Family Genealogy Day at SPENCER-PEIRCE-LITTLE FARM
Newbury, Massachusetts

~ 'Family History 101': An Introduction ~

How do I get started? If you are reading this at Family Genealogy Day at Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm, chances are you have some familiarity with the process of family history research. If you are a veteran researcher, you can skip to the last section: "How do I finish?" But if you are just starting your family history quest, this "Family History 101" guide is for you.

"Start with yourself," is a truism in genealogy. This truism can be extended to "start with what you know." By methodically and accurately recording information that you know with certainty about yourself, your parents, and grandparents, in a way you are creating a template for every individual you will come to research in the future. In assembling what you know, dig for and make copies of birth certificates, marriage licenses, and death certificates (i.e. "vital records") in order to document your known facts. (This brings to mind another truism: "Genealogy without proof is mythology.")

Consult your older family members not only for facts and documentation, but also for anecdotes, photos, obituaries, memorabilia, hints, and clues about the lives and locations of earlier generations. Make sure to record details of even the flimsiest family tales. After all, in your future research, you may be the one who finds evidence to confirm or debunk the family folklore. In researching earlier generations of your family, you can write to or visit the towns of their birth/marriage/death to obtain copies of vital records. (Information on how to do this can be found in some of the books included in the bibliography on the reverse of this sheet.)

Organize your information. After collecting information on several generations, it is helpful to get the information on a chart so you have a visual representation of relationships. (See sample charts attached.) Remember, five generations yields yourself and 30 ancestors. Ten generations? Yourself and 1022 ancestors! There are genealogy software programs that help organize information and can generate charts from the data.

Don't forget historical context. As you extend your collection of ancestors further back in time, remember that family history is far more than a dry collection of names & dates. As you explore various sources you will find information about occupations, military service, family migrations, etc. Further research into the local geography, local history, and social history will enhance your understanding of your ancestors in their time.

The Internet: Information and misinformation. The Internet has proven to be a tremendous boon to genealogical research. But at the same time, the Internet has enabled the virus-like spread of genealogical misinformation. So while the internet has profoundly changed information-gathering, the principles of rigorous research and solid documentation remain. Today it is easier than ever before to search the U.S. federal census records, the Social Security Death Index, military records, city directories, local histories, and previously-published family histories. One can easily "piggyback" onto earlier research. But the best course is to *consult the research of others*, then seek out and *confirm the documentation & sources* yourself.

How do I stay organized? One way to stay organized is to keep a research log for every individual, noting what sources have been explored, what documentation has been found, and what the next steps should be for each. This research log can be as simple as a notebook, or can be part of your "notes" in a genealogy software program. You will find as you work back in time, that vital records documentation is harder to come by for a variety of reasons. When faced with such an impasse, the resourceful researcher turns to probate, land, or other records to find tidbits of information from which to interpolate ages and family relationships. To stay organized as investigations broaden, a written log will help you make the most efficient use of research time.

OK, now I know how to get started. But how do I finish? At some point in the seemingly endless research, you will arrive at a time when you need to summarize your findings. Undoubtedly your summary will include some unanswered questions ("brick walls" or "dead ends") – that's why every genealogy project is never truly finished, but usually called "a work in progress." As one very chipper, tireless family history researcher once stated with glee: "Every time you discover a new ancestor, you've got two more to look for!"

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Defining the past. Shaping the future.

See the following pages for a bibliography & sample charts

~ 'Family History 101': An Introduction . . . *continued* ~

A bibliography of genealogy basics . .

Eichholz, Alice, Ed., ***Ancestry's Redbook: America's State, County, & Town Sources.*** 3rd ed. Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, Inc., 2004.

Greenwood, Val. ***The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy.*** 3rd ed. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 3rd ed. 2000.

Helm, Matthew, & Helm, April Leigh. ***Genealogy Online for Dummies.*** 4th ed. Foster City, Calif.: IDG Book Worldwide, Inc., 2004.

Leubking, Sandra, & Szucs, Loretto, Eds. ***The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy.*** 3rd ed. Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, Inc., 2005.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. ***Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian.*** Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1997.

Useful free genealogy web sites . . .

