



Finding Your Roots, Free:

While online genealogy tools abound, it can be difficult to identify free resources to build robust family histories. This program is designed to help you begin to sketch out a family tree, identify functional research jumping-off-points, and put together a research plan. We will then review my bibliography of free resources ranging from court records and census maps to deeds indexes, and orphan's court dockets.



1. Genealogy: a personal mission statement

"We all grow up with the weight of history on us. Our ancestors dwell in the attics of our brains as they do in the spiraling chains of knowledge hidden in every cell of our bodies."

—Shirley Abbott

Proceeding with a clear set of personal goals will help ground your research process and priorities. Are you most interested in honoring your family pride? Looking for information about a specific ancestor? Trying to identify consistent patterns across generations? Remember that each family's journey is unique, and the available resources and approaches may vary depending on your specific circumstances. By combining various research methods and utilizing both online and offline resources, you can make significant progress in uncovering your ancestors' stories.

Begin by listing some priorities to revisit later:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

2. Organize Your Information

While researching, you will uncover details to populate a family tree, as well as biographical details too robust to include on a family tree. Consider keeping a page of notes for each generation of a family, as well as each family member.

Use these note pages for details and follow up questions. Record names, relationships, and important dates on the family tree chart. Sample chart - Appendix A.

To clarify family relationships, use a template family tree as well. Family Tree Template - Appendix B.

3. Your Family Tree: Begin Where You Are

Conduct an “interview” with yourself and your siblings and other generational members, just as you would with older family members. Asking detailed questions might help to build out specific areas of follow-up inquiry for branches of your family.

Sample interview questions - Appendix C.

4. Tracking Available Information and Records

As you seek out specific life details and records for each member of your family, it will be useful to track the records that you have found for each family member. Save these records - either digitally or as paper files - with a consistent naming system that will allow you to identify which records belong with which family members. Using a tracking sheet for each family member can help you organize the files for future reference.

Sample File Tracking Sheet - Appendix D.

5. Identifying Research Roadblocks

After building the beginnings of a family tree, you may find that you hit one or more roadblocks with identifying a specific family member's identity, or a generation where easily-identifiable records stop. It is useful to try to determine the source of this roadblock. This will help you make a plan to use available resources to overcome the barrier.

Many research gaps are likely to stem from a common source: poor record keeping and intentional archive exclusion of people with marginalized identities. Americans who have family histories of enslaved people, indigenous people who were relocated or forced into residential schools, and immigrants with difficult to track pathways through the United States.

When researching people who were enslaved or formerly enslaved, it is useful to trace your family tree to the generation immediately following the generation of ancestors who were enslaved. From this generation, identify one or a few regions where your family may have lived and possible names of ancestors to research in those regions. From this information, you can start researching within the Freedmen's Bureau records for your identified regions and names. This may help you discover records of where your ancestor were held in slavery, when they became emancipated, and the name of the person who previously held them in slavery.

You can use the name of the person who enslaved your ancestors to request their estate file and their father's estate file from the county Register of Wills for the county in which they lived. Registers of Wills are an office of Orphans' Court and responsible for maintaining estate files. This includes full estate inventories, which often includes information about enslaved people counted as property in an estate.

6. Evaluating Available Research Resources

Paid genealogy resources provide the service of aggregating available research resources into a single, searchable database. Similar free programs have become available in recent years, as an affordable alternative to paid programs.

In addition to tracking your own interviews, research, and family tree building, you may wish to consider signing up for a free resource to help you connect with additional resources. Even without a subscription resource, you can make tremendous progress on your family history.

You may wish to consider the following resources:

- Family Search - www.familysearch.org

"We help people discover their family's history through our website, mobile apps, and

in-person help at over 5,000 local family history centers.”

- The Digital Public Library of America - <https://dp.la/>
(DPLA): The DPLA is an online portal that provides access to digitized collections from libraries, archives, and museums across the United States. They have a wide range of resources that can be helpful for African American genealogy research, including photographs, newspapers, and oral histories. Use their search feature to find materials related to your family history.

- Court records - court records are digitally searchable dating back to 1890 in Pennsylvania. <https://ujspportal.pacourts.us/CaseSearch>
Once you have accessed the Unified Judicial System case search, select “search by participant name” and enter your ancestor’s name. You do not need to specify a county before running a search.

- Estate file - you can contact your county’s Register of Wills to request the estate file for an ancestor or other relevant person in your search process. You can find your county Register of Wills through your municipal website or by requesting information from a local elected official constituent services office. Some counties make estate files available for in-person search and review. For Example, historic estate files can be viewed at Philadelphia City Hall. Other counties maintain an online search index, such as the Chester County Register of Wills.

