

# Getting started in genealogy

Tracing your roots? Here's where to begin. *by Russell Shaw*

**H**ow many branches can you draw in your family tree? For most of us, the prospect of researching our personal ancestry is as intimidating as it is fascinating. But as with most projects, knowing where to start is half the battle.

There's no denying the fascination, especially when the face of a long-dead ancestor is staring back at you from a fading black-and-white photograph. After close examination, you pick out facial features in the photo that resemble the ones you see reflected in your mirror every morning.

Who was this person? Where was she born? Was she an immigrant? Where did her parents come from? Did she have other children? The more you know about your ancestors, the more you'll know about yourself.

Genealogy is all about researching the historical record of our predecessors—the lives they led, the people they loved, and the impact they had on history. You'll find these records in hard copy, in digital databases, and in oral history; squirreled away in the repositories of libraries, courthouses, and churches and stored in the memories of older living relatives.

Computers, software, and the Internet make researching and documenting your roots easy.



➔ Technology is a great tool for budding genealogists, but don't underestimate the value of gathering family history by interviewing living relatives, too.

## THE POWER OF MEMORY

Although we'll concentrate on technology-oriented genealogical tools in this story, the best place to start your genealogical research is in the recesses of that marvelous, organic technology called the human memory. This research is, by proxy, a look back through the years; so those with more years will be your most valuable resources.

Collectively, you'll find that your parents, grandparents, aunts, and

uncles are some of your deepest wells of information; individually, they'll at least know enough to point you in the right direction for more in-depth research.

There are many ways to harness the memories of your older family members. If there are photo albums, scrapbooks and family bibles that have been passed down from preceding generations, you'll likely encounter at least some unfamiliar names and faces.

That dashing gentleman wearing the fedora, standing next to your great-great-grandfather, just might have been one of his cousins. Perhaps your own father remembers his grandfather talking about that side of the family—about how the cousin came to this country and opened a haberdashery, for instance. Where was his shop located? St. Louis, Missouri? Armed with that information, you could order a city business directory from the time period he was in business and find out more.

Once you've gathered your most easily obtained written and verbal family history, it's time to bring technology to bear. The best place to start is with any of several well-known genealogy related Websites. Some of these sites are entirely free; others charge either a subscription or a per-inquiry fee for specialized information (immigration records, census data, and so on).

### ONLINE RESEARCH

Some of the best sites for genealogy research include Ancestry.com ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)), Genealogy.com ([www.genealogy.com](http://www.genealogy.com)), RootsWeb.com ([www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com)) and FamilySearch.org ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)).

Ancestry.com arguably provides the most complete suite of information and services. Their database contains the records of more than two billion people and is searchable by surname and first name, plus the country—and even the state—where they lived.

To spread the word about your search, as well as to obtain tips to help you refine your search, Ancestry.com also provides message boards, specialized research tools, and a library of how-to-articles that will help you search their huge databases.

You'll find census records from 1790 through 1930; U.S. Immigration archives; links to birth, marriage, and death records—even a library of historical newspapers going as far back as 1786.

Genealogy.com is more of a community-based site. In addition to searchable databases, it has online tools you can use to construct your family tree, as well as links to family home pages created by users of the site. You can post questions and read ongoing discussions about the site, and about genealogy in general, in the site's robust Helpful Tips forum.

RootsWeb.com, meanwhile, is affiliated with and funded by Ancestry.com. Some of its most notable features include a Roots Surname List, which contains more than 100,000-entries; a collection of genealogical mailing lists; and links to thousands of relevant local Websites from around the world.

If, for example, you suspect you had ancestors in Pipestone County, Minnesota, you could follow the link trail to a page that lists cemeteries in that region. One cemetery in

particular, Edgerton (Minnesota's Hillside Cemetery, has a page listing the year of birth and death for every person buried there.

FamilySearch.com has a searchable database of close to one billion names, and makes available numerous genealogical-record compact discs for online ordering.