RootsWeb. Links to the Social Security Death Index, user-posted World Connect family trees, genealogy tips, and more. *www.rootsweb.org*

Cyndi's List. A categorized and cross-referenced index of Internet genealogy resources with over 258,000 links. *www.cyndislist.com*

The U.S. GenWeb Project. Links to state & county genealogy web sites. *www.usgenweb.org*

Available through many public libraries . . .

HeritageQuest/ProQuest. Offers the 1790-1930 census, 25,000 family & local histories, Revolutionary War pension records, and an index of 1.6 million genealogy & local history articles. *Contact your local library for information about access to HeritageQuest.*

Subscription web sites . . .

Visit these subscription web sites to determine if membership is useful for your particular research.

New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Mass. A research membership gives access to the library in Boston, and also to a vast collection of online resources, including nearly 150 years worth of authoritative articles in the NEHGS *Register.* *www.newenglandancestors.com*

Ancestry.com. Thousands of searchable databases and family/local histories. The site offers access to the U.S. Census 1790-1930. *www.ancestry.com*

Godfrey Memorial Library, Middletown, Conn. The Godfrey Scholar membership gives access to thousands of databases and newspapers, with more data added each month. *www.godfrey.org*

A few family history insights . . .

Individuals pursue family history for a number of reasons. Whatever your perspective, your research will reward you in the present, and will be something future generations of your family may appreciate for years to come. The understanding of the lives of our ancestors through the ages can help us understand our own place in the grand parade of humanity.

As you proceed in your research, however, beware of unsourced information in previously-published works, lest you unwittingly perpetuate genealogical fiction. For example, in the course of your research you will likely come across (1) a previously published – but undocumented – genealogy that connects your family to *all* the royal families of Europe; (2) a published genealogy that may have its hard facts in order, but then in flowery prose goes on to anoint *everyone* who ever carried the family name with a stratospherically superior level of pious and noble character; or (3) a published genealogy that – with no documentation – states that it was *your* intrepid ancestor who *swam* across the frigid Delaware to hand-deliver George Washington's forgotten ditty bag.

With enough research, you will find that true stories about your ancestors are usually more interesting than folklore or fiction. Exploring the role of your ancestors in local history can be endlessly fascinating as you learn about events that never came close to making it into your high school history book. Don't worry about finding that nut on your family tree. If you are ambitious enough to discover 12 generations of ancestors (i.e. 4094), you'll find that – if you are truly objective – you'll have roughly an equal number of saints and sinners. So whatever the assets and liabilities of *individual* ancestors, ultimately we can thank our ancestors *collectively* only for the fact that they *survived* long enough to have at least one child and create the next generation – leading forward to *us*!

– **R.W. Bacon**

Keeping track: Useful charts for the genealogy enthusiast

Using charts as a reference will help you better understand the relationships among different generations of your ancestors. On this page are samples of two common types of genealogy charts, the fan chart and the pedigree chart.

Fan Chart. The fan chart is a good "at-a-glance" reference that packs multiple generations of ancestors into a small space. The sample chart shown has space for eight generations (255 individuals). The drawback of the fan chart is that even on a large sheet, there is little room in the tiny spaces for date & place details.

Pedigree Chart. A standard-format pedigree chart can hold five generations on one 8.5"x11" sheet with room for birth, marriage, and death details. By adhering to a consistent ancestor numbering system, one can link multiple chart pages together.

