

Chapter 1

You Gotta Have Groundwork

In This Chapter

- ▶ Interviewing your family
 - ▶ Finding genealogical records in your home
 - ▶ Using official records to discover your ancestors
 - ▶ What you can find at Family History Centers
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You're not going to believe it when we tell you this, but the first thing to do when researching your family history online doesn't involve a computer. That's right, you don't even need to flip that switch. Start by collecting some basic information about your family the "old-fashioned" way — interviewing relatives, digging through trunks in the attic, and visiting some better-known places for records. Then you can use some of this basic information to guide your research and help you make decisions about the quality of the information you find online.



Before we get too far down the path, we need to caution you that you can't complete your entire family history online. We say this not only to avoid the scorn of experienced genealogists, but we also want to make sure that your expectations of online research are appropriate. While you can find a lot of records online and the number of original records available online increases every day, several sets of crucial records are still not available through the Internet. The best way to think of online genealogy is as one of many tools that you use to put together the pieces of your family puzzle.

In this chapter, we give an overview of several resources that you can rely on for information before you begin your online genealogical research. We also provide some Web sites that can assist you in accessing these resources.

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Starting Your Research with What You Already Know

You are really excited about getting started finding information on your great-great grandfather Benjamin Anderson. You fire up the computer, log on to your online service, and put good old Ben's name into one of the many genealogical search sites. The Results Web page comes up, showing entries for 450 Benjamin Andersons with the same name. Of course, the question is whether any of these people are the Benjamin you're looking for and, if so, which is the magic one? Well, if you know a little bit about Ben, then you can make some decisions as to which record or site is likely to contain information about him.

At this point, you might be asking yourself how you find information that can confirm whether the Benjamin on the screen is the one you're looking for. You're in luck because that's just what this section is all about. But before we go any further, we want to let you in on a little secret: Instead of starting your journey with Benjamin, it's better to begin by finding information about someone you already know a little bit better — yourself.

Making a few notes about yourself — the biographical sketch

You already know a great deal about yourself — probably more than anyone else knows about you. (That is, unless you're married. Then your spouse knows more about you, right?) You probably know your birth date, place of birth, parents' names, and where you've lived. (We recognize that not everyone knows all this information; adoptions or other extenuating circumstances may require you to do the best you can with what you know until you can discover additional information about yourself.) So, sit down at that computer, open your word processor, and create an autobiographical sketch. (Of course, if you prefer, you can take out a piece of paper and write down all those details instead.)

You can approach the sketch in several ways. Sometimes, the easiest method is to begin with current events and work back through your life. For instance, first note the basics: your current occupation, residence, and activities. Then move back to your last residence, occupation, and so on until you arrive at your birth date. Make sure that you include milestones like children's birth dates, marriage dates, military service dates, and other significant events in

your life. If you prefer, you can cover your life by beginning with your birth and working forward to the present. Either way is fine, as long as all the important events are listed in the sketch.

Another method is to use index cards or a word processor to make notes on things that you recall over a certain period of time. Then you can arrange the cards or the paragraphs in the word-processing file to create a biographical sketch.



The biographical sketch that you create now may become an important research tool for one of your descendants who decides to conduct research about you in the future. So, when you have the time, we recommend that you turn that sketch into a full-blown autobiography and include it in your genealogy for the benefit of future generations. This way, your descendants not only know the facts about your life, they also will have some insight as to why you chose the paths you did throughout your life.

Finding primary sources

If you're like most of us, you probably think you know a lot about yourself. If we ask you what your birthday is, you can tell us without batting an eye. But how do you know the birth date? You were obviously there, but probably you were not in a condition to be a reliable witness — given that you were just born and most likely not fully aware of what was going on. This is where primary sources come in handy. Most likely there were people present who were witnesses and helped create a record of the event.



Primary sources are documents, oral accounts (if the account is made soon after the actual event and witnessed by the person who created the account), photographs, or any other items created at the time of a certain event's occurrence.

For example, a primary source for your birth date is your birth certificate. Typically, a birth certificate is prepared within a few days of the actual event and is signed by one or more actual witnesses to the birth. Because of the timeliness and involvement of direct witnesses, the information contained on the record (like the time, date, and parents' names) is usually a reliable first-hand account of the event. It's important to recognize that even if a record was prepared near the time of an event, such a unilateral account doesn't automatically mean that every fact provided on the record is correct. Cases arise where typographical errors occurred, or incorrect information was provided to the creator of the record. Often these errors are not caught when the certificate application is signed because new parents are preoccupied with things other than government paperwork during their stay at the hospital. So it's always a good idea to try to find other primary records that can corroborate the information found in any record.

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Secondary sources are documents, oral accounts, and so on that are created some length of time after the event or for which information is supplied by someone who wasn't an eyewitness to the event. A secondary source can also be a person who was an eyewitness to the event but recalls it after a significant period of time passes.

Some records may be considered both primary and secondary sources. For example, a death certificate contains both primary and secondary source information. The primary source information is the death date and cause of death. These facts are primary because the certificate was prepared around the time of death, and the information is usually provided by a medical professional who pronounced the person dead. The secondary source information on the death certificate includes the birth date and place of birth of the deceased individual. These details are secondary because the certificate was issued at a time significantly later than the birth (assuming that the birth and death dates are at least a few years apart). Secondary sources don't have the degree of reliability or surety of primary sources. Often secondary source information, such as that found on death certificates, is provided by an individual's children or descendants who may or may not know the exact date or place of birth and who may be providing information during a stressful situation. Given the lesser reliability of secondary sources, backing up your secondary sources with reliable primary sources is always a good idea.