Although this site is a service of The Church Of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), most of the names in the collection are those of non-Mormon individuals. Many thousands of LDS members built FamilySearch by researching paper records, which were then converted to digital form. The church offers this resource as a public service.

NAME	DIED / BUR	BORN	B	L	COMMENT
Lee, baby boy	1911 Oct 26	age 1 day	5	42	
Lester, Maggie E	1906 Dec 30	35	5	66	
Lester, Maggie Ellen	1902 Dec 23	1872 Jul 7	5	66	
Lester, Nathaniel	1895 Dec 18	no info	5	66	vet CW
Lester, Susan	1894 Apr 11	1930 Dec 8	5	65	
Linderberger, John Martin Sr	1901 Aug 27	1934 Feb 3	2	46	
Lindhorst, Onesie	1926 Mar 30	1849 Feb 16	2	33	
Lisewood, Estelle	1954 Jun 27	78y 9m 13 d	5	30	
Lisewood, Joe Mae	1897 May 14	ca 1866	5	33	
Lorenz, Anna M	1910 May 17	25y 10m 17 d	5	14	
Lorenz, Jas L	1919 Mar 28	ca 1849	5	14	
Lorenz, Fred D	1910 Dec 7	ca 1857	5	14	
Los, Peter	1921 Mar 31	1869 Jul 25	2	85	
Lutber, Jennie	1927 Feb 6	age 1 day	1	56	
Lutber, John	1916 Jan 16	1871 Mar 15	1	56	

RootsWeb.com can get you started in your search for online cemetery records, such as the example shown here.

## GENEALOGY WEBSITES

### ANCESTRY.COM

Monthly subscriptions range from \$7.95 to \$29.95. Annual subscriptions range from \$29.95 to \$199.95

### FAMILYSEARCH.ORG

Free

### GENEALOGY.COM

Annual subscriptions range from \$69.99 to \$199.99

### ROOTSWEB.COM

Free (financed by Ancestry.com)



→ Ancestry.com's home page is your starting point for searching the site's huge database, consisting of more than two billion names.

## INFORMATION FOR ETHNIC RESEARCHERS

Most major general genealogy Websites have directories of ethnic genealogy sites, where you'll find specific directories, mailing lists, and forums devoted to that particular background.

Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites On The Internet ([www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)) is a great place to look for specialty ethnic genealogy sites. The Main Category Index page lists those sites in alphabetical order. The variety is stunning: people of Huguenot ancestry, for instance, will find links to 128 sites; African-Americans will encounter a doorway to more than 500 sites. Let's drill a bit down into one of the more comprehensive ethnic-related listings and see what we can find.

Let's say you're of Jewish ancestry. Scroll down the index page, click on the Jewish link, and you'll be taken to a page listing 15 categories of Jewish genealogical information. You'll find a staggering 539 Websites and mailing lists within these categories.



→ Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites catalogs specialty genealogy databases for numerous ethnic groups.

If you're of African descent, you might enlist the services of the African Ancestry group. Order their \$349 test kit and mail them a sample of your DNA (obtained from the inside of your cheek), and they claim they can trace your maternal or paternal ancestry to a specific region of the continent.

