

Genealogy – Suggestions for Beginners

Welcome to the Historical Collections! The Bridgeport Public Library boasts one of the largest collections dedicated to genealogy research in the region. Our staff is here to help you get started with your research and show you how to use some of the great collection sources that will be right here at your fingertips. We'll help you find that long lost relative by assisting you with researching your Family Tree. It doesn't matter if you are not a Bridgeport native, we have information from all over the world.

I. **Start with yourself and identify what you know**

You or your relatives might already have items you can use to research your family tree readily available. Use these items to gather names, dates, and locations associated with specific ancestors.

- Pedigree chart: consider what you already know about yourself and your family. Make a simple family tree chart starting with you and working back to your parents, grandparents, and great grandparents if possible.
The Historical Collections has pedigree charts and many other forms useful for recording your genealogy research
- Search for any documents with valuable information that you may have on hand: birth, death, and marriage certificates; family bibles and recipe books; photo albums and scrapbooks; letters and family memorabilia, etc.
- Speak to family members and friends with knowledge of your family. These people might be able to provide names and ages for an ancestor or associate the person you are researching with a specific geographical location, place of work, or other activity.
 - Remember: different family members will often have different versions of the same story or provide conflicting information. Make notes. There could be something in their stories that will help you uncover the facts.

II. **Evaluate the information you have gathered and determine how you will proceed**

Where are the “gaps” in your family tree? Decide what you want to learn and start building your family tree with directed research.

- Working your way backward from the present, choose an ancestor or spot on your family tree for which there is no information and start your research with this person.
 - For instance, you may have names, dates, and locations for only three of your four grandparents.
- Seek basic records to get more information on this ancestor:
 - City directory entries; telephone directories
 - Vital records, i.e., birth, death, and marriage certificates, will be kept by the U.S. State where the event on the record took place.
 - U.S. Census records, 1790-1930, can provide information on individuals and the households in which they were living. *The U.S. Census for all states is now available by computer at the library and through remote access at home.*
 - Social Security Death Benefits Index (starts with 1937)

“Evaluate”- *continued on next page*

Once you are ready to search, come into the Historical Collections and take a look at the basic sources there. HC offers access to:

- Social Security Death Index, US Census data, *some* basic vital record indexes, and directories through its subscription to “Ancestry” and “Heritage Quest” (computer).
- Books and guides on how and where to write for vital records
- Family Search – LDS – International Genealogical Index (IGI) and vital records catalog

If you have family from Bridgeport or Connecticut, you can make use of the department’s extensive collections related to these areas

- city directory collection
- local newspapers on microfilm
- Bridgeport vital records on microfilm (ca. 1850-1905)
- Hale Cemetery Headstone Inscription Directory for CT cemeteries (up through 1934)
- Barbour Collection (CT vital records index up to 1850)
- Index to military service records
- Regimental histories
- Town and county histories
- Family genealogies and biographical histories

III. Use basic vital records and census information to gather more records

After obtaining death certificates or basic records that provide names and dates for ancestors, you can search for numerous other record types at the local, county, state, and federal level.

- Obituaries, birth, and wedding announcements
- Cemetery records and headstone inscriptions (there may be a family plot or area of a cemetery where relatives are buried)
- Funeral homes
- Wills (probate records), land deeds, tax records, etc. could yield information on an ancestor’s activities and as well as other family members
- Military service records
- Regimental and military histories
- Naturalization records and passenger lists
- Education or employment records
- Medical records
- Published family genealogies
- Town and county histories with genealogical information

“Basic Records” - *continued on next page*

The **Historical Collections** holdings include hundreds of publications on every aspect of genealogy research. These publications will guide you in specific areas of research and tell you where to find more information. Some publications provide transcriptions of original documents such as passenger lists or court records. Publication topics include:

- Genealogy of ethnic groups, e.g., Irish, Mexican, Slovak, etc.
- African and Native American roots
- Passenger and immigration lists; emigration indexes
- Foreign records research
- Conducting genealogical research via the Web
- Name origin and heraldry
- Military service records
- Extracts from newspaper, cemeteries, and church records
- Local, county, and state documents, including probate
- Finding female ancestors in records
- Adoption and missing persons research
- Organizing and publishing your research; creating scrapbooks and memorabilia

IV. Visit Libraries, Historical Societies, and other Repositories

Your local library (*Historical Collections!*), genealogy society, state library and archives, as well as other repositories can be great sources of information for your research

