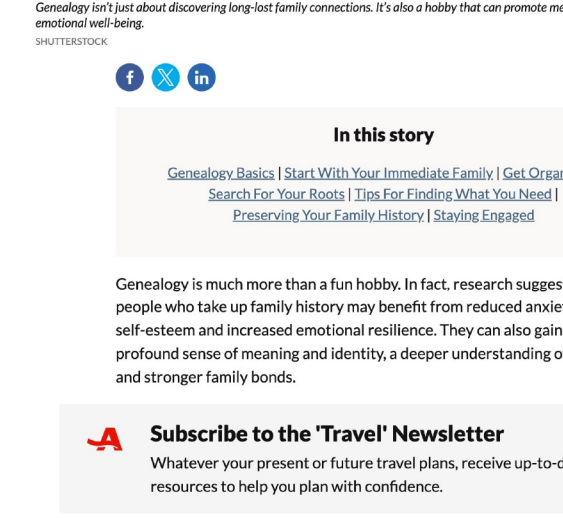


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AARP Smart Guide to Genealogy

29 tips to help you discover your roots and help create a lasting legacy. By Matt Alderton, AARP



Genealogy isn't just about discovering how far family connects. It's also a hobby that can promote mental and emotional well-being.

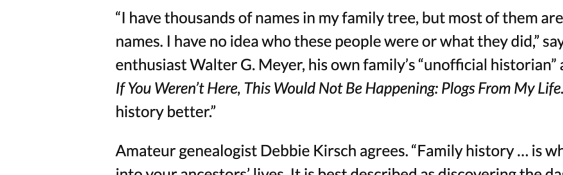
Genealogy is much more than a fun hobby. In fact, research suggests that people who take up family history may benefit from reduced anxiety, higher self-esteem and increased emotional resilience.

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Given the positive impacts of learning and curiosity on attention, mood, memory and well-being, genealogy might even stimulate improved cognition and brain health.

If you've never researched your family history, it might seem intimidating. Fortunately, there's a treasure trove of tools and resources that can make it easier and more fruitful.

GENEALOGY BASICS



1. What is genealogy? It's the pursuit of a family tree. It's a hobby that can promote mental and emotional well-being.

2. Genealogy vs. family history. Genealogy is the study of family lines, while family history is the study of a family's experiences and traditions.

3. Set realistic expectations. Often, the spark that ignites a person's interest in genealogy is discovering about the important ancestors they might have descended from.

4. Start with yourself. Because genealogy is about self-discovery, your own life is a logical starting point. You are the start of your family tree.

5. Build a basic family tree. A family tree is the bedrock of every genealogy project. To begin yours, "start with what you have," advises professional genealogist, librarian and archivist Scott Andrew Bartley.

6. Conduct interviews. Interviewing is a vital part of genealogy. It's a way to gather information that isn't available in any other source.

7. Document everything. For every person on your family tree, try to track down vital records like official birth, death and marriage certificates.

8. Compare analog, digital approaches. The quality of your family tree — not to mention its accuracy — depends on the quality of the sources you use.

9. Have a system. An organizational system can help you keep track of the vast number of records involved in genealogical research.

10. Choose the right tools. Whether you use the Ahnentafel method or another numbering system, the right tools will keep you organized.

11. Stay on track with puzzles. Pedigree charts and family group sheets are important forms for every genealogist's toolbox.

12. Get a grip on photo storage. Photos are an important part of genealogical research. They provide a visual record of your family's past.

13. Start your search online. Almost every conceivable record is now digitized and searchable. That's the internet. It's where the bulk of your search will probably take place.

14. Branch out to specialized sources. While genealogy websites have records from many external sources, it often helps to search those sources directly for information and records that may have been overlooked.

15. Take your search offline. While a lot of historical records are available online, brick-and-mortar resources may hold important gems you won't find anywhere else.

16. Visit genealogical centers. Perhaps the most valuable destinations for genealogical research are genealogical libraries like the FamilySearch Library in Salt Lake City, which has thousands of affiliated libraries around the world.

17. Try churches and cemeteries. Churches and cemeteries are "invaluable" for genealogical research because they preserve records that may not exist elsewhere.

18. Connect with community. Community-based groups that specialize in ethnic or religious histories can be helpful with research that requires unique perspectives.

19. Plan a heritage trip. To take your genealogical research to new places — not just figuratively, but literally — consider heritage travel.

20. Take a DNA test. DNA testing that traces your ancestry to specific geographic regions can fill the gaps in your family tree.

21. Remember, finding can change over time. If your surname is CIA or Smith, your ancestors might have been "Ciarra" or "Smiths" in an earlier age.

22. Consider hiring a professional genealogist. For many people, genealogy is a fun treasure hunt. For others, it's a wild-goose chase. No matter which camp you belong to, a professional genealogist could be helpful.

23. Leverage social media. If your relatives need a way to consume the stories that you're writing, social media is one option.

24. Write it down. In genealogy research, it's only the beginning. Once you've mined your family history, decide how to extract the gems you've uncovered.

25. Create a website. Your relatives need a way to consume the stories that you're writing, social media is one option.

26. Put it in a book. A website will vanish if the creator doesn't maintain it. However, you can pass down a self-published book to kids, grandkids and beyond.

27. A delcious idea. Recipes and traditions are an important part of family history.

28. Stay engaged. Life is full of distractions, but you can always keep learning and growing.

29. Pass it on. Genealogy can be an enriching solo sport, but it's most rewarding as a family affair.

Remember the aforementioned family history book? Pass yours down with actionable items inside.

Next Alderton is a contributing writer who specializes in health and wellness, travel and technology. His work has appeared in USA Today, Forbes and The Washington Post.

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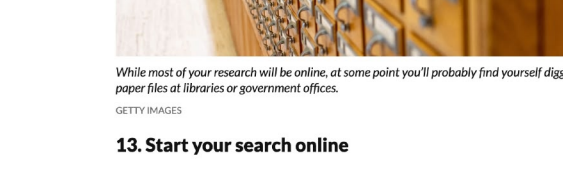
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GET ORGANIZED



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9. Have a system. An organizational system can help you keep track of the vast number of records involved in genealogical research.

"I recommend assigning numbers to individuals and organizing them into family group sheets — not to mention future generations. While pedigree charts can be interesting, a narrative of your family history is infinitely more engaging," according to Meyer.

"The facts and figures are just the beginning. Once you've mined your family history, decide how to extract the gems you've uncovered and share them with other living relatives, not to mention future generations. While pedigree charts can be interesting, a narrative of your family history is infinitely more engaging," according to Meyer.

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