Genealogy software programs have features that enable the creation of charts from user data. A number of companies sell attractive charts that can be filled in by hand. Numerous genealogy sites on the Internet offer free charts to download. One good place to start is Misbach Enterprises (*www.misbach.org*).
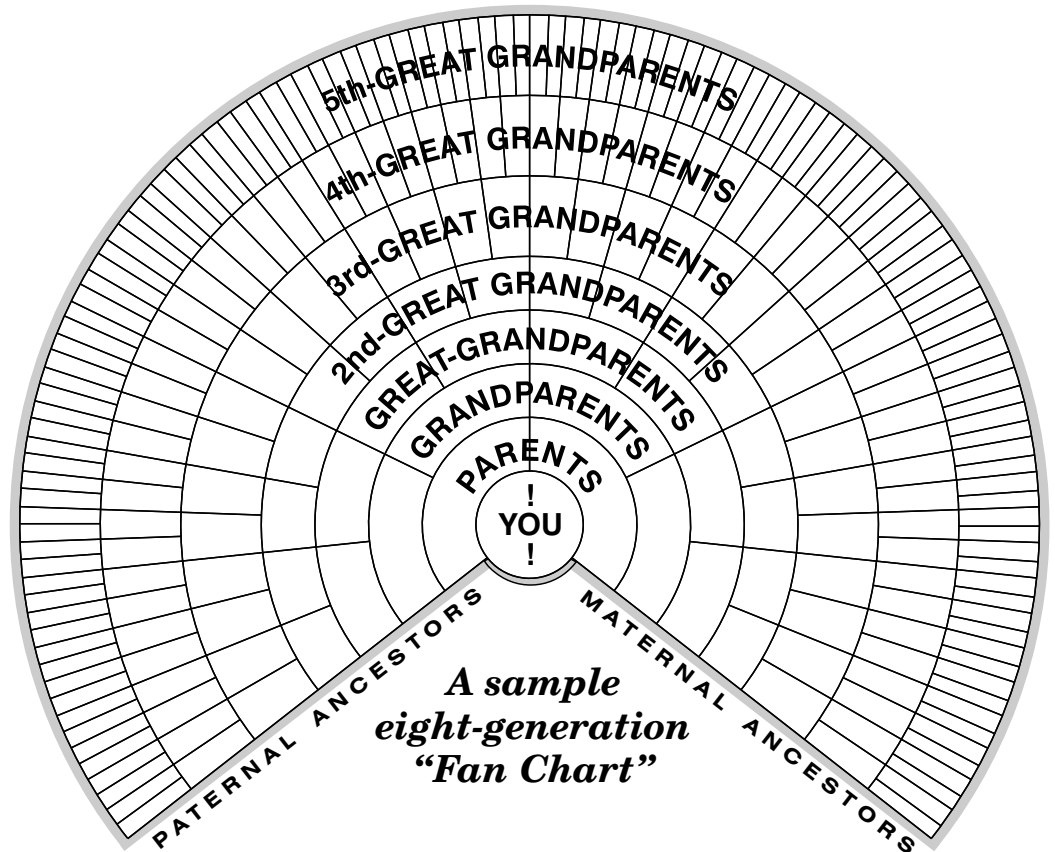
A sample eight-generation "Fan Chart"
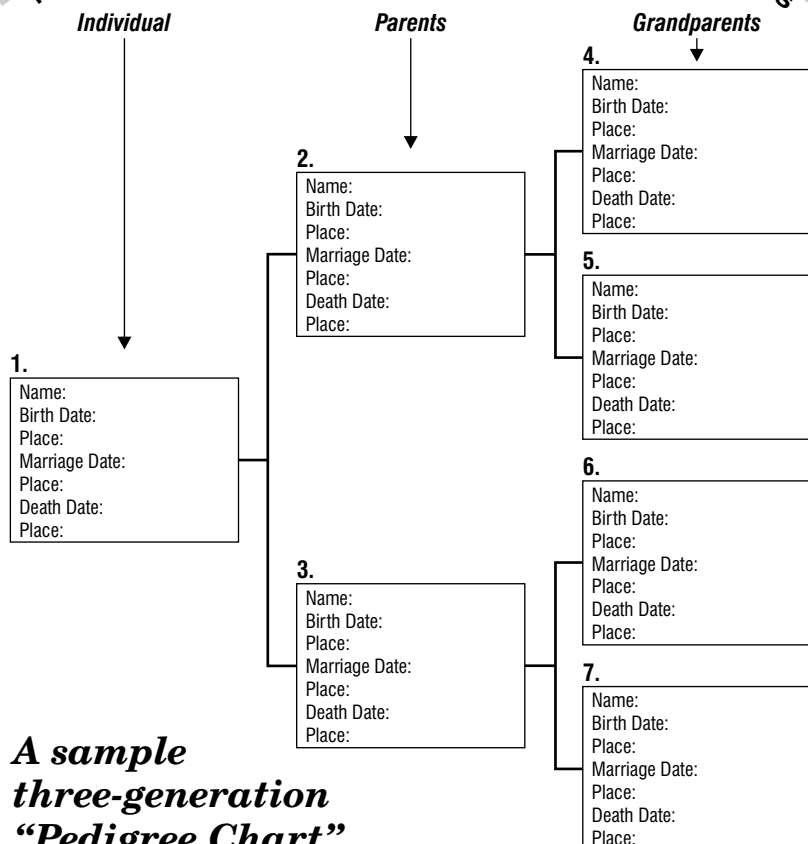
A sample three-generation "Pedigree Chart"

