



Rogue Valley Genealogical Society & Jackson County Genealogy Library

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BEGINNING GENEALOGY TIPS

Welcome to Genealogy! Many of us started working on our family trees without any real idea what that might entail. We would lose track of things, going back to find it again, and sometimes not being able to. Or we would find something and build off that piece of information only to find out it was the wrong person. For some of those reasons, we want to share with you some of our best tips for starting your family tree research.

- 1) Talk to your relatives, not just your parents or grandparents, but aunts, uncles, and cousins, too. Ask them about the ancestors they remember. Certainly ask about what they believe are facts and dates. Also ask about their memories and the stories of their childhood. A family tree is not just dates; it's the history of their lives. Gather together all you can find in your home about your family. Scour the attic, basement, and closets (and those of relatives), and collect family records, old photos, letters, diaries, the family bible, etc. If you're lucky, you have a relative who saved everything.
- 2) Organize your information on paper using genealogical forms and/or a computer software program. Scraps of paper in piles here and there can be lost. The standard forms that genealogists have been using for years really do help you see what you have and what you are missing.
- 3) **DOWNLOAD FREE FORMS.** The forms are easily accessible from RVGS or multiple genealogy websites, including Google. Just record the information on the form and you have the start of your family tree! The forms are:
 - [The Pedigree Chart or Ancestor Chart](#)- This chart gives you a visual outline of your ancestors.
 - [The Family Group Sheet](#) - This sheet is where the details are recorded about each family unit on the Pedigree Chart. You will have multiple Family Group Sheet pages.
- 4) Focus your research, don't just jump around. Choose a particular branch and immerse yourself in discovering its history. Use the information you collected from your relatives, the Internet, library, and other resources.
- 5) The most important tip of all is to document where you found the information that you put on your forms! You are on the search for truth, not myth. You must have clear source documentation to support adding individuals to your family tree.
- 6) Test every bit of information that you gather against the rules for credible evidence. Aunt Tillie may not have remembered Great Grandpa's birth date correctly. Become familiar with researching to the [Genealogical Proof Standard](#) established by the Board for Certification of Genealogists.

- 7) Recognize that everything you find on the Internet (or in books) is not always true, even though it may be presented that way. Especially on the Internet, there is an enormous amount of misinformation. Look at everything you find with a critical eye.
- 8) Do not expect to find the information to fill in ALL the blanks in your family tree on the Internet. That's only the tip of the iceberg of what exists for family researchers. Just because you can't find someone in an Internet search doesn't mean that information about them doesn't exist.

There are many, many more repositories of family information to explore than the Internet. Check out libraries (genealogical, public, academic, special), churches, newspapers, county courthouses, cemeteries, historical societies, courts, military service organizations, prisons, land offices, funeral homes, etc. The list of possible sources for genealogical information is nearly endless!

We hope these tips help to get you started on the right path. Our Education Committee is offering a free Genealogy "Mini Camp for Beginners" in March that consists of 5 one-hour classes plus a follow-up with the "Genealogy Newbies Interest Group." The group meets the 2nd Thursday of the month from 6:00-7:30 PM. The first 45 minutes will be additional instruction and the last 45 minutes will be questions and answers with one of our certified genealogists.

In September is our annual "Genealogy Week," a week of 2-3 free classes a day to help you further develop your research skills, and to help you move on in your quest to find those elusive ancestors.

Please plan to join us.