Although we've said that secondary sources are not as reliable as primary sources, that doesn't mean that secondary sources are always wrong or aren't useful. A good deal of the time, the information is correct, and such records provide valuable clues to locating primary source information. For example, in the case of a birth date and birthplace on a death certificate, the information provides a place and approximate time frame you can use as a starting point when you search for a birth record.

You can familiarize yourself with primary sources by collecting some information for your own biographical profile. Try to match up primary sources for each event in the sketch — for example, birth and marriage certificates, deeds, leases, military records, and tax records. For more information on finding these types of documents, see the appropriate sections later in this chapter. If you can't locate primary source documents for each event in your life, don't fret! Your biographical sketch can serve as a primary source document because you write it about yourself.



For additional information on primary sources, see The Historian's Sources page at the Library of Congress Web site at

1cweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/psources/pshome.html

For a comparison of primary, secondary, and *tertiary* sources (such as bibliographies, indexes, and encyclopedias), see the Randall Library Resource Guides site at

library.uncwil.edu/is/infocycle.htm

Chatting with Papa and Aunt Lola: Interviewing Your Family Members

There are some sources of genealogical gold out there, and you might not even recognize them. These sources hang around the food table at the family reunion, ask you embarrassing questions about your love life, and overstay their welcome in your home. Yes, they are your relatives.

Interviewing your relatives is an important step in the research process. They can provide family records and photographs, give you the dirt on other family members, and identify which other people would be beneficial to talk to about the family history. When talking with relatives, you want to collect the same type of information about their lives that you provided about your own when you wrote your biographical sketch.

Your parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are all good candidates for information sources about your family's most recent generations. Talking to relatives provides you with leads that you can use to find primary sources. (For more information on primary sources, see "Finding primary sources" in the preceding section.) You can complete family interviews in person or through a questionnaire — although we strongly recommend that you conduct them in person. For an example of a cover letter to send your family asking for an interview, go to the Family Tree Maker Web site at

www.familytreemaker.com/00000059.html



There's no easy way to say this, so please excuse us for being blunt — you may want to begin interviewing some of your older relatives as soon as possible, depending on their ages and health. If a family member passes on before you have the chance to interview him or her, you may miss the opportunity of a lifetime to learn more about his or her personal experiences and knowledge of previous generations.

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Good interviewing questions

Before you conduct a family interview, pull together a set of questions to guide the discussion. A little planning on your part makes the difference between an interview in which the family member stays focused, or a question-and-answer session that invites bouncing from one unrelated topic to another. Here are examples of some questions that you may want to ask:

- ✔ What is your full name, and do you know why you were named that?
- ✔ Where were you born and when? Do you remember any stories that your parents told you about your birth?
- ✔ What do you remember about your childhood?
- ✔ Where did you go to school? Did you finish school? If not, why? (Remember to ask about all levels of schooling through college.)
- ✔ What were your brothers and sisters like?
- ✔ Where and when were your parents born? What did they look like? What were their occupations?
- ✔ Did your parents tell you how they met?
- ✔ Do you remember your grandparents? Do you recall any stories about them? What did they look like?
- ✔ Did you hear any stories about your great-grandparents? Did you ever meet your great-grandparents?
- ✔ When you were a child, who was the oldest person in your family?
- ✔ Did any relatives (other than your immediate family) live with you?
- ✔ Do you remember who your neighbors were when you were a child?
- ✔ Did your family have any traditions or celebrate any special holidays?
- ✔ Have any items (stories, traditions, or physical items) been handed down through several generations of the family?
- ✔ When did you leave home? Where did you live?
- ✔ Did you join the military? If so, what branch of service were you in? What units were you a part of? Did you serve overseas?
- ✔ What occupations have you had? Did you have any special training?
- ✔ How did you meet your spouse?
- ✔ When and where did you get married? Did you go on a honeymoon? Where?
- ✔ When were your children born? Do you have any stories about their births?
- ✔ Do you know who in the family originally immigrated to this country? Where did they come from? Why did they leave their native land?

You can probably think of more questions that are likely to draw responses from your family. If you want to see additional hints for conducting interviews, see the **Capturing the Past Web site** (www.byubroadcasting.org/capturingpast/).

Here are a few tips to remember as you plan a family interview:

- ✔ **Prepare a list of questions that you want to ask:** Knowing what you want to achieve during the discussion helps you get started and keeps your interview focused. (See the sidebar “Good interviewing questions” in this chapter for some ideas.) However, you also need to be flexible enough to allow the interviewee to take the conversation where he or she wants to go. Often some of the best information comes from memories that occur while the interviewee is talking — rather than being generated strictly in response to a set of questions.
- ✔ **Bring a tape recorder to the interview:** Make sure that you get permission from each participant before you start recording. If the interviewee is agreeable, you might consider videotaping the session. That way you can see the expressions on his or her face as he or she talks.
- ✔ **Use photographs and documents to help your family members recall events:** Often photographs can have a dramatic effect on the stories that the interviewee remembers. If there is a lull in the interview, pulling out a photo album is an excellent way to jump-start things.
- ✔ **Try to limit your interviews to two hours or less:** You don’t want to be overwhelmed with information, and you don’t want the interviewee to get worn out by your visit. Within two hours, you can collect a lot of information to guide your research. And remember, you can always do another interview if you want more information from the family member. (Actually, we strongly encourage you to do subsequent interviews — often the first interview stimulates memories for the individual that you can cover during a later interview.)
- ✔ **Be grateful and respectful:** Remember that these are people who have agreed to give you time and answers. Treat them with respect by listening attentively and speaking politely to them. And by all means, be sure to thank them when you’ve completed the interview.

