

FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH PROCESS

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1. **Three Prerequisites** (to complete the task)

- Curiosity (ask questions)
- Skepticism (do not necessarily believe the answers you get/the information you find)
- Tenacity (keep at it; do not give up)

2. **Methods** (finding and analyzing the information)

- Seek help (archivists, librarians, historians, experts, family and friends, etc.)
- Search for sources (archives, libraries, museums, government offices, business offices, associations, churches, internet, trade press, etc.)
- Strategies and techniques
 - ✓ Start with what you have, even if only a single photo or letter;
 - ✓ Ask yourself who might know something about this;
 - ✓ Make appointments, specifically identifying documents/information sought;
 - ✓ Build relationships; make it easy for someone to help you;
 - ✓ Network, always ask who else may be able to help; and
 - ✓ Seek corroboration; two sources are better than one.

3. **Resources** (to obtain the most reliably accurate information)

- Primary Sources (original documents created at time of event, e.g., birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, certificates of title, census data, identification cards, driver licenses, other records such as ship logs, records generated in ordinary course of business, letters, emails, diaries, literary drafts, contemporaneous memoranda, photographs, recordings, oral histories, artifacts)
- Secondary Sources (information generated after event or by someone not personally familiar with event or a step or two removed from the event or time, e.g., well-researched and referenced books/articles)
- Tertiary Sources (factual overview of topic with no analysis, referencing primary and secondary sources, like databases or bibliographies)

Don't worry too much about the three labels above. Professional historians and academicians apply them to their sources, but the same source can be primary, secondary, or tertiary depending on what you use it for. Simply concern yourself with getting first-hand information whenever possible. Always look for multiple sources. Do not rely entirely on second- or third-hand information.

4. **Finish Job** (research is only the first step)

- Analyze the information you gather (sources may be accurate, inaccurate, conflicting);
 - Determine how to best tell your story;
 - Write manuscript (write, rewrite, start over, seek reviews, do not quit); and
 - Share with your family and/or publish.
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