

Person/Family:

Gather What You Have

- ☐ Write down what you know about your family history.
 - Start with yourself and work backwards.
 - Fill out ancestor charts and family group sheets, create a timeline, etc.
 - It's okay to have question marks and blank spaces.
- ☐ Ask relatives what they know about your family history.
- ☐ Interview relatives about their life stories and ask them to help identify people in photos, slides, and videos.
- ☐ Collect or document family papers and heirlooms.

Decide What You Want to Learn

- ☐ Start a list of goals and questions.
 - Think about where there are gaps in your knowledge or conflicting information. Questions can be broad or narrow.
- ☐ What are you curious about?
- ☐ Pick the most interesting or urgent question. What records might help answer that question?
- ☐ Create a research plan to help guide your next steps.

Research and Provide Context

- ☐ Search for records and historical information.
 - Use a genealogy records checklist.
 - Look online in genealogical databases, newspaper databases, digital archives, and genealogy websites. Remember: not all records have been digitized!
 - Look in libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, courthouses, cemeteries, and places your ancestors lived.
 - Consider national, state, and local border changes, as well as natural and manmade disasters. How might these factors affect where records exist today?
 - Use sites like the FamilySearch Research Wiki and Cyndi's List to find tips and recommendations specific to the place or topic you're researching.
 - Ask for help from genealogical societies, libraries, and online genealogy groups.
- ☐ Use smart search strategies to find records.
 - Use reliable sources and verify family history facts using multiple records.
 - Work backwards from yourself—don't skip generations!
 - Try alternative spellings for first names and surnames, including nicknames and initials.
 - Search for records by location and date if you're not finding them with a name search.
 - Look for your ancestor's FAN Club: Friends, Associates, and Neighbors (coined by Elizabeth Shown Mills)
 - Think about how federal, state, and local laws might affect which records exist for your ancestors.

Research and Provide Context (continued)

- ☐ What are some favorite research tips that you want to remember?
 - Where was this record created? Where is it kept today?
 - Why was this record created? What was the purpose of the record?
 - How was this record created? What steps were involved?
- ☐ Cite your sources!
 - Learn how to cite genealogical sources using *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* by Elizabeth Shown Mills and the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
- ☐ Document what you have searched for, including where and when you searched.
- ☐ Analyze the records you find. Ask yourself:
 - Who created this record? Who is the informant?
 - What information is included in this record? (Tip: Make sure you read the entire record, not just the bits about your ancestor.)
 - When was this record created?
- ☐ Think about your ancestor's historical context.
 - What major local, national, and international events took place during their life?
 - How did their identity, the place they lived, and the time they lived in impact their choices and experiences?
 - What opportunities and challenges may they have faced?

Organize and Share

- ☐ Organize your files in a way that makes sense to you.
- ☐ Use descriptive filenames for digital files.
 - For example: Smith Jane_1940 US Federal Census_Ancestry.jpg
- ☐ Decide how you would like to present the information you have gathered. Some possibilities include:
 - Write a book, an article, an essay, or a blog.
 - Build a website or share your family tree online.
 - Compile a cookbook with favorite family recipes, stories, and photos, or host a dinner using those recipes.
 - Assemble a poster, slideshow, or photobook for a family reunion.
 - Craft your family tree or memories onto a quilt, wall hanging, or piece of needlework.

Begin Again

- ☐ Update your list of questions and goals.
- ☐ Pick a new question to work on!
- ☐ What do you want to tackle next?