Identify What You Know and Use Home Sources

Personal knowledge can form the first limbs of your family tree. Begin at home by gathering and organizing your papers, make a simple chart or list, beginning with you, your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Search for the following:



- birth, baptismal, graduation, marriage, military, and occupational records
- death certificates, burial records, and obituaries
- yearbooks, newspaper articles, family letters, social activity mementoes, sports awards, and other documents that might provide names, dates, and locations

Then look at your family's religious records, old letters, photographs, and memorabilia. Print copies and label everything to document the source, and scan them when possible to save them digitally. Now you are well on your way to forming the branches of your family tree.

Next, contact family members and ask questions about their lives and those of other relatives. Interview all your oldest relatives first. Most of us later regret not doing that in time to learn from them. A sampling of questions might include the following:

- Where did they live?
- In what part of the country?
- What kind of dwelling did they live in?
- Did they move around while growing up? • When and where were their relatives born?
- When did these relatives die, and where are they buried?

Take along some of your old photos and attic treasures to jog their memories. And be sure to ask if you may see their old family records, letters, photos, and memorabilia. These documents might help you expand your search. Take photographs of their mementoes, records, and photos with your camera, or phone, or bring a portable scanner. Document the photos you take with names, dates, and places.

Listen to their family stories and make notes. Relatives often have different versions of the same story since each person remembers an event in his or her unique way, but these differences make it interesting! Share what you already know with them. Use a tape recorder or video camera if your relative feels comfortable with it—most mobile phones can make audio and/or video recordings today. Make your initial visits short with someone you are just getting to know. Always ask for permission first before you make copies and take photos, videos, or audio recordings.