Looking for Love Letters, Laundry Receipts, and Other Important Documents

Are you, or have you ever been, accused of being a pack rat? You know what we mean: someone who keeps every little scrap of paper that he or she touches. Ah, you know who you are. (And we know how to recognize you because — and here’s a deep, dark confession — we’re *both* pack rats of the

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serious variety!) If you are, then you're well suited for genealogy. In fact, if you're lucky, you descended from a whole family of pack rats who saved all those scraps from the past in their attics or basements. You may be able to share in their treasures — digging to find things that can further your genealogical research. For example, pay a visit to grandma's attic, and you may discover an old suitcase or cigar box full of documents like driver's licenses, wartime ration cards, and letters. These items may contain information that you can use to reconstruct your ancestor's past.

When you go through old family treasures, look for things that can serve as primary sources for facts that you want to verify. For more information on primary sources, see "Finding primary sources," earlier in this chapter. Here's a list (although not an exhaustive one) of some specific things to look for:

- ✓ Family Bibles
- ✓ Legal documents (such as mortgages, titles, and deeds)
- ✓ Insurance policies
- ✓ Wills
- ✓ Family letters
- ✓ Obituaries and newspaper articles
- ✓ Diaries
- ✓ Naturalization records
- ✓ Baptismal certificates and other church records
- ✓ Copies of vital records (such as birth, marriage, and death certificates, and divorce decrees)
- ✓ Report cards from school
- ✓ Occupational or personnel records
- ✓ Membership cards



For a list of other items to look for around the home, see the Treasures in the Attic page at

www.ancestry.com/library/view/ancmag/673.asp

as well as the Ancestors: Family Records page at

www.pbs.org/kbyu/ancestors/records/family/intro.html

Dusting Off the Old Photo Albums

A picture is worth a thousand words — so the saying goes. That's certainly true in genealogy. Photographs are among the most treasured documents for genealogists. Pictures show how your ancestors looked and what conditions they lived in. Sometimes the flip side of the photo is more important than the picture itself. On the back, you may find crucial information such as names, dates, and descriptions of places.

Photographs are also useful as memory-joggers for your family members. Pictures can help others recollect the past and bring up long-forgotten memories. Just be forewarned — sometimes the memories are good, and sometimes they're not so good! Although you may stimulate thoughts of some great moments long ago, you may also open a can of worms when you ask grandma about a particular person in a picture. On the plus side, in the end she may give you the lowdown on not only that person but every single individual in the family who has ever made her angry — this can provide lots of genealogical leads.



You may run into several different types of photographs in your research. Knowing when certain kinds of photographs were produced can help you associate a time frame with a picture. Here are some examples:

- ✓ **Daguerreotypes:** Daguerreotype photos were taken from 1839 to 1860. They required a long exposure time and were taken on silver-plated copper. The photographic image appears to change from a positive to a negative when tilted.
- ✓ **Ambrotypes:** Ambrotypes used a much shorter exposure time and were produced from 1858 to 1866. The image was made on thin glass and usually had a black backing.
- ✓ **Tintypes:** Tintypes were produced from 1858 to 1910. They were made on a metal sheet, and the image was often coated with a varnish. You can usually find them in a paper cover.
- ✓ **Cartes-de-visite:** Cartes-de-visite were small paper prints mounted on a card. They were often bound together into a photo album. They were produced between 1858 and 1891.
- ✓ **Cabinet cards:** Cabinet cards were larger versions of cartes-de-visite. They sometimes included dates on the borders of the cards. The pictures themselves were usually mounted on cardboard. They were manufactured primarily between 1865 and 1906.

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- ✔ **Albumen prints:** These were produced on a thin piece of paper that was coated with albumen and silver nitrate. They were usually mounted on cardboard. These prints were used between 1858 and 1910 and were the types of photographs found in cartes-de-visite and cabinet cards.
- ✔ **Stereographic cards:** Stereographic cards were paired photographs that rendered a three-dimensional effect when used with a stereographic viewer. They were prevalent from 1850 to 1925.
- ✔ **Platinum prints:** Platinum prints have a matte surface that appears embedded in the paper. The images were often highlighted with artistic chalk. They were produced mainly between 1880 and 1930.
- ✔ **Glass-plate negatives:** Glass-plate negatives were used between 1848 and 1930. They were made from light-sensitive silver bromide immersed in gelatin.

When you deal with photographs, keep in mind that too much light or humidity can easily destroy them. For more information on preserving photographs, see Chapter 3. Also, some online resources can help you identify types of pictures. See the City Gallery Web site (www.city-gallery.com/learning/) for information about nineteenth-century photography, and visit the Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Your Family Photographs page at

genealogy.about.com/library/authors/ucmishkin1a.htm

for descriptions of several types of photographs.

Sifting Through Birth, Death, Marriage, and Divorce Records

Vital records are among the first sets of primary sources typically used by genealogists (for more on primary sources, see “Finding primary sources,” earlier in this chapter). Vital records include birth, marriage, divorce, and death records. For the most part, local governments keep the originals (although some governments have microfilmed them and stored them centrally). These records contain key and usually reliable information because they were produced near the time that the event occurred, and a witness to the actual event provided the information. (Outside the United States, vital records are often called *civil registrations*.)

Vital records are usually maintained in the county or parish, or in some cases the town, where the event occurred. Normally, you must contact the county, parish, or town clerk to receive a copy of a record. Some states centrally collect or microfilm their vital records, and they're available for public use at the state archives or library. You can find an online list of centralized vital record

repositories in each of the United States at the Vital Records Information site (vitalrec.com). For information on where to find vital record (and civil registration) information online, see Chapter 5.



