



209 Lincoln Way East, Mishawaka, IN 46544

## Basic Genealogy: How to Start

Genealogy is asking the questions: Who were my ancestors? When did they live? Where did they live? What events in their lives created records? You will need to know the history of the place your ancestor lived to know where to look for their records. Your relatives may not have moved but boundaries of townships, counties and states have moved over the years.

### Where to begin:

- I. Start with yourself and work backwards one generation at a time. It's recommended to start with an individual and trace that family line.
- II. You have two types of ancestors;
  - Direct Ancestors** – These include your parents and grandparents. You will list these ancestors on a Pedigree Chart.
  - Collateral Ancestors** – These include your aunts and uncles. You will list these ancestors on a Family Group Chart.
- III. The next step is gathering all the family records that you may own. Talk to your relatives and find out what records they have and stories they may know about the family. Be sure to record those stories and then corroborate them with documentation. Stories tend to change over the years but you can still use them for clues.
- IV. Cite sources as you research. HOW you know is just as important as WHAT you know. Plus, you will need to know where a record came from during the evaluation process.
- V. Genealogy charts can be used to help sort out what you already know and what information you need to find. The gaps in these charts are where your research will begin.
- VI. Common charts used include:

**Family Group Charts:** This is what you will use to record detailed information on a family unit.

**Pedigree Charts:** This is a snapshot of your ancestors, listing names, birth, death, and marriage information.

**Research Log:** This chart prevents you from doing any duplicate work. You will use it to write what resource you looked at and what individual you were researching when you used it.

**Correspondence:** This is used to keep track of requests you made to individuals, and organizations.

## What's in a name?

When you begin your family research, you will soon see that there are alternative spellings of surnames and even given names. This is because names were spelled phonetically. The courthouse clerks and census enumerators wrote what they heard. This means you could be searching indexes for all the different spellings of your ancestor's surname. The story that surnames were changed at Ellis Island is a myth. The immigrant's papers were made at the port of departure and interpreters on Ellis Island assisted the doctors and health inspectors. This doesn't mean that names weren't changed, though. Some immigrants themselves changed their names due to ethnic bias or because they wanted a more Americanized name.

### Standard Methods of Recording Information:

- I. Surnames are written in all capital letters.
- II. Record middle names, use initials only if middle name is not known.
- III. Maiden names are in parenthesis.

Example: Mary (SMITH) JOHNSON

- IV. Nicknames are in quotations.

Example: John "Shorty" DOE

- V. Format for dates: day, three letter abbreviations for month, and four digit year. Write out the month of June. Its abbreviation could be mistaken for the month of January.

Example: 16 June 1890

- VI. Record locations from smallest to largest. (town or township, county, state)

Example: Mishawaka, St. Joseph, Indiana

An exception would be if you found a marriage record at a church. Record the name of the church first then town, county and state information.

Example: St. Peter Parish, Mishawaka, St. Joseph, Indiana

### Resources:

Croon, Emily Anne. *Unpuzzling Your Past: The Best-Selling Basic Guide to Genealogy*. Baltimore: Genealogical Pub, 2010.

Family Search.org. May 23, 2012. <http://familysearch.org> (Has videos covering multiple topics, click on the tab at the top "Learn")

Morgan, George G. *How to do Everything Genealogy*. Emeryville: McGraw-Hill, 2009.