~ 'Family History 101': An Introduction . . . *continued* ~

For thorough research, use a checklist of family history sources

When you have searched the obvious sources for information about a particular ancestor and still find nothing, a checklist of sources is helpful so that in your continuing research you will "leave no stone unturned."

The checklist at the right presents a good model to start with. Depending on the locale and era of your research, you may wish to customize your source checklist. Information to do this is best found in the previously mentioned genealogy reference, *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, 3rd ed., by Sandra Leubking & Loretto Szucs, Eds. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, Inc., 2005.)

Name:_____

Date of Birth: _____ Place of Birth: _____

Date of Death: _____ Place of Death: _____

Home Sources
___Relatives
___Baby Book
___Bible
___Diary/Journal
___Genealogy
___Letters
___Awards
___Memberships
___Passport
___Memorial Card
___Obituary
___Photographs
___School Records
___Work Records
___Pension Records
___Financial Records
___Health Records
___Insurance Records
___Licenses
___Scrapbook

Town/City Records
___Birth Record
___Marriage Record
___Tax Records
___Death Record
___Cemetery Record
___Church Record
___City Directory
___Hospital Record
___Mortuary Record
___Newspaper Articles
___Headstone
___Town/City History

County Records
___Civil Court Record
___Criminal Record
___Divorce Record
___Guardianship Record
___Deed/Mortgage Record
___Probate/Estate Record
___County History

State Records
___Birth Record
___Death Record
___Land Record
___Military Record
___State History
___State Census

Printed Sources
___Genealogies
___Periodicals
___Local Histories
___Biographies
___Yearbooks
___Trade Journals
___Professional Publications

Federal Records
___Social Security Death Index
___Federal Land Record
___Military Record
___Pension Record
___Ship Passenger List

Federal Census Records
___1790	___1870
___1800	___1880
___1810	___1890
___1820	___1900
___1830	___1910
___1840	___1920
___1850	___1930
___1860	

The above checklist of sources is by no means comprehensive!

A five-generation Relationship Chart

On the standard family relationship chart, the numbers at the top and side indicate the number of generations away from a common ancestor. To determine the relationship between any two descendants, place the common ancestor in the upper left corner of the chart. Then follow the *column* down to find the relationship of one of the individuals to that common ancestor. Then find the relationship of the second individual across the top *row* of the chart. The intersection of the *column* and *row* indicate the relationship of the two individuals. Note that the word "removed" indicates that the individuals are not of the same generation. To figure relationships in more distant generations, extend the chart in both directions.

*"Family History 101: An Introduction"
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	Common	1 Generation	2 Generations	3 Generations	4 Generations	5 Generations
Common	Common Ancestor	Child (Son or Daughter)	Grandchild	Great Grandchild	2nd Great Grandchild	3rd Great Grandchild
1 Generation	Child (Son or Daughter)	Sibling (Brother or Sister)	Nephew or Neice	Grand Nephew or Neice	Great Grand Nephew or Neice	2nd Great Grand Nephew or Neice
2 Generations	Grandchild	Nephew or Neice	First Cousin	First Cousin Once Removed	First Cousin Twice Removed	First Cousin Three Times Removed
3 Generations	Great Grandchild	Grand Nephew or Neice	First Cousin Once Removed	Second Cousin	Second Cousin Once Removed	Second Cousin Twice Removed
4 Generations	2nd Great Grandchild	Great Grand Nephew or Neice	First Cousin Twice Removed	Second Cousin Once Removed	Third Cousin	Third Cousin Once Removed
5 Generations	3rd Great Grandchild	2nd Great Grand Nephew or Neice	First Cousin Three Times Removed	Second Cousin Twice Removed	Third Cousin Once Removed	Fourth Cousin