Each state has different laws regarding the release of vital records. It's a good idea to check the policy of the governing agency before making the trip or ordering a vital record. In some cases, the agency may only release a record for a good cause or to a close relative.

Birth records

Birth records are good primary sources for verifying — at a minimum — the date of birth, birthplace, and names of an individual's parents. Depending on the information requirements for a particular birth certificate, you may also learn the birthplace of the parents, their ages, occupations, addresses at the time of the birth, whether the mother had given birth previously, date of marriage of the parents, and the names and ages of any previous children. Sometimes, instead of a birth certificate, you may find another record in the family's possession that verifies the existence of the birth record. For example, instead of having a certified copy of a birth certificate, Matthew's grandmother had a Certificate of Record of Birth. This certificate attests to the fact that the county has a certificate of birth and notes its location. These certificates were used primarily before photocopiers became commonplace, and it became easier to get a certified copy of the original record.



Birth records were less formal in earlier times. Before modern record-keeping, a simple handwritten entry in a book sufficed as an official record of an individual's birth. So be very specific when citing a birth record in your genealogical notes. Include any numbers you find on the record and where the record is located (including not only the physical location of the building, but also the book number and page number of the information).

Marriage records

Marriage records come in several forms. Early marriage records may include the following:

- ✓ **Marriage bonds:** Financial guarantees that a marriage was going to take place
- ✓ **Marriage banns:** Proclamations of the intent to marry someone in front of a church congregation
- ✓ **Marriage licenses:** Documents granting permission to marry
- ✓ **Marriage records or certificates:** Documents certifying the union of two people

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These records usually contain — at a minimum — the groom’s name, the bride’s name, and the location of the ceremony. They may also contain occupation information, birthplaces of the bride and groom, parents’ names and birthplaces, names of witnesses, and information on previous marriages.



Here’s one thing to be careful about when using marriage records: Don’t confuse the date of the marriage with the date of the marriage bond, bann, or license — it’s easy to do. The latter records were often filed anywhere from a couple of days to several weeks *before* the actual marriage date. Also, do not assume that because you found a bond, bann, or license that a marriage actually took place. Some people got *cold feet* then (as they do today) and backed out of the marriage at the last minute.



If you have trouble finding a marriage record in the area where your ancestors lived, try looking in surrounding counties or parishes or possibly even states. Other places to look are in the areas where the parents of the ancestors lived.

Divorce records

Genealogists often overlook divorce records. Later generations may not be aware that an early ancestor was divorced, and the records recounting the event can be difficult to find. However, divorce records can be quite valuable. They contain many important facts, including the age of the petitioners, birthplace, address, occupations, names and ages of children, property, and the grounds for the divorce.

Death records

Death records are excellent resources for verifying the date of death, but are less reliable for other data elements such as birth date and birthplace, because people who were not witnesses to the birth often supply that information. However, information on the death record can point you in the right direction for records to verify other events. More recent death records include the name of the individual, place of death, residence, parents’ names, spouse’s name, occupation, and cause of death. Early death records may only contain the date of death, cause, and residence.

Coming to Your Census

A lot of key dates in a person’s life are recorded in vital records (see “Sifting Through Birth, Death, Marriage, and Divorce Records,” earlier in this chapter for more details). However, unless your ancestors were consistently

encountering life-events that resulted in numerous vital records, there will still be some gaps to fill in your research. Census records are one of the best record sets in the United States for filling in these gaps. *Census records* are periodic counts of a population by a government or organization. These counts can be regular (such as every ten years) or special one-time counts made for a specific reason. Some censuses contain just statistical information; others contain names and additional demographic information.

United States Census schedules

Federal census records in the United States have been around since 1790. Censuses were conducted every ten years to count the population for a couple of reasons — to divide up the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, and to assess federal taxes. Although census collections are still done to this day, privacy restrictions prevent the release of any detailed census information on individuals for 72 years. Currently, you can find federal census data only for the census years 1790 to 1930. However, practically all of the 1890 Census was destroyed due to actions taken after a fire in the Commerce building in 1921 — for more on this, see “First in the Path of the Firemen,” *The Fate of the 1890 Population Census*, at

www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/spring_1996_1890_census_1.html

Federal census records are valuable in that you can use them to take historical “snapshots” of your ancestors in ten-year increments. These snapshots enable you to track your ancestors as they moved from county to county or state to state, and to identify the names of parents and siblings of your ancestors that you may not have previously known.



Each census year contains a different amount of information, with more modern census returns (also called *schedules*) containing the most information. Schedules from 1790 to 1840 only list the head of household for each family, along with the number of people living in the household broken down by age classifications. Schedules from 1850 on have the names and ages of all members of the household.



The people who collected census details on individuals were called *enumerators*. Traveling door to door, these census-takers worked within an assigned district where they stopped at each residence to ask questions about the household. Being a census enumerator was not the most glamorous work. They were typically paid small amounts of money — usually barely enough to cover their expenses. Enumerators possessed differing levels of training and penmanship. These variations resulted in census returns that contained some readable information and some that had illegible entries and notes. Of course, on the plus side for genealogists, some enumerators went beyond the call of duty and made interesting notes on the families that they visited.

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Using American Soundex to search United States census records

For the censuses conducted from 1880 to 1920, you can use microfilmed indices organized under the American Soundex system.



The *American Soundex* system is a method of indexing that groups names that are pronounced in a similar way but are spelled differently. This indexing procedure allows you to find ancestors who may have changed the spelling of their names over the years. For example, you find names like Helm, Helme, Holm, and Holme grouped together in the American Soundex.

