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Genealogy: History on a Personal Scale



◀ *Five generations of the Miller family pose in 1916. Seated: Theresia Keller Miller (born 1833) holding her great-great granddaughter Louise Garbe (born 1915). Standing: Ida Welling Hoffman (born 1878), Sophia Miller Welling (born 1853), and Lucille Hoffman Garbe (born 1897). Photograph loaned by Michael Sibbersen.*

There are nearly as many reasons for the study of family history as there are people who pursue it. Almost one-half of the researchers using the resources at the Center for Archival Collections are family historians. Every family's history reflects in some way the history of the larger society around it. For this reason, genealogy can make historical events more meaningful.

The article below explains how to begin the hunt for your family's "roots." Pedigree charts and family group sheets can be compiled from the raw data gathered from government records. Other sources and techniques need to be used to put the data into human terms. Teachers may want to try a project to get their students thinking about 20th century events and how they affected the students' families. While it would not be possible for most students to trace their family trees farther back than their grandparents' or great-grandparents' generation in a short amount of time, the students can learn much about the personal side of history by asking a few questions of the appropriate family members:

1. Where and when were you born? Where and when were you married? Did anything funny or sad happen at the time?
2. When did you start school? How many children were in a classroom? Who were your best friends?
3. What did you do for fun? Do you remember any special games, books, or movies?
4. Tell about your house. Where was it? What did it look like?
5. How many brothers and sisters did you have? (Names, birthdates) Did you have any pets? What were they and what were their names?
6. Did you go on any special trips? Where?
7. Were you in the military? Where did you serve? Did anything funny or sad happen during that time?
8. How did you and your husband/wife meet? What did you do on dates?
9. What do you remember best about your parents?
10. Do you know any very old family stories?

Students who are aware of some of the events of 20th century history before they begin their interviews will find this background helpful when they talk to their older relatives. Events which may have had an impact on their families include World War I, the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, World War II, the Baby Boom, the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, women entering the workforce, changes in transportation, communication, technology, and so on. Not every family is affected in the same way by the same events, and the students may enjoy sharing their favorite stories back in the classroom.

These questions can also be a good basis for any family historian beginning interviews with older relatives. Events which may have had an impact on their families include World War I, the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, World War II, the Baby Boom, the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, women entering the workforce, changes in transportation, communication, technology, and so on. Not every family is affected in the same way by the same events, and the students may enjoy sharing their favorite stories back in the classroom.

These questions can also be a good basis for any family historian beginning interviews with older family members or distant cousins. Remember: if you plan to tape record interviews, make sure you've practiced with the machine before you begin, and have plenty of power and extra tapes. Label the tapes with the names of the people at each interview and the place and date of the session. Transcribe the tape as soon as possible. Talk with other family historians to learn more about their interview techniques.

This is just one approach to enriching the study of family history. It can be an immensely rewarding search for people of all ages.

—Lee N. McLaird

Genealogy: A Beginner's Guide

The investigation of family history has become a popular pursuit. The search for Indian princesses, brave youth who immigrated from the old country by themselves, gallant soldiers who fought in the Civil War, or horse thieves has been the driving force behind this upsurge. Family history research can be a tedious process, but the steps of the research process, if followed correctly, will lead to a successful, rewarding experience.

The first step of the process is to sort out home sources. Start with yourself, recording your birth and marriage dates and places, and then go back one generation at a time from the known to the unknown. Searching through family Bibles, letters, or diaries, scrapbooks, and photograph albums can provide important clues about the family. Record names, dates, and places on pedigree charts. Make accompanying family group sheets, to record the parents and all their children. Be sure to document each source of information at all times.

Next, contact relatives to find what information they have compiled. The article above suggests some questions to ask.

After gathering home sources, organize charts and notes by family groups. A standard three-ring binder is excellent for storing your materials and can then serve as your reference notebook for continued research. Copies of family documents (store the originals safely) can be included for quick viewing. Review all materials, then make a want list of what you need to extend your family lines. Keep a record of sources checked (a research log) in order to avoid duplication.

A trip to the local library and county courthouse with reference notebook and research log in hand is next. At the library you may find a family and local history collection of atlases, cemetery records, census records, directories, family histories, newspapers, obituary files, photographs, published biographies and histories, and other miscellaneous materials. Larger research libraries such as the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah and the **Allen County Public Library** in Fort Wayne, Indiana have materials from all over the United States, including military records and passenger lists. The microfilm resources of the Family History Library can be ordered via interlibrary loan from a branch Family History Center.

Local government records that might be found at the county courthouse include court records, deeds, divorces, estates, guardianships, naturalizations, soldiers' records, tax records, and vital records (birth, marriage, and death). State and local health departments usually have contemporary vital records. Call ahead to determine hours of operation.

Visit the church your ancestors attended. Records of baptism or confirmation, marriage, and burial may be available. If a church no longer exists or records are not available, get in touch with denominational archives.

Contact local genealogical and historical societies for assistance. The societies usually maintain collections of family and local history. Many publish indexes and transcripts of records. Featured speakers at their regular meetings provide information on topics of genealogical and historical interest. Membership provides opportunities for meeting fellow researchers and exchanging information.

Family history research requires many hours of researching in archives, churches, courthouses, and libraries. An organized, documented research process will assure you a more successful, rewarding experience.

--Stephen M. Charter

Genealogy Resources on the Internet

Searching the Internet is becoming a common way for family historians to "scout" a research library before making a trip or to enlarge their circle of contacts. The Center for Archival Collections maintains our complete list of **local government record holdings** for northwest Ohio online. By searching the linked pages, researchers can determine if the desired record is likely to be held at the CAC before they make an inquiry. Information on other Ohio research libraries and courthouses can be found at the Ohio Historical Society's page at: <http://www.ohiohistory.org/>. There are thousands of genealogy-related sites on the World Wide Web. The following are useful for their size and the links they provide to still more sites:

<http://www.acpl.lib.in.us/genealogy/> is the homepage for the Allen County (Fort Wayne, Indiana) Public Library Historical Genealogy Department, one of the largest family history libraries in the eastern United States.

<http://www.nehgs.org/> is operated by the New England Historic Genealogical Society and provides information about the publications and holdings of the organization.

<http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/vital/ssdl/main.htm> provides searchable access to the Social Security Death Index.

<http://www.ancestry.com/> is a commercial site, but has a great deal of information offered at no cost.

<http://www.rootsweb.com/roots-l> is the homepage for the family history electronic discussion group, Roots-L.

<http://www.CyndisList.com/> is Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet, a massive listing of thousands of sites organized by subject category.

<http://www.usgenweb.org> is a volunteer organization that provides links and access to thousands of family history resources throughout the United States.

These web addresses are accurate at this writing. Just as with printed resources, family historians should consider the information that they find on the internet to be a *guide* to their research, and not necessarily established as facts. Good hunting!

--Lee N. McLaird

THE PHOTOGRAPH IN THIS ISSUE is an example of one source of information that can be used to document family history.
