



Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County

"How To Begin Your Genealogy Research"

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Start With What You Know and Work Backward

1. Where Do I Begin? Family Trees are Puzzles- Become the Family Detective!

Collecting the Puzzle Pieces

A. Chose one "focus" relative and work back (ala Ron Arons Presentation)

B. Organize what you have- letters, photographs, records, etc,

C.. Write down what you know from family stories, notations in the family bible, birth, marriage or death records you have. Gather letters, photos from the past. Write down memories of your childhood, your siblings, parents, grandparents, other relatives.

D. If you have someone in your family from the generation(s) before you- ask them, questions and take notes or better yet tape them (video or voice).

The purpose of your questions are to extend information you may already have; give clues to further research, gather history of the family.

Don't ask open ended questions- such as "Tell me everything you know about the XXX family"- you won't get what you want - you need to ask specific questions.

Sleuthing

- a. What type of questions do I ask? (see handout)
- b. Ask the same questions for each generation (names of parents and siblings/ names of their parents and grandparents/ names of spouses and children for each person/ dates and places of births/marriages/deaths for each person.
- c. Take the information that "relative a" told you and compare with what "relative b" told you.
- d. ask other relatives related to the person whose information you are working on their recollections on the same story, ask if they have photos or documents of the people you are asking about. Make copies (scan or copy on a copier)

Sketching Out The Clues

- e. Add the information to your chart/data base this may give you clues for further research
In new members kit see:
 - an ancestor chart (Ahnentfel chart)
 - family group sheet (keeps information together on each nuclear family)
- f. Label your notes with date, who/what was source of information, place of an interview topic or period covered and how source was given to you

2. How Do I approach a relative and ask questions?

- a. Call or write relatives you know and explain what you are doing and that you want their help. If writing-- type out the letter so it is 100% legible and include a self addressed stamped envelope. If you are writing out the questions, leave space after each question for them to write in the answer.
- b. Call a relative you don't know and introduce yourself. Give enough information to explain how you may be related. Say you will be writing to them to ask for some family information and you hope they will help you. Include a copy of your "family tree" that shows how you may be related, and/or some document that shows the ancestor(s) of the two of you so they can make the connection based on fact- i.e. a photograph, a census, newspaper article.

c. Reassure the person that if they can't remember all of something, what ever they remember now is of help- that memory may trigger others later on... If they don't want the information published or put on the internet agree to do so- and make certain you KEEP the promise

d. If you are interviewing the person face-to-face- ask them to spell out the names as some letters sound the same- and the way the family spelled the name before may not be the way it is spelled now. Knowing the original way of spelling the names will help in researching other documents. Remember that the name may be spelled differently on different records- yet it is the same person! Name may have been Anglicized, or in translation the name was spelled differently.

Look for naming patterns. Ashkenazic Jews name after deceased ancestors. Do several people in same generation have same name or Hebrew name- their common ancestor may be reason they were named for him or her

Don't Be Surprised if some relatives will not respond or reply or won't give up any information!

3. Document, Document, Document

Where to look for documentation

Note fact from : birth/marriage/death record; book, census records, courthouse record; family story, interview, newspaper article, synagogue records etc.

A. What is a primary document?- i.e. birth record

What is a secondary source (newspaper article, city directory)

Why there may not be a primary source for many Jewish genealogists

a.. Start with the most recent US census (1930)

www.Ancestry.com/

www.ProQuest.com

www.familysearch.org (Family History Centers/NARA microfilms) if they or their ancestor was here in 1930 and work back to the census they were first mentioned.

Information from the census will include the year they were naturalized, arrived in US, other family members (number of children born -/number alive 1910), where they were born, their parents' language at home

4. Look at ships manifests for information on arrival) date of arrival on census forms, if date is truthful. Look at Ellis Island and Castle Garden website/ FHC microfilms/ Steve Morse Website/Ancestry.com

Don't be surprised if year of arrivals are not accurate!

5. Ask if you can look at family photograph albums or scrapbooks or school yearbooks. You may want to copy some of the documents and they may be reluctant to let it out of their hands so make arrangements to go with them to have copies made or scanned.

6. Papers, wills, birth, marriage, death records, voter registration cards, military records, naturalization papers, school report cards, social security records, copies of income tax reports, insurance papers, driver's licenses, all of which may provide interesting biographical or socioeconomic information. Old family letters- which may provide addresses, town names that may help locate family still in the area.

<http://ssdi.rootsweb.com/>

<http://cyndislist.com/>

7. Look at newspapers from where they lived during the time frame of study. Many are now on-line or microfilmed. Find out if there was a local Jewish newspaper in the area as well as the general newspaper as many occasions would be written up and list many family members attending the functions.

Many Newspapers are on-line going back many years.

www.godfrey.org (paid subscription) has archives of NY Times, LA Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Atlanta Constitution and many others

8. If the person served in the military in the US or in another country there are records that would be helpful. Ask about where they served, what type of unit they were in, to help access the service records. There are pension records that are microfilmed, the NARA has the list of many of military records on line then contact the military personnel center for the records.

9. City Directories Both in US and in Europe- pre telephones- gives names and addresses and business addresses/advertisements for businesses

Can access city directories : some cites

www.familysearch.org - Family History Library

www.ancestry.com (paid subscription- free access at Family History Centers)

www.cyndislist.com - search the "City Directory"

www.uscitydirectories.com - "City Directories of the United States"

www.colapublib.org, [L.A. County Public Library](http://www.colapublib.org)