The American Soundex code for a name consists of a letter and then three numbers. (Double letters count for only one number, and if your surname is short or has a lot of vowels in it, you use zeros on the end to bring the total numbers to three.) To convert your surname to American Soundex, use the first letter of your surname as the first letter of the American Soundex code, and then substitute numbers for the next three consonants according to the following table. (For example, the American Soundex code for the surname *Helm* is H450.)

1	B, P, F, V
2	C, S, K, G, J, Q, X, Z
3	D, T
4	L
5	M, N
6	R

We know that probably sounds confusing, so just follow these steps to convert your surname to a American Soundex code:

1. Write down your surname on a piece of paper.

As an example, we convert the surname *Abell*.

2. Keep the first letter of the surname and then cross out any remaining vowels (A, E, I, O, U) and the letters W, Y, and H.

If your surname begins with a vowel, keep the first vowel. If your surname does not begin with a vowel, cross out all the vowels in the surname. So, in the surname *Abell*, we keep the letters *A*, *B*, *L*, and *L*.

3. If the surname has double letters, cross out the second letter.

For example, the surname *Abell* has a double *L*, so we cross out the second *L*, which leaves us with the letters *A*, *B*, and *L*.

4. Convert your letters to the American Soundex code numbers according to the preceding chart.

We have the letters *A*, *B*, and *L* remaining. Because *A* is the first letter of the surname, it remains an *A*. The *B* converts to the number 1 and the *L* to the number 4. That leaves us with A14.

5. Cross out the second occurrence of any repeated numbers that are side by side, including a number that repeats the value that the letter at the beginning would have.

The remaining numbers of the Abell (A14) surname do not have the same numerical code next to each other. But it could happen with a name like Schaefer. Ordinarily, the name Schaefer would have the American Soundex code of S216. However, because the *S* and the *C* would both have the code of 2 and are side by side, you would eliminate the second 2 and come up with a American Soundex code of S160.

6. If you do not have three numbers remaining, fill in the rest with zeros.

Only two numbers remain in the Abell surname after we cross out the vowels and double letters. Because the American Soundex system requires a total of three numbers to complete the code, we must fill in the remaining numerical spot with a zero. Thus, our result for Abell is A140.

If you're like us, you want the most efficient way to do things. Although figuring out an American Soundex is not overly complicated, it can be a little time-consuming if you have several names to calculate. Fortunately, there are some free online sites that calculate American Soundex codes. Here are a few:

✔ **Yet Another Soundex Converter:**

www.bradandkathy.com/genealogy/yasc.html

✔ **Surname to Soundex Code:**

resources.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter

✔ **Surname to Soundex Converter:**

www.geocities.com/Heartland/Hills/3916/soundex.html



American Soundex indexes are subject to human error and in some cases are incomplete — for example, the 1880 Federal Census American Soundex primarily focuses on indexing those households with children age 10 years or younger. And those who carried out the actual indexing did not always handle American Soundex codes correctly or consistently. So the indexer may have made a coding error or failed to include some information. Therefore, if you're relatively certain that an ancestor *should* show up in a particular county in a census that uses American Soundex, but the American Soundex microfilm doesn't reflect that person, you may want to go through the census microfilm for that county anyway and look line-by-line for your ancestor.

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We should also mention that population schedules were not the only product of the federal censuses. There were also special schedules including slave, mortality, agriculture, manufacturing, and veterans returns. Each type of special schedule contains information pertaining to a specific group or occupation. In the case of slave schedules (used in the 1850 and 1860 censuses), slaves were listed under the names of the slaveowner, and information was provided on the age, gender, and race of the slave. If the slave was over 100 years of age, his or her name was listed on the schedules (although names may have been included for other slaves if the enumerator felt inclined to list them).

Mortality schedules (used in 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880) include information on people who died in the 12 months previous to the start of the census. Agricultural schedules were used between 1840 and 1910. However, only the schedules from 1840 to 1880 survive. They contained detailed demographic and financial information on farm owners. Manufacturing schedules (taken infrequently between 1810 and 1880) contain information on business owners and their business interests. Veteran schedules include the Revolutionary pensioner census, which was taken as part of the 1840 census, and the special census for Union veterans and their widows (taken in 1890).

Soundex improvements

Many of you have heard of the Soundex System — especially if you've already worked some with the United States census, or you live in a state that uses the Soundex as part of your driver's license number, or you're just a nut for indexing systems. However, you might not realize that there's more than one Soundex System. The American Soundex, which is the one used for the United States census and the one most widely recognized, is not alone. Nor was it the first system developed.

The *Russell Soundex System*: Robert C. Russell patented the first Soundex system in 1918. The Russell Soundex System categorizes the alphabet phonetically and assigns numbers to the categories. There are eight categories and four other rules to follow. The odd-looking terms that refer to parts of the mouth are technical descriptions of how to make the sounds; just try making the sounds of the letters shown with

each one, and you'll get the idea. Here's what they look (and sound) like:

Categories

1. Vowels or Oral Resonants: *a, e, i, o, u, y*
2. Labials and Labio-Dentals: *b, f, p, v*
3. Gutturals and Sibilants: *c, g, k, g, s, x, z*
4. Dental-Mutes: *d, t*
5. Palatal-Fricative: *l*
6. Labio-Nasal: *m*
7. Dento- or Lingua-Nasal: *n*
8. Dental Fricative: *r*

Other Rules

The code always begins with the first letter of the word.

If you have two letters in a row that are the same, they are represented in the code as one letter (for example, if you have “rr”, it is represented as “r”).

If the word ends in *gh*, *s*, or *z*, those letters are ignored.

Vowels are only considered the first time they appear.

