



Genealogy 102: Next Steps

Genealogical Research Process

Step 1: Review what you know

Organizing your records is key! Especially with remote research, the records you will gather may not have context clues about where you downloaded them. It's very easy to find a record you already have in your files.

Step 2: Decide what you want to learn

Generate your Question to research. This will help keep you on track while searching on the various sites and catalogs online.

Step 3: Select Records (Collections) to Search

This step is less important when researching remotely than when visiting in-person. Rather than specifying specific records you will search, focus on which collections of records you will search. This, along with your research question will help narrow your focus.

Step 4: Obtain and Search the Records

This step will obviously vary depending on the type of records available in the collections and sites you are searching. Some records will be openly available in a downloadable digital format while others may only be available as an index or extracted data. Some records may only be a catalog entry. These may require you to contact the staff of the archive or repository to get a copy of the record you are researching. TIP: When contacting staff, please be kind and remember that many of the records we research are restricted by law or policy. I have found that email is generally the best contact option, unless a contact option is specified on the website of the archive or repository. Email lets the staff get to your request when they are able rather than interrupting their other work.

Step 5: Evaluate and Use the Information

This step is largely the same whether researching in-person or remotely. Study the record you receive and mine it for additional information. When researching remotely, you may be able to start the process over again immediately, if a record is available online for download.

For more information on the Genealogical Research Process and detail on the steps, visit https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Principles_of_Family_History_Research and follow the steps.

Levels of Genealogy Research

Developed by a professional genealogist in the Netherlands, Yvette Hoitink, CG®, QG™, this system of levels can provide a quick glance at your current level of research on any one ancestor or person in your family tree.

- Level 0 - Unidentified Ancestor - No information is known about this person
- Level 1 - Names Only - Only the names of this person is know
- Level 2 - Vital statistics - Basic information is known such as birth, marriage, and death dates and places and is proven with records
- Level 3 - Occupations, residence, children, spouses - Additional context information is known and proven with records
- Level 4 - Property ownership, military service, religion, criminal activity - Advanced context information is known and proven with records
- Level 5 - Genealogical Proof Standard -
- Level 6 - Biographical

For more detailed information, visit <https://www.dutchgenealogy.nl/six-levels-ancestral-profiles/>

Vital Records

This category of records includes birth, marriage, and death records. They provide basic information on key events in any one of our ancestor's lives as well as some additional information depending on the specific record.

- In the US, these records are most often recorded at the municipal or county level with copies of records sent to the state level.
- In addition to civil records, some families may have church records that provide similar information, such as baptismal or ordination records.

Each state began recording the various vital records at different times and had varying levels of compliance by their county recorders.

- Iowa began requiring counties to record Births, Marriages, and Deaths in 1880, but some counties may have started earlier, and compliance to the state law did not occur statewide until 1924.

	Births	Marriages	Deaths
Earliest		County Formation	
Statewide Registration	1880	1880	1880
General Compliance	1924	1880	1924

- The IAGenWeb project has a Quick Reference Guide for official record dates for County Vital Records <http://iagenweb.org/state/research/bmdguide.htm>

Census Records

In US,

Year	Date	Population
1790	2 August	3,929,214
1800	4 August	5,308,483
1810	6 August	7,239,881
1820	7 August	9,638,453
1830	1 June	12,860,702
1840	1 June	17,063,353
1850	1 June	23,191,876
1860	1 June	31,443,321
1870	1 June	38,558,371

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Year	Date	Population
1880	1 June	50,189,209
1890	2 June	62,979,766
1900	1 June	76,212,168
1910	15 April	92,228,496
1920	1 January	106,021,537
1930	1 April	123,202,624
1940	1 April	132,164,569
1950	1 April	150,697,361

Censuses have been held every 10 years since 1790.

Due to privacy laws in the US, Census Records are restricted from public access for 72 years from the date of the census. The 1950 Census was released to the public on 1 April 2022, but the 1960 Census won't be available until 1 April 2032.

Questions on the Census

Each census is prepared with differing questions depending on the statistics the government is interested in at the time of the enumeration, but they typically include:

- Location
- Name - Relations
- Personal Description - Race, Sex, Age, Married, Children
- Nativity - Place of Birth, Place of Parent's Birth
- Citizenship - Year of Immigration, Years in US, Naturalization Status
- Occupation - Trade/Profession
- Education - Attending School, Read/Write Ability, Languages Spoken
- Ownership of Home
- Military
- Health

State and Territory Censuses

Many states held censuses between the Federal census years, eg. 1875, 1892. Details about these censuses can be found on the FamilySearch.org Research Wiki (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/State_Census_Records)

Alternate Records

Sometimes vital or census records can be difficult to locate for a number of reasons. When we can't find a record, we turn to other records that can provide the evidence we are looking for.

Can't Find	Look For
Birth Records	Baptismal Record, Newspaper Announcements
Marriage Records	Newspaper Announcements, Divorce Records
Death Records	Burial Records, Newspaper Obituaries, Probate/Estate Records

Resources

Local and Online Resources

- Ames Public Library - <https://www.amespubliclibrary.org/> - has a number of Genealogy resources, including Ancestry Library Edition, FamilySearch Affiliate Library access, HeritageQuest Online, Ames/Central Iowa Newspapers, Books, Family Tree Magazine, Internet Genealogy
- ISU Parks Library - <https://www.lib.iastate.edu/> - includes Special Collections & University Archives, and Access to Databases and Journals
- County Courthouses - legal records, including birth, marriage, death, and land records.

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- State Historical Society of Iowa - <https://history.iowa.gov/history> - Located in Des Moines, serves as the official state historical repository.
- Iowa Genealogical Society - <https://iowagenealogy.org/> - Located in Des Moines, their mission is to share genealogical information and methods with those interested in family history. To provide personal assistance to researchers, offer education in obtaining and managing genealogical information, and improve access to genealogical resources.

Census-Specific Resources

- FamilySearch.org Wiki - https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census
- National Archives - <https://www.archives.gov/research/census>
- United States Census Bureau - <https://www.census.gov/history/>
- Census Questions Asked - https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/
- Ancestry.com Research Guides - <https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/Free-Research-Guides>
- Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_census
- *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920* by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide | Jan 1, 1995