

How to Start Your Search/Research

Before anything else, establish a goal. This is no different than needing a road map to drive from point A to point B. Your goal helps define the map.

Your goal may be to start a family tree, collect building designs, gather information on a historical period or event, establish waterways and property lines or write a term paper. Whatever the desired result you need a map.

Begin with what you already know. Names, dates, locations, pictures, letters, common denominators between pieces of information. Think of this like a jigsaw puzzle, each piece of information helps complete the picture.

Now that you have a road map, remember this is not a road race. There will be many starts, stops, roadblocks, detours, dead ends, and most likely several unusual and/or fascinating surprises. Depending on the size of your road map, you may be spending far more time than expected.

Ask questions and talk with others. Friends, family, experts in the field, internet resources, visit archives, libraries, and museums, cemeteries, walk the blocks of a town, government records both foreign and domestic, legal documents such as birth, death, marriage, divorce, wills, lawsuits, property deeds and homesteads, the US National Archives, church records.

Above all, keep accurate records of your findings. When, what, where, and why. Examples: what newspaper, when was the article printed, where is the newspaper published and where was the story reported, what happened and why. Save photocopies of documents to support your findings.

Some search/research sites are free, many require paid subscriptions. Several genealogy websites, such as ancestry.com, familysearch.com, have blank forms you can print and fill in with your findings. Some provide online services to save your research. There are several software packages available for tracking all types of research.

Before jumping into any paid subscriptions, check with local libraries, genealogy societies, etc. as they may have subscriptions available to the public.

And...most of all...have fun!