The American Soundex System. The American Soundex System, the system with which most people are familiar, modified the Russell Soundex system. The changes include these:

The code disregards vowels altogether unless the first letter of the word is a vowel.

The letters *m* and *n* are categorized together and represented by the same number.

Words ending in *gh*, *s*, and *z* are treated the same as other words, and those letters are assigned values.

The American Soundex code begins with the first letter of the word and has three numbers following. Zeros are added to the code to ensure that it has three numbers. You can see the categories of letters and numbers assigned to them in the Using American Soundex to Search United States Census Records section of this chapter.

The Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex System. The Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex System builds upon the Russell and American Soundex Systems, and addresses difficulties in categorizing many Germanic and Slavic names that the other two systems encounter. The major points of this system are:

The code is made up of six numbers.

The first letter of the word is also represented by a number. If the first letter is a vowel, it has the code 0.

Some double-letter combinations that sound like single letters are coded as single.

If a letter or letter combination can have two sounds, it is coded twice.

If you want more detailed information about the various Soundex systems, take a gander at the Soundexing and Genealogy Web site at

www.avotaynu.com/soundex.html

And if you want to run some names through the American and Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex Systems at the same time, we recommend you visit the Generating American and Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex Codes in One Step converter at

stevemorse.org/census/soundex.html

Other census records in the United States

You may also find census records at the state, territorial, and local level for certain areas of the United States. For example, the state of Illinois has federal census records for 1810 (one county), 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890 (small fragment), 1900, 1910, and 1920. In addition to these, Illinois has two territorial censuses taken in 1810 and 1818 — and eight state censuses taken in 1820, 1825, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1845, 1855, and 1865. Some city-census enumerations were taken in the 1930s, and a military census was taken in 1862. These non-federal census records can often help you piece together your

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ancestors' migration patterns or account for ancestors who may not have been enumerated in the federal censuses. Sometimes, these censuses can also provide more detail on your ancestors than the federal census schedules can.



Guides that offer information on census returns at the local and state level include *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*, edited by Alice Eicholz (Ancestry Publishing), *Your Guide to the Federal Census* by Kathleen Hinckley (Betterway Books), and *State Census Records* by Ann Smith Lainhart (Genealogical Publishing Company).

Searching census records from other countries

The United States isn't the only country that has collected information on its population. Census counts have taken place in several countries throughout history. Here are examples of a few countries with census records.

Australia

Although Australia has taken a census every ten years since 1901, the first Australia-wide census was conducted in 1911. Now for some bad news — every return has been destroyed, in accordance with law. There are other records that you can substitute for census returns in the form of convict returns and musters and post-office directories. These returns are available for some states for the years 1788, 1792, 1796, 1800, 1801, 1805, 1806, 1811, 1814, 1816, 1817, 1818, 1819, 1820, 1821, 1822, 1823, 1825, 1826, and 1837. Some of these records can be found at these locations:

- ✓ The State Library of New South Wales at
www.sl.nsw.gov.au/find/databases/fhs.cfm
- ✓ The Archives Office of Tasmania at
www.archives.tas.gov.au/genealres/census%20index.htm
- ✓ The Latrobe Library in Melbourne at
www.statelibrary.vic.gov.au/slv/latrobe/ltguide.htm
- ✓ The Public Records Office of Victoria at
www.prov.vic.gov.au

For more information on locating census returns, see the *Censuses in Australian Colonies* page at

www.users.on.net/proformat/census.html

Austria

Austrian censuses were taken in the years 1857, 1869, 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910. The first census that listed individuals by name was the 1869 Census. These returns include surname, sex, year of birth, place of birth, district, religion, marital status, language, occupation, literacy, mental and physical defects, residence, and whether the household had farm animals.

Canada

Canadian census returns are available for the years 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901. The returns from 1851 to 1891 contain the individual's name, age, sex, province or country of birth, religion, race, occupation, marital status, and education. The returns for 1901 also include birth date, year of immigration, and address. For more information on data elements in the 1901 Census, see the Description of Columns on the 1901 Census Schedule page at

freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~wjmartin/census.htm

These returns are stored at the National Archives of Canada (www.archives.ca/).

If you're looking for online information on specific census records, see the Bob's Your Uncle, Eh! genealogy search engine at

indexes.tpl.toronto.on.ca/genealogy/index.asp

By selecting Census from the drop-down box marked *Topic*, you can see a variety of sites on census records including the 1753, 1921, 1935, and 1945 censuses of Newfoundland, French Canadian Heads of Households in the Province of Quebec in 1871, Index to the 1871 Census of Ontario, Index to the 1744 Quebec City Census, Nova Scotia Census Records, and the Toronto Census of 1837.

Denmark

The Danish Archives has census returns for the years 1787, 1801, 1834, and 1840 (as well as other years up to 1916) at

www.sa.dk/ra/engelsk/Roots.htm

The returns contain name, age, occupation, and relationship for each individual in the household. After 1845, census returns include information on the individual's place of birth. Census returns are available after 80 years.

