Types of records

Your relatives and others who knew your ancestors may remember important events and dates that have not been recorded. They may have family heirlooms, records, mementos, photographs, and other items that contain family history information. Best of all, relatives may have interesting family stories to tell. Sometimes they can direct you to others who knew your ancestors.

A personal interview may be the best way to glean family history information. You can also contact relatives by phone, by letter, or by e-mail if you are not able to meet in person. Determine in advance the information you are hoping to learn.

Contact the Person:

- Tell the person who you are and how you are related to him or her.
- Explain that you are doing family history or genealogical research. Tell the person who you would like to learn about and what you would like to know.
- Allow the person sufficient time to find papers or to think about what he or she can remember.

Prepare in Advance:

- Determine in advance the information you are hoping to learn
- Have paper or paper family history forms ready so you can record the information you learn.
• Write down the questions you want to ask. Open-ended questions are most effective.

   Example of an open-ended question: Tell me about your mother’s immigration to this country.

   Example of a closed-ended question: Did your mother immigrate to this country?

• Gather the information that you have, such as family group records and pedigree charts. You can share this information and ask if it is correct.

• Plan to record what you learn. Use pencil and paper, a tape recorder, a camera, or a video camera.

• Test in advance the recording equipment you will use. Be sure you have fresh batteries and know how to use the equipment. Make sure you will be able to record successfully the interview.

• Be aware that microphones can be intimidating for some people and they may not feel comfortable providing information when they can see the microphone. Try to position the microphone so it is not openly visible to the person.

• If you are interviewing an oral historian or a village elder, learn the proper ways to approach and work with him or her.

Conduct the Interview:

• Bring or send family photographs, and ask the person if he or she can identify people in them.

• Don’t be in a hurry. Give the person time to think and respond at his or her own pace. Be prepared to come back or send additional correspondence if necessary.

• Ask about family records, certificates, photographs, or other artifacts. As you are told about them, write down the information. Ask for permission to make copies of records. Take photographs or video footage of the artifacts if you can.

• Refer to the suggested interview questions on the following page for ideas on what to ask.

Use the Information:

• Update your records with any new information you have gathered.

• Make a transcript or report of your interview, and ask the person you interviewed to read it and make corrections. Ask for permission to copy the report and distribute it to family members. Give a copy to the person you interviewed.

• Contact other relatives you learned about.
Interview Questions

You may want to use some of the following questions as you interview family members.

**Family Members**

1. What is your full name? When and where were you born? Who did you marry?
2. Do you have photos of your family members that we could look at?
3. Who is your father? Mother? When and where were they born? Married?
4. What are the names of your brothers and sisters? When and where were they born? What schools did they attend? Who did they marry?
5. What memories can you share about your father? Mother? Siblings?
6. What religions were practiced in your home?
7. What jobs do you remember your parents and other family members doing?
8. Will you show me some of your old family documents or artifacts? Do you have things like family Bibles that might have names and birth dates in them?
9. Is or was anyone in the family interested in family history? Do you have any genealogical forms (family trees, pedigree charts, family group records) about your family?

**Extended Family**

10. Do you have photos of family members that we could look at?
11. What can you tell me about your father’s relatives? Mother’s relatives?
12. Do you know their full names? When and where were they born? Married? Died? Buried?
13. Where did some of these extended family members live? Did they immigrate to this country?
14. What memories do you have of extended family members, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and so on? Will you share with me some of the old family stories?
15. Are there any family members who kept a journal or who wrote a historical account of your family? Who were they? Are any of these documents available for me to see?
16. Did you or any of your relatives serve in the military? Which wars did you or other relatives fight in? Will you share some of their war stories with me?
17. Is there anyone in the family who owns a family Bible or a family register?
18. Will you show me some of your old family documents or artifacts?