## IT'S ON THE RECORD

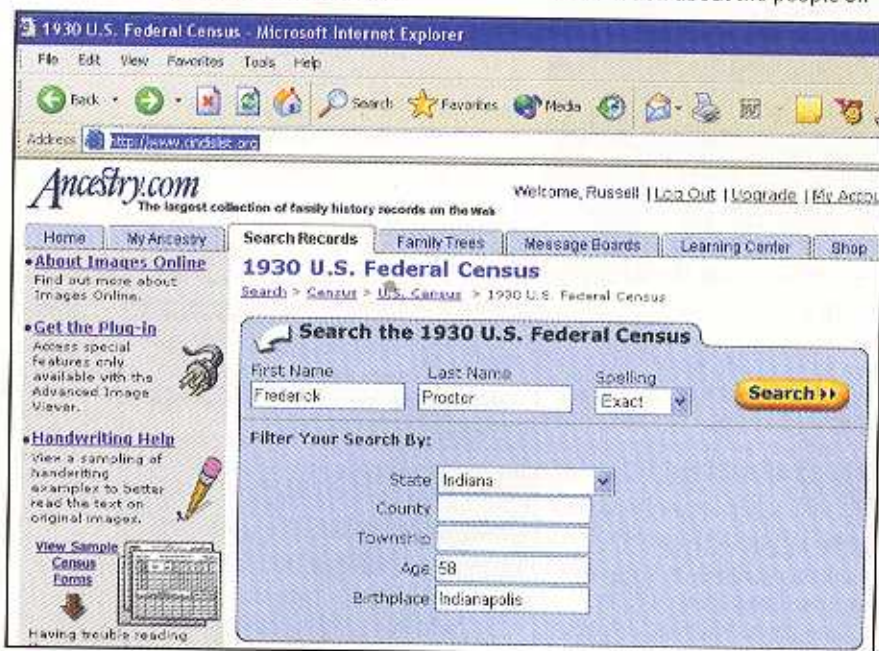
Online public record collections are extensive, and they may provide vital, as well as anecdotal, information about the people on

your family tree. Ancestry.com maintains a list of the public-record databases, and you can search them—to an extent—without having to pay a fee. Records collected by the U.S. Census are among the most useful, but due to privacy restrictions, they're not made public for 72 years. The dead can't expect the same privacy protection—not that they can complain about it. Ancestry.com's Social Security Death Index contains more than 71 million names and, at press time, was as recent as September 2003.

In order to search census records on Ancestry.com, enter your ancestor's first and last name and (if you have it) the state, county, and town where the person lived when the census was taken. The search results will list the names matching your criteria, but you'll need to pay the site's subscription fee if you want to see the actual record (see sidebar for pricing).

These same records are also available on microfilm at the National Archive (in Washington D.C. and at regional centers) and at select libraries—but digital searches are far easier to conduct.

Ancestry.com has a stunning variety of highly specialized databases, too, including birth and marriage records, immigration lists, and even Civil War service records.



→ Although U.S. Census records are public, the U.S. Census Bureau doesn't offer online access to its database. You can search these records at the commercial Ancestry.com Website—for a fee.

**FAMILY TREE SOFTWARE**

Once your genealogical research begins delivering results, you'll need a way to organize all the information. The time-honored (and most effective) method of doing this is with a family tree.

You might have seen these inside the cover of a family bible or on an old sheet of parchment, with names on some branches and question marks on others. Perhaps your genealogical research is designed to resolve the mysteries that these questions mark raise.

Just as computers make it easier to research your family tree, computer software makes it much easier to draw your family tree. The best-known genealogy software programs include Broderbund's Family Tree Maker, Millennia's Legacy Family Tree, Wholly Genes' The Master Genealogist, GenoPro's GenoPro and Geno Pro Gold, and FormalSoft's Roots Magic:

The capabilities—and costs—of these programs vary widely. Trial versions of some of these programs, including Roots Magic and Legacy Family Tree, are available for free (you'll find both programs on the disc).

Several other programs are offered at one price without printed documentation, and at a higher price for printed manuals. Most of these programs allow you to customize the type of records you wish to keep and how you wish these records to appear.

Using Millennia's Legacy Family Tree, for example, you can examine your family tree five different ways:

Family View shows the current husband and wife as the main couple on the screen, along with when and where they were born and—if they're deceased—when and where they died.

