HISTORY & GENEALOGY

GETTING STARTED IN GENEALOGY

Collect and organize the information you have at hand

- Write down what you already know about your family history.

- Look for the family documents that you might already have. These might include birth, marriage, and death certificates; baptismal records; family Bibles; newspaper obituaries; wills; diaries; and personal letters and correspondence. Transcribe dates from family tombstones. Examine family photographs and photo albums for written notes citing names and relationships.

- Take steps to preserve family documents and guard them against damage and loss.

- Interview relatives and find out what they know about your family’s history.

Find out if someone has already researched your family

- Look for a published family history. The History and Genealogy Department has extensive holdings of published family histories. Search the online library catalog at http://webpac.scll.org or ask a librarian for assistance.

- Family trees posted on websites such as FamilySearch or Ancestry can offer clues.

- Verify for yourself the information published by other researchers, regardless of the source.
GETTING STARTED

Be organized and methodical

- Focus on one family branch and one generation at a time to keep your research manageable.
- Start with yourself (or the latest generation) and work backward, researching each person and each generation as you go. Be as complete and consistent as possible. Do not skip generations.

Document your research

- Record family data on pedigree charts and family group sheets. Free copies are available in the History and Genealogy Department, or they can be downloaded as PDFs at http://www.slcl.org/genealogy-and-local-history/genealogical_forms.
- Maintain a research log that records which sources you checked and what the results were.
- Record the information source of each discovery. Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace by Elizabeth S. Mills (call no. R 907.2 M657E) offers helpful advice on how to analyze source materials and cite them properly.

Other tips

- Consult “how-to” books on genealogy available in the History and Genealogy Department. Many general research guides and handbooks are located in the open stacks beginning with call number 929.1. Most are available for check out with a valid St. Louis County Library card.
- Improve your research skills by taking a class and attending lectures. The History and Genealogy Department offers genealogy classes, workshops and presentations. Class schedules are available in the library and on the library website at http://www.slcl.org/genealogy. Beginning genealogy courses are sometimes also taught at local community colleges.
• Join one or more genealogical societies. Such organizations provide a community of other researchers with whom you can collaborate and get help in overcoming difficult research problems.

COMMON RECORDS USED IN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

• Census records— Census records are rich sources of information about individuals and families and form the backbone of research on U.S. families. The available information depends on the census year. The 1940 census is the latest one made open to the public.

• Vital records—Dates for births, marriages and deaths are often found in family Bibles, church registers, and tombstone inscriptions, as well as official state, county and local records.

• City directories—Offer information about residence and occupation.

• Probate records—Wills and estate records often help establish descendents and their relationships.

• Land records—Deeds and other records may reveal heirs and family relationships.

• Church records—Besides important birth, marriage and death information, church records often include the names of parents and godparents or sponsors who might have been relatives.

• Naturalization records—Provide information about country of origin and other data, depending on the year.

• Passenger lists—Provide data about the year and point of entry and sometimes offer other information.

• Newspapers—Offer obituaries and news items about family members.
ABOUT HISTORY & GENEALOGY AT ST. LOUIS COUNTY LIBRARY

Founded in 1998, the History & Genealogy Department is a nationally recognized research collection. Substantial print, microfilm, and electronic holdings offer information for the St. Louis area, Missouri, and states east of the Mississippi, with emphasis on migration trails leading into Missouri. The department also offers substantial resources for African American, French Canadian, German, Swiss, and British Isles research. The National Genealogical Society Collection makes 30,000 print items, including 10,000 family histories, available for checkout and interlibrary loan. The History & Genealogy Department at St. Louis County Library is an FamilySearch affiliate library.