

# AN ANCESTRAL TREASURE HUNT

How many times have you wondered why your parents named you what they did? Chances are good that you were named for one of your **ancestors**. That's right, ancestors. We all have them, but finding out who they were, where they lived, and what they were like is not always easy. To discover the answers to these whos, whats, wheres, whens, and whys, you will need to do a bit of searching. People who trace their family roots to discover their personal past are called genealogists. You can be one too.

The study of your own family can be an adventure. It is more than just collecting the names and birth dates of forgotten family members. As you begin your climb back through the branches of your family tree, you will discover things about your family that you never knew. You may find ancestors who were smugglers and others who were highly respected citizens. Your great-great-great-grandmother may have been a nurse during the Civil War or have helped an escaping slave on the Underground Railroad. Perhaps a distant relative was captured in an Indian raid during Vermont's pioneer days.

Your relatives provide you with a personal connection to past events whether they are the ones you read about in your history book or just happenings in their day to day lives. What could be more interesting than knowing that an ancestor of yours was one of the Green Mountain Boys who fought alongside Ethan Allen? No matter who your ancestors were, or what they did, they helped make history. As we discover more and more about our grandmother's grandmother and our father's great aunt and the events in their lives, we learn firsthand about the politics and customs of their times.

Parents often tell us that we look like a certain relative, or laugh like Aunt Sue, or have grand-

mother's temper, or like music the way our great-grandfather did. Finding out about these people might help us learn a bit about ourselves and help us to understand why we do the things we do. Why is it that your family serves oysters at Thanksgiving, exchanges gifts in March, or goes ice fishing on Crystal Lake? Maybe your grandparents and even their parents did the same. A little searching and asking the right questions of the right people and you may find out how these traditions began.

Most of us do not know our great-grandfather's full name, but we can find out without too much trouble. That is what being a genealogist is all about. You will need very few supplies. In fact your family search requires only a pencil, notebook, and your patience and interest. Being a good detective also helps.



Before you get started you should realize that your search may take months or even years. If your family has lived in the same area for **generations**, your work will be much easier than someone whose family has moved many times. Whatever your situation, tracing your family tree will not always be simple, but is **guaranteed** to be exciting and interesting.

How does one find out about someone who died over one hundred years ago? Start by talking to your parents and, if they are still living, your grandparents. The older the relative you find to speak with the better. Keep in mind that memories sometimes fail and the information we get is not always **accurate** and may conflict with what others tell us.



After you have talked to as many relatives as you can and have written down all that they have told you, you will need to go to other sources for your data. Family Bibles, letters, photographs, and diaries are all places where you can find information that will help identify your ancestors. Many libraries have collections that include family genealogies. Part of your family may be listed in one of these books. Church and census records may also come in handy, as will newspaper **obituaries** in figuring when a certain relative lived and died. Birth, death, and marriage records are kept differently in every state. In Vermont this information can be obtained from local town clerk's offices or from the vital records office in Montpelier. Older records are often stored on **microfilm**. **Regulations** for using these materials differ. Staff will be able to help you learn how to find the information you need.

The National Archives provides several free publications on genealogical research.  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy>

Now that your search has begun and names and dates are piling up in your notebook, it is time to put

them in order. On page 10 you will find a blank family chart. There are enough spaces for you to fill in five generations of your family. As you fill in the names and dates starting on the left with your name and moving to the right to your great-grandparents, you are traveling back in time. In those five generations you have dug back about 150 years identifying some family members whose names you may not have even known before.

Put your name on line 1. Your mother and father's names go on lines 2 and 3. Lines 4 through 7 are for your grandparents. The names of your four pairs of great-grandparents go on lines 8 through 15. Be sure to include middle names and women's **maiden names** whenever possible. These will give you clues to the names of other ancestors.

Under your name write your birth date and where you were born. Do the same for all the other relatives on your chart but add their dates and places of marriage and, if they are no longer living, the dates and places of their deaths.

When you have filled in all the names and information that you know you will probably still have a few empty spaces on your chart. Don't let that discourage you. It takes a long time to gather all the information you need. In time, however, your chart will fill with names from your family's past.

## VOCABULARY

**ancestor** - any person from whom one is descended

**generation** - the average time interval between the birth of parents and the birth of their children

**guarantee** - promise

**accurate** - correct

**obituary** - notice of a death including a brief biography of the deceased

**microfilm** - a film upon which documents are photographed in a greatly reduced size

**regulations** - rules

**maiden name** - a woman's family name before marriage

# YOUR FAMILY TREE

Start Here

