

A family history starter.

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Notes to encourage the novice

Many people think about their past at some time. It's often said when there is a funeral 'I wish I had made time to know the deceased ! ' Sadly many elderly relative's take their lifetime knowledge to the grave and its lost to future generation.

When beginning your family history have a good clear idea of **who you are today** and how you happen to be the person you are. This means:-

1. Name & Date your own parents and their siblings.
2. Know who both sets of your Grandparents were.
3. Find where they were born and died.
4. When were they married or joined.
5. Locate where they lived, worked, played and were educated..
6. How long have the lived in New Zealand or Australia.
7. When, why and how did they immigrate.
8. What was their trade, profession or vocation.
9. Which groups, Churches, clubs did they support.
10. When and where did the arrive.

Compile notes about your family in a book giving details of time, place, document etc, etc. This is not unlike a journalist who wants to know who, what, why, when, where and how an event took place and the context and / or impact of that occurrence.

I believe a word of caution should be given. '**Beware of the supposed useful search engines which taut for business on the internet**'. Always and before signing up to an online search engine seek advice from other experienced family history practitioners. There are many expensive entities touting for business, inviting you to access their data base and file your own data, they then suggest availability of pertinent information requiring you to "Register" with your Credit Card.... Some are genuine but there are others who know little other than what has been put in by gullible researchers.

If you are lucky surviving family members may know about your ancestors and be willing to share information. A good family historian will be genuinely sensitive, caring and attentive to detail because it's the remnants of a life full of memories and emotions which are being considered. A relative or Estate executor may not fully appreciate the importance of old documents, letters, memorabilia and photographs discovered during the tidy up and disposal stage of personal effects.

The best genealogical information is corroborated by living relations so it's important to make time and be truly interested in their life stories and experience's The discerning family historian is open-minded and non-judgmental in gathering information. Its important to recognise you will not get information unless you ask and your interest is known.

Family Records

Make a thorough search all family storage areas, inside and out, from top to bottom of the home. Including attic, basements, garage, sheds, workshops and so on. Encourage your relatives to make similar searches in their storage areas. Often other family members might have gathered or accumulated information over the years and will be happy to share it if asked. Most families have at least one relative who keeps track of cousins' birthdays, anniversaries, or deaths etc. Learn who that relative is. When information is found, offer to pay for the cost of photocopying and postage.

We can gather the family history information others have already prepared by:

- ❖ Asking our family members if they have any written information about the family, including ancestral maps, ancestral books, letters, stories, family group records, pedigree charts, school records, certificates, pictures, and artefact's such as wood carvings, tapa designs, etc.
- ❖ Ask if you may have a copy of what they have.
- ❖ Noting discussion and validating it against public records such as Newspaper archives.
- ❖ Checking Gazettes and Official information.
- ❖ Discussing your findings with others.

When beginning Family History Research its important to be self organised and have a reassuring safe custody place for keeping archives and records. The following sources are worth consideration as you think through connections and possibilities.

1. Official Documents

- ✓ Certificates of birth, marriage, and death
- ✓ Wills, deeds, and property records
- ✓ Military service and pension documents
- ✓ Passports
- ✓ Naturalization documents
- ✓ Medical records
- ✓ Licenses (business, marriage, fishing, driving)
- ✓ School records

- ✓ Church records
- ✓ Insurance policies
- ✓ Books and Albums
- ✓ Family Bibles
- ✓ Scrapbooks and albums
- ✓ Baby and wedding books
- ✓ Books of Remembrance
- ✓ Photograph Albums

2. Personal Writings

- ✓ Journals and diaries
- ✓ Personal histories and biographies
- ✓ Letters and cards

3. Printed Notices and Announcements

- ✓ Newspaper clippings and obituaries
- ✓ Announcements of births, weddings, and anniversaries
- ✓ Programs (award ceremonies, funerals)
- ✓ Family reunion notices and records

4. Certificates

- ✓ Religious records
- ✓ Fraternal or society records
- ✓ Occupational awards
- ✓ Academic awards
- ✓ Vocational & Trade credentials
- ✓ Sporting achievement's and accolade's
- ✓ Bibliographic Citations in other published works

As you discuss family history, you will probably learn some traditional family stories about an ancestor. Many traditions are based on fact, but most prove to have significant incorrect information. Stories often tend to inflate an ancestor's importance or misrepresent one's origins. Also, the correct information may have been inaccurately remembered as it was often orally passed through the family. Be hesitant to accept family traditions at face value. Treat them as vague clues. Some family traditions are little more than romantic hearsay and often prove to be false. Whilst there may be some truth, stories are often difficult to substantiate. If we suppose something is correct and don't test it against other information we are doing ourselves a disservice. Its important to record how you learned the family stories in your reference file noting who told you, when and where.

Family Memorabilia is one of the most important sources of supporting information. Many families have kept objects which provide important clues for further research on an ancestor.

You may want to write a brief description explaining **(1)** what each item reveals about the family and **(2)** where the item is located. Look for items such as:

- ✓ Religious artefacts
- ✓ Samplers, tapestries and quilts
- ✓ Heirlooms
- ✓ Pieces of furniture or household items
- ✓ Medals, awards, trophies
- ✓ Souvenirs
- ✓ Clothing, uniforms

If at all possible, obtain a photo of items and record who currently possesses them. Provide a description and location note on every photograph and how it supports or relates to your particular research.

Record Keeping:

Keep a record of contacts with family members on your research log. This will help you avoid duplicating your work and can help in following up later. Write out notes about interviews, meetings, and reunions. Make paper copies of e-mails and keep copies of letters sent or received. Cite these notes, printouts, and copies on your research log.

Soliciting Information:

For a variety of reasons some family members may have reservations about revealing what they know about other people. There can be many and varied reasons for this and considerable patience, tact and sensitivity is paramount. Always be willing to share what you know or have discovered. Apart from the adamant and disinterested individual some people might be encouraged to share if they see you are genuine and not just some nosey nuisance. Family members who were reluctant to share information on one occasion may change their minds, or become intrigued by the information you have discovered and share. Your information may convince them of your seriousness and decide to tell their story.

There have often been unpleasant things which have happened in the past and people feel they are best forgotten. My granny would often say 'Let bygones be bygones' when probed for information. Historically in the 15th century, a bygone was simply 'a thing that has gone by', that is, a thing of the past. Shakespeare used the term with that meaning in 1611 with 'The Winters Tale'

With the passage of time 'bygones' came to refer specifically to past events with an unpleasant tinge to them; for example, quarrels or debts. The Scottish churchman Samuel Rutherford recorded that usage of the phrase in a letter during his detention in Aberdeen in 1636. In the letter he regrets the follies of his youth and acknowledges his debt to God in showing him the error of his ways... So generally there is a little more to the phrase 'let bygones be bygones' than the more literal 'let sleeping dogs lie' or the old proverb 'let all things past, pass' which was recorded by John Heywood in his 1562 edition of Proverbs. 'Let bygones be bygones' uses both meanings of the word 'bygones' and means, in extended form, 'let the unpleasantness between us become a thing of the past'. With this mind set people feel justified retaining some information which might unearth a plethora of mystery and intrigue or simply rebirth hidden knowledge from which they have long moved on. Patience, sensitivity and tact can encourage confidence in your efforts to preserve our family history.

Respectful patience and sensitivity are essential tools of the family historian...