- State Census Records - <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/online-resources>
Census records are available for each decade, beginning with 1790 and ending in 1950. Select your census year and enter your ancestor’s last name as your primary search term.

- Marriage Certificates - Your county Register of Wills office is also responsible for maintaining marriage record archives. Having a name and a range of no more than 10 years within which your ancestors were married will help guide the search process.

- Draft registration - <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/selective-service>
In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act, creating the country's first peacetime draft and officially establishing the Selective Service System. The draft continued from 1948, during both peacetime and war, to 1973, when President Richard M. Nixon signed legislation officially ending the draft. The Selective Service registration requirement was later suspended in April 1975. However, in 1980, President James E. Carter resumed Selective Service

registration.

To obtain a copy of a **WWII though Vietnam era (men born April 28, 1877 to March 28, 1957)**, Selective Service Record, please complete the [Selective Service Request Form](#) - Attached as Index E. and
Email: stl.archives@nara.gov

Or mail to:

National Archives & Records Administration
National Archives - St. Louis
ATTN: RRPOR
P.O. Box 38757
St. Louis, MO 63138-0757

- Freedmen's Bureau Records - <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/freedmens-bureau>

The United States Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was created by Congress in 1865 to assist in the political and social reconstruction of post-war Southern states and to help formerly enslaved African Americans transition from slavery to freedom and citizenship. In the process, the Bureau created millions of records that contain the names and information of hundreds of thousands of people across the United States including formerly enslaved African Americans, and those who were free before the Civil War, white southerners, northern educators, elected officials, and more. The National Museum of African American History record search portal makes possible for the first time the ability to research multiple sets of Freedmen's Bureau data in one place, allowing users to search indexed data for specific names, places, and dates and transcribed data for topics, subjects, institutions, and any other words or phrases.

- Federal Writer's Project Former Slave Narratives - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>

Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938 contains more than 2,300 first-person accounts of slavery and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves. These narratives were collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) of the Works Progress Administration, later renamed Work Projects Administration (WPA).

- Immigration entry - <https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/passenger-arrival.html>

Documentation of immigrants entering the United States varied significantly from 1789-1819 because there was not a singular entity creating and maintaining records of

immigrants. Until January 1820, the United States government did not require passenger lists, but the new Steerage Act of 1819 required the master of a ship to provide a manifest of passengers boarded at foreign port. The Immigration Act of 1891 introduced further documentation as it required that information be collected about immigrants entering the United States overland from Canada and Mexico.

- Indentured servitude records -

<https://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/record-indentures-individuals-bound-out-dataset/>

Indentured servitude was prevalent in North America from the early seventeenth century but dwindled during the first decades after the Revolution. It represented one of several forms of unfree labor that colonists relied upon to support the agricultural and artisanal industries of the colonies.

An indenture was a contract that bound an individual to a master for a fixed period of time. The indentured person - woman, man, or child - would work for a specified number of years and in exchange, would be provided food, shelter, and occasionally some money or property as “freedom dues.” At the end of the contract, the individual would be released from their indenture and become a free person.

- Bureau of Indian Affairs School Records -

<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/schools/school-records-more>

Researchers can find information relating to American Indians and Alaska Natives from as early as 1774 through the mid-1990s at National Archives locations throughout the country.

The National Archives preserves and makes available documents created by federal agencies in the course of their daily business. Because the U.S. government’s interactions with American Indians and Alaska Natives have changed over time, knowing the geographic place and time period of your research topic will help create a more positive research experience.

- Obituaries - <https://www.findagrave.com/>

Obituaries are usually published in local and regional papers. By locating a person’s final resting place, you can often find obituaries and funeral programs which provide details about their life.

A. Sample Family Tree Chart - Four generations

Self

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Mother

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Father

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Maternal Grandmother

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Maternal Grandfather

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Paternal Grandmother

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Paternal Grandfather

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Maternal Great-Grandmother

(to maternal grandmother)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Maternal Great-Grandfather

(to maternal grandmother)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Maternal Great-Grandmother

(to maternal grandfather)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Maternal Great-Grandfather

(to maternal grandfather)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Paternal Great-Grandmother
(to paternal grandmother)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Paternal Great-Grandfather
(to paternal grandmother)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Paternal Great-Grandmother
(to maternal grandfather)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

Paternal Great-Grandfather
(to maternal grandfather)

Name:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Spouse's Name:

Marriage Date:

Place of Marriage:

