

Indiana Genealogical Society NEWSLETTER

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In the Beginning...The Basics of Genealogy by Darlene Anderson

The decision to begin researching your family history can be due to a variety of reasons. Some people do it because they love mysteries, or because their grandmother told them so many stories they just had to find out more. For others, it's about finding answers--maybe you were adopted, or you left the area where you were raised.

Whatever your reason, genealogy is a hobby that will bring many accolades of happiness, as well as many sighs of disappointment. When you're experiencing one of those disappointing times, all you need to keep in mind is that you're not alone--that and the fact that your great-great-granddaddy was NOT actually an alien!

These items are essential to get you started in your journey:

--**Pencils and pens**--Some libraries will ask that you only use a pencil, so their books will not be damaged by pen marks.

--**Spiral bound notebooks**--I don't know how many times I have lost information or my information became separated because I used single sheets of paper to write notes on. A spiral bound notebook will keep all your notes in one place for easy reference.

--**3 ring binders and dividers**--Use your 3 ring binder and dividers to

organize your research. I use one binder for each surname, and then the dividers separate families within each binder.

--**Folders**

--**3 hole punch**

--**Coins for the copy machine**--I usually take dimes on my research trips. It's a good idea to call ahead to the library and ask how much they charge for copies on the copy machine, and the microfilm reader-printer, as well as ask if they have a dollar bill changer.

--**Pedigree charts**

--**Family group sheets**

--**Lots of determination!**

Home is Where Genealogy Begins

Now that you are armed with the tools of the trade and a desire to know more about your family, you should write down all you know about yourself, your parents and your grandparents. Don't skip on this information--it will become invaluable when your parents or grandparents are no longer available.

Ask your relatives for all the documents you will need to prove your family history. These can include: diaries; wills; birth, death and marriage certificates; baptismal,

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occupational, military and school records; family Bibles; funeral registers and memorial cards; divorce papers and even baby books. Hopefully they will lend them to you long enough for you to make copies, but if not, just ask to take a look at them, then write down all the information found on them, as well as the name and address of the person who owns the document and the date of your visit. This is also a good time to ask to see family photographs.

Now that you have all this information from your family, the family group sheet should become your best friend. A family group sheet records basic information about a couple--names, dates and places of events, children, ex-spouses, parents, church affiliation, military and places of residence. At a glance it will show you what facts you have already documented and which ones you need to document. For every piece of data you record on a family group sheet you should have a document that proves that fact--you want your family history to be supported by evidence, not mere speculation based upon rumors and hearsay.

Pedigree charts provide a different way to look at your family--it shows you the mother and father's

sides of the family, usually four generations back. For each couple listed on the pedigree chart a family group sheet should be filled out. Your research binder should include copies of your family group sheets and pedigree charts. A good rule to keep in mind when on your genealogy jaunts is to never take an original or a copy of a document on a research trip. The risk of losing a valuable document while traveling or visiting your local genealogy library is much too great.

Further Reading

Croom, Emily Anne--*Unpuzzling Your Past*.

Rose, Christine and Ingalls, Kay Germain--*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Genealogy*.

Allen, Desmond Walls and Billingsley, Carolyn Earle--*Beginner's Guide to Family History Research*.

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