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Germany

The German central government held censuses in 1871, 1880, 1885, 1890, 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1919, 1925, 1933, and 1939. Unfortunately, these census returns do not have much genealogical value because they were statistical in nature. For more information on the German census, see *What About the German Census?* at

www.genealogy.net/gene/faqs/sgg.html#census

Ireland

Countrywide census enumerations have been conducted every ten years since 1821. Unfortunately, the census returns from 1821 to 1851 were largely destroyed in a fire at the Public Record Office in 1922. Fragments of these census returns are available at the National Archives of Ireland (an online transcription of the census fragments is available at

home.iprimus.com.au/s_steffensen/1851IrelandCensus.htm

The government destroyed the returns from 1861 and 1871. Returns for 1901 and 1911 still survive and are available at the National Archives of Ireland at

www.nationalarchives.ie

Ireland suspended its law prohibiting the release of census returns for 100 years to make the 1901 and 1911 returns available to the public. For more information on censuses in Ireland, see the *Census Records* page at

scripts.ireland.com/ancestor/browse/records/census/index.htm

If you are interested in Northern Ireland, see the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland site:

proni.nics.gov.uk/research/family/family.htm

Italy

The Italian State Archives contains national censuses for the years 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901. Its Web site is

www.archivi.beniculturali.it

Norway

The first census in Norway was conducted in 1769. A census by name was conducted for the first time in 1801, but was not repeated again until 1865. Each

census after 1865 contained information such as name, sex, age, relationship to head of household, civil status, occupation, religion, and place of birth. For more information on Norwegian censuses, see the Documenting the Norwegian Census page at

www.rhd.uit.no/census.html

An online searchable index of the 1801, 1865, 1875, and 1900 censuses of Norway is available at

digitalarkivet.uib.no/cgi-win/WebFront.exe?slag=vis&tekst=meldingar&spraak=e

The 1865, 1875, and 1900 censuses of Norway are also available from the Norwegian Historical Data Centre. Here's the site:

www.rhd.uit.no/folketellinger_engelsk_britisk.html

United Kingdom

Since 1801, censuses have been taken in the United Kingdom every ten years (except 1941). Most of the returns from 1801 to 1831 were statistical and did not contain names, making them useless for genealogists. Beginning in 1841, the administration of the census became the responsibility of the Registrar General and the Superintendent Registrars, who were responsible for recording civil registrations (vital records). This changed the focus of the census from the size of the population to details on individuals and families. The Public Records Office releases information in the census only after 100 years, and can be found at

www.pro.gov.uk

You can find census returns for England and Wales at the Family Records Centre in London and for Scotland at the New Register House in Edinburgh:

www.pro.gov.uk/research/familyhistory.htm

If you are not in either of those places, you can find copies of area returns at district libraries or Family History Centers (for more on Family History Centers, see "Discovering Family History Centers" at the end of this chapter), as well as find some censuses online (flip over to Chapter 5 for more information). The 1881, 1891, and 1901 censuses for Scotland are available at the ScotlandsPeople site maintained by the General Register Office for Scotland:

www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk

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Location, Location, Location: Researching Land Records

In the past, ownership of land measured an individual's success. The more land your ancestors possessed, the more powerful and wealthy they were. This concept often encouraged people to migrate to new countries in the search for land.

Land records may tell you where your ancestor lived prior to purchasing the land, spouse's name, and the names of children, grandchildren, parents, or siblings. To use land records effectively, however, you need to have a good idea of where your ancestors lived and possess a little background information on the history of the areas in which they lived. Land records are especially useful for tracking the migration of families in the United States before the 1790 Census.

Most land records are maintained at the local level — in the town, county, or parish where the property was located. These records can come in multiple forms that reflect various types of land records and the locations in which they exist.

Finding land records in the United States

Your ancestors may have received land in the early United States in several different ways. Knowing more about the ways in which people acquired land historically can aid you in your research.



Your ancestor may have purchased land or received a grant of land in the public domain — often called *bounty lands* — in exchange for military service or some other service for the country. Either way, the process probably started when your ancestor petitioned (or submitted an application) for the land. Your ancestor may have also laid claim to the land, rather than petitioning for it.

If the application was approved, your ancestor was given a *warrant* — a certificate that allowed him or her to receive an amount of land. (Sometimes a warrant was called a *right*.) After your ancestor presented the warrant to a land office, an individual was appointed to make a *survey* — or detailed drawing and legal description of the boundaries — of the land. The land office then recorded your ancestor's name and information from the survey into a *tract book* (a book describing the lots within a township or other geographic area) and on a *plat map* (a map of lots within a tract).

After the land was recorded, your ancestors may have been required to meet certain conditions, such as living on the land for a certain period of time or making payments on the land. After they met the requirements, they were eligible for a *patent* — a document that conveyed title of the land to the new owner.

The Bureau of Land Management, Eastern States Land Office holds land records for public-domain land east of the Mississippi River. Here's its site:

www.glorerecords.blm.gov

The National Archives (www.archives.gov/research_room/federal_records_guide/bureau_of_land_management_rg049.html) holds the land records for the Western states. For secondary land transactions (those made after the original grant of land), you probably need to contact the recorder of deeds for the county in which the land was held.

Here are some Web sites with information on land records:

✓ **History and Use of Land Records:**

hometown.aol.com/CookCooke/historyanduse.html

✓ **Legal Land Descriptions in the USA:**

www.outfitters.com/genealogy/land/land.html

✓ **Georgia:** Georgia Department of Archives and History Land Records

www.sos.state.ga.us/archives/rs/land.htm

✓ **Illinois:** Illinois Public Domain Land Tract Sales

www.sos.state.il.us/departments/archives/data_lan.html

✓ **Indiana:** Land Office Records at the Indiana State Archives

www.in.gov/icpr/archives/databases/land/indiana_.html

✓ **Maryland:** Land Records in Maryland

www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/refserv/genealogy/html/land.html

✓ **Ohio:** Introduction to Ohio Land History

users.rcn.com/deeds/ohio.htm

✓ **Oklahoma:** Federal Tract Books of Oklahoma Territory

www.sirinet.net/~lgarris/swogs/tract.html

✓ **Pennsylvania:** Pennsylvania Original Land Records Series

www.innernet.net/hively/PALand/About%20PA%20Land%20Records.htm

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✓ **South Dakota:** Homesteading Records Information Page

members.aol.com/gkrell/homestead/define.html

✓ **Tennessee:** An Introduction to the History of Tennessee's Confusing Land Laws

web.utk.edu/~kizzer/genehist/research/landlaws.htm

✓ **Texas:** Texas General Land Office Archives

www.glo.state.tx.us/central/arc/index.html

✓ **Virginia:** Introduction to Virginia Land History

www.ultranet.com/~deeds/virg.htm



Because the topic of land records is so expansive, many books have been devoted to the subject. When you're ready to tackle land records in more depth, you may want to look at William Thorndale's "Land and Tax Records" in *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, edited by Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, and published by Ancestry.