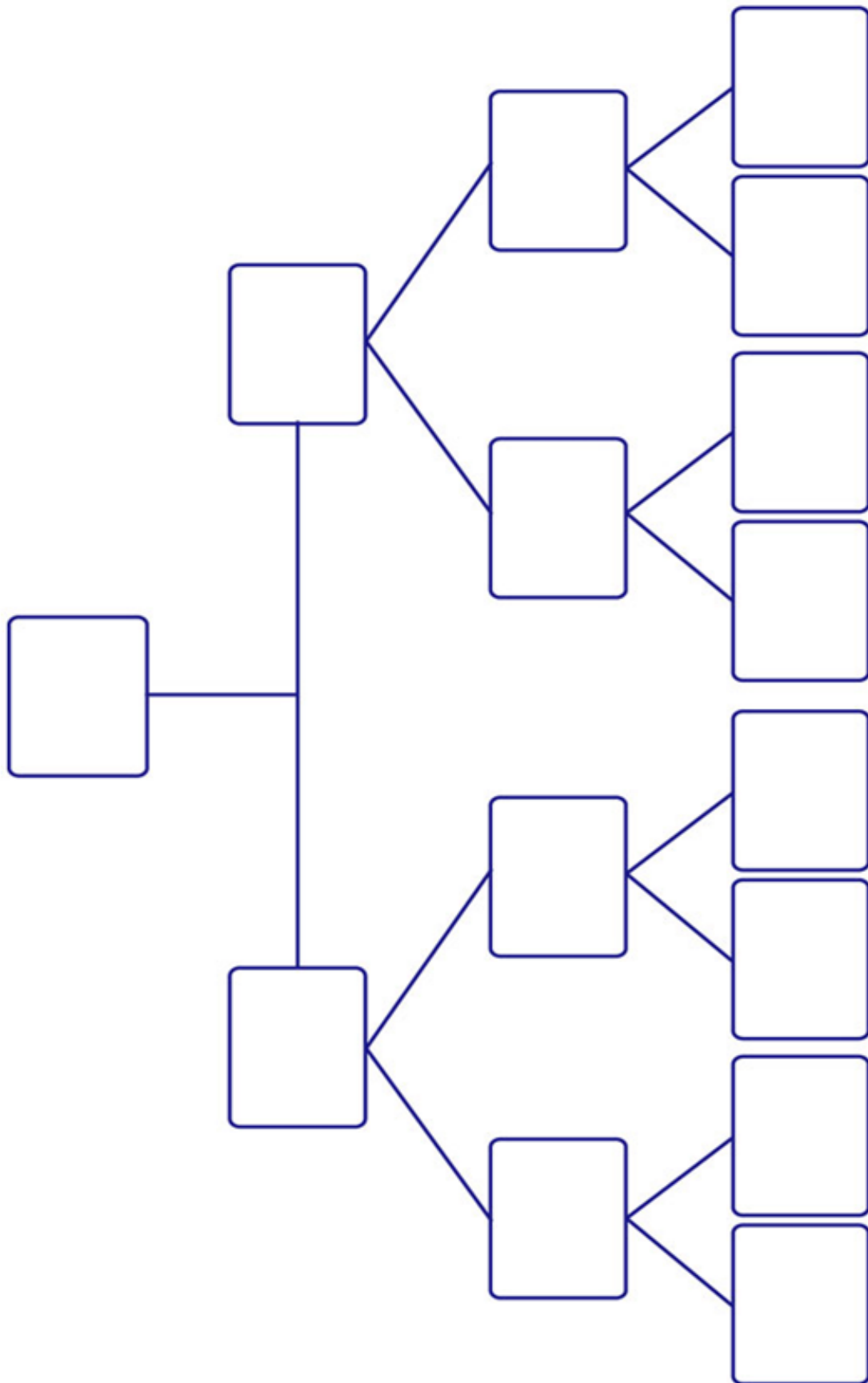
First Home:

Date of Death:

Place of Death:

Place of Rest:

B. Template Family Tree



C. Sample Family Tree Interview Questions

What is your name?

How old are you, and what is your birth date?

Where were you born?

Are you married, and for how long?

When and where were you married?

What are your parents' names?

Where did you live when you were a child?

Did you move around a lot as a child? Where?

What were your parents' occupations?

What is your occupation?

Why did you pick that profession?

Did your family get together often for holidays or special occasions?
Who was there?

