



NATIONAL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Nine Tips to Start Your Family History

If you are just beginning to research your family history, be sure to take advantage of the resources listed below. They will provide you with a solid foundation as you build your family tree.

1. Download and save a free [NGS Pedigree Chart](#) and [NGS Family Group Sheet](#). These free charts will help you keep information organized. Get a notebook for written notes or preserve notes in Word or Google Docs, or use a mobile friendly app like Evernote. Back up everything as you work digitally.
2. Recommended guide book: NGS's [Paths To Your Past: A Guide to Finding Your Ancestors, 2018 Edition](#).
3. Write down and keep track of all surname spelling variations (surname = last name).
4. Talk to your relatives. Start with the oldest ones first. Be sure to take written notes or record your interviews.
5. Ask family members for permission to see certificates and make a record of family birth, marriage, death, and burial records (known as vital records) in your free Pedigree chart and Family Group Sheet. Also ask if family histories, Bible records, and ancestors' photographs exist.
6. Document your findings so you will know the exact sources later. NGS can help you: See our [Family History Skills](#) course and [Mastering Genealogical Documentation](#).
7. Get to know your local library, reference librarian, and especially its collections and digital resources for genealogy research.
8. Network: Join a local genealogy and/or historical society.
9. Learn how to search the large primary databases—[Ancestry](#), [FamilySearch](#), [Findmypast](#), and [MyHeritage](#)—and get to know their resources.