- Public libraries – are good sources for “how to” and genealogical instruction books as well as periodical articles and computer sources such as “Ancestry.”
The Historical Collections has one of the largest genealogy collections in the state!
- LDS Family History Centers – volunteers administer family history center libraries in every state and assist researchers with their genealogy. It is possible to order vast numbers of records (usually on microfilm) from the U.S. and other countries through these libraries for a small fee.
- State Libraries and Archives – each U.S. state has a State Library and Archives that hold valuable publications and original documents on different aspects of the state’s history. Such items could include town and county histories, vital records, newspapers and indexes, land deeds and probate records, cemetery listings, military service and regimental information, data on state administered institutions such as orphanages and state hospitals, and more.
- National Archives – regional branches of the National Archives hold and maintain federal records pertaining to a particular region of the country. Many of these records, such as immigration and naturalization data, may be of value to genealogists and are often available for research on film or by request.
- Historical Societies – often have valuable primary resources or publications on local area history and family activity throughout an area.
- Genealogical Societies – there are numerous genealogical societies, large and small, throughout the United States. Many have repositories and produce publications devoted the genealogical research for a particular state or area. They also often sponsor programs and workshops that provide instruction for genealogy researchers.

V. **Join genealogy clubs, societies, and associations**

There are many organizations devoted to all aspects of genealogy research from statewide genealogical societies to special interest groups devoted to one family or ethnic group.

Membership could provide the following:

- Organizational newsletters and publications
- Workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Discounts on books and other genealogy research tools such as CD's and software
- Exchange of your research with other genealogist with similar interests
- Volunteer opportunities to teach others in family history research
- Permission to research records, e.g., vital records offices in Connecticut

Programs at the Historical Collections!

- *Genealogy Roundtable - HC holds a Genealogy Roundtable on the third Wednesday of every month. Under the leadership of Genealogist Bill Stansfield, patrons meet to discuss their research and share tips on research and methodology.*
- *Programs throughout the year –HC organizes or sponsors programs and workshops on various aspects of genealogy research throughout the year. Patrons are encouraged to share their research interests with staff and some have helped conduct programs for the public.*

VI. **Computer-based resources**

An increasing number of sources used by genealogists are being made available via computer. In addition, genealogists can also use computers to organize and publish their research.

- Online tutorials and resource centers – many organizations offer online tutorials or guides on genealogy research via the internet:
 - National Archives – About Genealogical Research
 - National Genealogical Society – Getting Started
 - Family Search – LDS databases and library catalog
 - Heritage Quest – Genealogy 101
 - NEHGS – New England Historic Genealogical Society – How to Get Started in Genealogy
 - Roots web – Guide to Tracing Family Trees
 - Usenet Project – Getting Started, Help for Genealogy Researchers
- Digital publications and subscriptions
 - Subscriptions websites and publications such as Ancestry.com and Heritage Quest (offered to all members of any Connecticut public library), PERSI, offer digitized US Census images, periodicals on state and local history, access to many local, state, and federal records, city directories and newspapers, etc.

“Computer-based resources” - *continued on next page*

- Web sites, listservs, and blogs devoted to all aspects of genealogy research
 - Cyndi's List – enormous, well organized compendium of links for genealogists on all areas of research
 - LINKPENDIUM – a directory of nearly two million genealogical resources
 - Everton Publisher's Genealogy Page – lists of repositories, resources, publications, etc.
 - ROOTS-L – mailing list for genealogists; links to many genealogy homepages
 - Treasure Maps – gives background on the value of family history research and provides a “research room” with resources for researchers
 - WeRelate - community based web site dedicated to exchange of information and collaboration between genealogists
- Software for home use to organize and/or publish research is available from many companies. Brother's Keeper ® and Family Treemaker ® are two popular programs.

VII. Practice good research habits. Maintain your records and organize your research

Remember, it is important to make good notes as you conduct your research so that you can cross-reference the data you collect and you won't duplicate your efforts.

- Cite the source of all data you collect; always note date of publication, name of author/agency, and where the source is located.
- Maintain correspondence – keep notes on what you receive and what you send with names and dates for future reference
- Make sure copies of documents or notes are legible and that nothing is “cut off.”
- If you share information with others, make sure you have your own copies.
- Make frequent back up copies of computer files and anticipate changes in software, etc., that could hinder access to your files.
- Consider publishing your research efforts for yourself, family members, a favorite genealogy web site or society, etc.; many libraries have books on organizing and publishing your genealogy research. *HC has some books on this topic.*

VIII. Consider the value of family history research to you and how extensive you wish your research to be

Some researchers only want “names and dates” to fill in their family trees while others take a more in-depth approach, choosing to study the history of the period or country in which their ancestors lived.

- Historical context: No matter what level of research you pursue, you will inevitably have to consider record keeping within the context of your ancestor's daily life. Knowing something about how your ancestor lived and what types of records were recorded and maintained at that time, will aid you in your search for documents.

IX. Have Fun!

Genealogy is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States and more and more people are beginning the search for their roots every day. The search for your family tree is a journey that can be full of twists and turns and requires patience, learning, and perseverance. But ultimately, it is a pursuit that should bring fun and satisfaction.