D. Genealogy Record Tracking Sheet

Family Member Name:

Relationship to Researcher:

Date of Birth:

Date of Death:

Primary Resources:

Family Bible

Journals

Letters

Baby Books

Wedding Book

Legal Papers:

- Adoption record

- Court record

- Name change

- Business contract

- Property purchase

- Estate file

- Tax files

- Legal licenses

- Arrest records

- Prison records

- State Census Records

List years here:

Birth Certificates

Marriage Certificates

Divorce Records

Graduation

Announcement

Baptism Records

Yearbooks

Immunization Records

Insurance Records

Military Records:

- Draft registration

- Pension

- Disability

- Discharge

- Service awards

- Citations

Freedmen's Bureau

- Field office report

- Labor contract

- School report

Immigration Records

- Immigration entry

- Visa record

- Passport record

Indentured servitude
records

Bureau of Indian Affairs

School Records:

- student records

- attendance censuses

- student medical records

Secondary Resources:

Oral History

Biographies

Newspaper Articles

Obituaries

Advertisements

Local News

E. Draft Registration Request Form

OMB Control No. 3095-0071 Expiration Date: 09-30-2021	
SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM RECORDS REQUEST Year of Birth Prior to 1960	
Provide the following information and mail this form with any attachments to:	National Archives & Records Administration National Archives – Saint Louis P.O. Box 38757 Saint Louis, MO 63138-0757
DO NOT PROVIDE CREDIT CARD INFORMATION; IF RECORDS ARE FOUND, YOU WILL RECEIVE A REQUEST FOR PAYMENT	
A. REGISTRANT INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)	
Name:	
Last First Middle	
Selective Service Number (if known):	
Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY):	
Home Address at Time of Registration:	
Street Address	
City County State	
Place of Registration (if known):	
Street Address	
City County State	
B. RECORD REQUESTED	
Please check one block	☐ Registration Card ☐ Classification Ledger ☐ Registration Card AND Classification Ledger
C. REQUEST PURPOSE 	
D. CONTACT INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)	
Name: Telephone Number:	
E-Mail Address: Street Address:	
City: State: Zip Code:	
E. REQUESTER SIGNATURE (Only if the Requester is the Registrant)	
PRIVACY ACT AND PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENTS Collection of this information is authorized by 44 U.S.C. 2104(a). Disclosure of this information is voluntary; however, we will be unable to respond to your request if you do not furnish your name and address, and the minimum required information regarding the record. The information is used by NARA employees to search for the record, to respond to you, to maintain control over requests received and answered, and to facilitate preparation of internal statistical reports. You are not required to provide the information requested on a form that is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act unless the form displays a valid OMB control number. Public burden reporting for this collection of information is estimated to be two minutes per response. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of the collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to National Archives and Records Administration (MP), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001. DO NOT SEND COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS	
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION	
NA FORM 13172 (03-20)	
PRINT FORM	SAVE FORM
CLEAR FORM	

\$ //

6 00
~~20 00~~
2 50
50
8 00
1 50
75
1 00
50
2 00
1 50
2 50
2 00
60
75
8 00
2 00
1 00
3 00
3 00
3 00
2 25
3 50

Appraisement continued

Amount brought from the preceding page
Sundry sorts of Earthen ware in the Cellar
1 da Table, Tin ware & Tallow
20 lb of dried Flax & four pounds Hatched Flax 1
8 of Meal at 33 per lb & 2 bush 18
1 Feather Bed, bedding, sacking bottom & bedsteads
1 2 2 two sheets Coverlet, Rope & Bedsteads
7 Blankets much worn
3 Coverlets
1 Chaff Bed, bedding Rope & Bedsteads
7 set of Bedsteads 25, one Chaff Bed, bedding & Bedsteads
1 Feather Bed Bedding Rope & Bedsteads
1 Walnut Desk
Sundries, viz Poster in a cupboard up stairs
A small Table & a broken looking Glass
A small poplar Chest 50 three blue Chairs
Two little Wheels 3 one long wheel 1.25 Root 90. Swift & spring wheel 1
5 lb of Flax part hatched
one Case of Walnut Drawers
one turnround legtable 2.50 a poplar Chest 50
one Armchair 1, 8 Rush & splint bottomed Chairs 2
Two Windsor Chairs 1.33 one side Saddle 3
Three sheets of Tow 3.50 Three pillow Cases & bolsters of 2. 75
Table Linen 1.50 a small dining Table 4.25 a square poplar Table 2
one dropping box 50, a looking Glass 3

\$ //

1 50
50
4 00
2 82
24
16
7
6
5 50
7 75
25
10
3
50
3 50
6 15
1
10
3
3
4 33
4 25
9 75
3 50

For a digital format of this genealogy resource, and other available programs, visit hedgewitchhistory.wordpress.com