Finding land records in other countries

Depending on the country that you research, you may find a number of ways that land transactions occurred. These links can assist you in figuring out how to research land records in a particular country:

✓ **Canada:** Land Records — Genealogical Sources in Canada

www.archives.ca/02/020202/02020207_e.html

✓ **England:** Land Conveyances: Enrolment of Deeds, and Registration of Title

catalogue.pro.gov.uk/ExternalRequest.asp?RequestReference=ri2225

✓ **Ireland:** Land Records

scripts.ireland.com/ancestor/browse/records/land/index.htm

Trial and Error at the Courthouse

Was your ancestor ever on the wrong side of the law? If so, you may find some colorful information at the courthouse in the civil and criminal court records. Even if you don't have an ancestor with a law-breaking past, you can find valuable genealogical records at your local courthouse. Typical records

you can find there include land deeds, vital records, wills and probate records, tax records, and some military records (provided the ancestors who were veterans deposited their records locally). We discuss many of these types of records in more detail in Chapter 5.



It's a good idea to call ahead to the courthouse to find out whether the record you're looking for is actually at that facility. Sometimes records are kept off-site; it might be a waste of time to hit the road and go to the courthouse. Also, the more information you can provide to the clerk or customer service representative, the easier it will be for him or her to retrieve the record. Useful information includes full name of the ancestor, approximate date of the record, and any record identification number that you might find in an index to the record set.

Visiting Libraries, Archives, and Historical Societies

Collecting additional information on the area where your ancestor lived may inspire you to search for information in public (and some private) libraries. Although local history sections are not generally targeted toward genealogists, the information you can find there is quite valuable. For example, public libraries often have city directories and phone books, past issues of newspapers (good for obituary hunting), and old map collections. Libraries may also have extensive collections of local history books that can give you a flavor of what life was like for your ancestor in that area. For a list of libraries with online catalogs, see The Library Index site at www.libdex.com/.

Archives are another place to find good information. They exist at several different levels (national, state, and local) and have different owners (public or private). Each archive varies — some may have a large collection of certain types of documents, while others may just contain documents from a certain geographical area. To find archives, see the Repositories of Primary Sources page at

www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html

A third place to find additional information is at a historical society. Generally, historical societies have nice collections of maps, documents, and local history books pertaining to the area in which the society is located. Also, they are repositories for collections of papers of people who lived in the community. Often, you can find references to your ancestors in these collections, especially if the person whose personal documents are in the collection wrote a letter or

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transacted some business with your ancestor. You can find links to historical societies on the Yahoo! site at

dir.yahoo.com/arts/humanities/history/organizations/historical_societies/

Getting Involved with Genealogical Societies

There are times when dealing with all of the different record sets and methods of researching your family can be overwhelming. On such occasions it's nice to be able to sit down with some people who have similar experiences or more knowledge than you and discuss your research problems. One place that you can find such a group is your local genealogical society. Genealogical societies hold periodic meetings that focus on particular research methods. Some also have weekend seminars where they bring in genealogical lecturers to address topics of interest to their members.

If you have research needs in other areas of the country (or foreign countries for that matter), then you might consider joining a society in that area. Although you do not live there, you can still use the resources of the society to find answers to your questions, and you can contribute to the distant organization more than you realize by sharing your findings and experiences. Most societies have people who are well versed in the records that pertain to the area where the society is located. These individuals can be a great resource as you go through the research process.

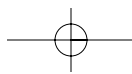
To find a genealogical society in the United States, check out the Federation of Genealogical Societies Society Hall at

www.familyhistory.com/societyhall/main.asp

A general search engine (such as Google or AltaVista) can help you find societies in other countries.

Discovering Family History Centers

You may be surprised to discover that your own hometown has a resource for local genealogical research! Sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), over 2,500 Family History Centers worldwide provide



support for genealogical research. The FamilySearch collection of CD-ROMs is among the important resources found in Family History Centers. They contain databases with the following information:

- ✓ **Ancestral File:** A database with over 29 million names available in family group sheets and pedigree charts.
- ✓ **International Genealogical Index:** A list of over 284 million individuals who are reflected in records collected by the LDS.
- ✓ **United States Social Security Death Index:** An index of those persons for whom Social Security death claims have been filed.
- ✓ **Military Index:** A list of United States soldiers killed in the Korean and Vietnam Wars.
- ✓ **Family History Library Catalog:** A catalog of over 2 million rolls of microfilm, one-half million pieces of microfiche, and 400,000 books and CD-ROMs available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

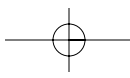
Many other resources are available from Family History Centers, including their collection of microfilmed records and indices.



You need not be a member of the LDS church to use a Family History Center; the resources contained within them are available to everyone. Keep in mind that the workers at a Family History Center cannot research your genealogy for you, although they're willing to point you in the right direction. To find a Family History Center, use the FamilySearch search interface, which you can find at

www.familysearch.org/eng/Library/FHC/frameset_fhc.asp

Otherwise you can consult your local telephone directory.



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