Pedigree View lists you, plus your parents and their parents, going back as many as three or four

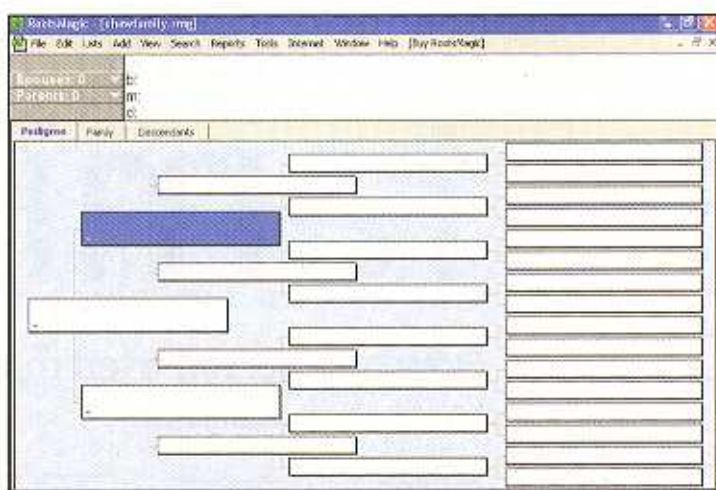
generations. Separate grids list brothers, sisters, spouses, and children.

Chronology View shows key dates in the life of a specific person. Descendant View displays information about your own children.

If you want a simple, alphabetized listing of everyone in your family tree, choose Index View.

**START DIGGING**

There's a Chinese proverb that says "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The first step in what will be the long, but enjoyable journey of documenting your personal family tree should begin with talks with relatives, your personal computer, some good genealogy software, and access (high-speed, preferably) to the Internet.



Look on the CD-ROM accompanying this month's issue of *EZ Tech Guides* for a trial version of Roots Magic.

In my case, I used this technology to track down distant cousins in Pennsylvania, 2,500 miles from my home in Oregon. Not only have I added these folks to my family tree, but I now have a standing invitation to dinner the next time I find myself in their neck of the woods.

Allow me to wish you good luck in your own research. ■

**GENEALOGY SOFTWARE**

**FAMILY TREE MAKER, \$49.99**

**FAMILY TREE MAKER**

**DELUXE, \$69.99**

**FAMILY TREE MAKER**

**COLLECTOR'S EDITION, \$99.99**

Broderbund Software

[www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)

**ROOTS MAGIC, \$29.95 TO \$39.95**

FormalSoft

[www.rootsmagic.com](http://www.rootsmagic.com)

**GENOPRO, FREE DOWNLOAD**

GenoPro Gold, \$24.00

[www.genopro.com](http://www.genopro.com)

**LEGACY FAMILY TREE**

**STANDARD, FREE DOWNLOAD**

**LEGACY FAMILY TREE**

**DELUXE, \$19.95 TO \$56.95**

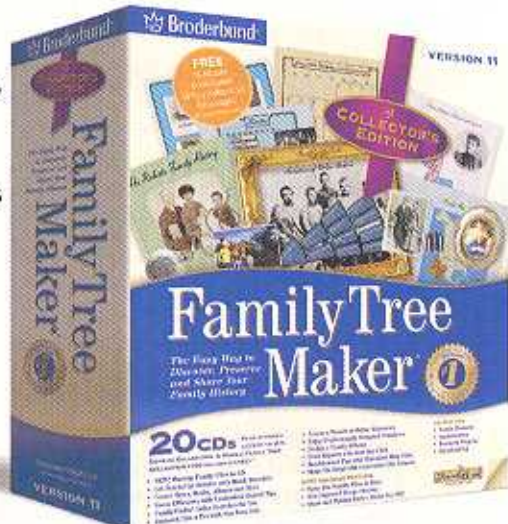
Millennia Corp.

[www.legacyfamilytree.com](http://www.legacyfamilytree.com)

**MASTER GENEALOGIST GOLD \$79.95**

Wholly Genes

[www.whollygenes.com](http://www.whollygenes.com)



You'll find a wide variety of family-tree software on the market, including several versions of Broderbund's Family Tree Maker.