptions are questionable. The further back you trace family lines, the more rigid the socioeconomic classification.

### Organizing Your Materials

Organization is crucial in family history work. There are various ways to organize your information—talk with others and see what methods they use. The important thing is that you find an organizational method that works for you and then consistently use it.

### Organizing Your Findings

#### Old Family Group Records and Various Notes

1. Enter notes and sources into tree-building software.
2. Store originals in file folders or boxes (be sure to back up research onto another computer or memory device).

#### Research Folder for a Specific Family

1. Title the acid-free folder by the family surname.
2. Place a pedigree chart, a family group record, a research log, and copies of sources into the folder.

### Preserving Your Family Records

Where possible, store your family records in a safe place. You may want to store digital copies of your records and personal files at the home of a relative. This way your family information will be preserved even if your own copies are lost or destroyed. In addition, you should contribute your

ancestral information that is not yet part of the Family Tree System. Anything submitted to Family Tree will be preserved by the Genealogical Society of Utah. You may also wish to keep a backup of your data on a flash drive external hard drive, or filed in a bank safety deposit box.