

Eating the Elephant – One bite at a time

A full-grown elephant weighs a couple of tons. One person eating that much would take years to finish the elephant. However, if you have a large village eating the elephant, it can be done in a couple of weeks.

The same is true of genealogy. If you are doing it by your lonesome, it will take you years. If you have the help of relatives and others in the global village, the task can be made much less painful and take a lot less time. You might actually complete your genealogy before you become it. Nah!

There are several time proven steps to doing genealogy and I will list some of them here in the most productive order. Try to follow the order as it has been proven to get the most results with the least pain. The shotgun approach can also be called the scatterbrained approach. Please read this guide completely before you begin your genealogy research.

Before we begin, we are required by Federal law to inform you that genealogy is an addictive habit. If it is too late, enjoy this addiction.

- 1. Talk to the old ones before they become the dead ones.** The old ones might be able to give you the stories that go with the names, where the older ones came from, the missing clues that make the genealogy go easier.
- 2. Ask the old ones the correct questions in the correct way. Humility and love go further than “tell me, tell me, tell me”.** What do they remember about their parents. Where did they live. When did they move. Why did they move. Who were their aunts, uncles, and cousins? When did the births, deaths marriages and other major events occur. Was anyone in the service? Get the stories, they make the dead ones live again.
- 3. Ask if they know of any of distant relatives who is doing the family history.** If they don't know of anyone who is doing it, ask who in the family might know?
- 4. If the old one knows of someone, call that person and follow up with a letter or e-mail giving your information and how you are related.** Don't forget the words “Thank you”. Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you want them to send you something. Include two stamps.
- 5. Call or write the local genealogical society where your ancestors came from.** Send a pedigree chart and a family group sheet of the furthest back ancestor you know of. Ask if anyone in the society has a common ancestor. Again, include a stamped, self-addressed envelope and your e-mail information. Some of societies have their information on line and you can look at it.
- 6. Data Base Searches** – There are literally thousands of genealogical databases to look through. The more common ones are listed in lots of genealogical magazines in the libraries. But you can start with a few and once you get a feel of what is out there, you will become an expert in your own local genealogy. What is more important is that you learn to “data mine” the web sites that are out there. I will give you several examples to show you how it is done.

Family History Center

On the website, www.familysearch.org, create an account, sign in, under the **search** tab, type in your ancestors first and surnames, and the rest of the information that you know. Do not guess unless you base your guess on some point of information. Sometimes the search works best with a minimum of information. Start with that and add information to narrow the search. If you find something, ponder where it came from. The source of the information might prompt you to look for similar data on other relatives or it may prompt you to think of another source of information you had not thought of.

On the main search screen of “Family Search”, click the “**catalog**” tab, click the “**search**” tab, click the “**surname**”. Type in the surname you want to research. See if there are any books in the system which might pertain to your families. Do this for every person on your pedigree chart.

Now go back and do a “**place search**” Type in the place your ancestor came from. If the place has any records that the FHL has microfilmed, they will be listed. Get a feel for what types of records are available from the places your ancestors are from.

There are lots of courses and research helps available on specific research areas. The courses and help items are listed under the “Search” and then “Wiki” tabs from the main screen. **Check them out.**

Internet Search

Again, a general warning is appropriate at this time. There are a lot of sites on the net which are worthless and will try to suck you in and empty your wallet. They offer the family crest, a coat of arms, to give you a list of people that you might be related to. Avoid them like the plague.

Search on the internet using search engines like Google, Yahoo or other programs by typing in the surname of your ancestor, then the town or county they lived in and then the word “genealogy”. You never know when someone has published a book or put some information online which may cover your ancestors. If you have an unusual surname, type in the surname and the word “genealogy”.

Do another search by typing in your localities and the word “genealogy”. Explore the various local web sites where your ancestors lived to get a feel for what records are available that might be of help. There might be newspaper birth, marriage, obituaries, funeral notices; cemetery records compiled by the local genealogical or history society, special libraries or museums that have genealogical collections, local libraries that have genealogical collections, the contact for the local genealogical society. You never know what you might find.

Check Ancestry, Gen-web, Cousin Connect, the genealogical society for the area your ancestors are from, the FamilySearch Wiki.

Computer Programs

Genealogy can be done the old-fashioned way, with paper and pencil. However, once you get back more than two or so generations, it is easier to keep track of what you have discovered, researched and done on a genealogy program. There are many online programs such as Family Search and Ancestry, but it is recommended that you keep your work on your local computer, not in an online database. The programs that reside on your computer usually have much more flexibility on data searches, printouts and data recording. When you are ready to send your information into a genealogical organization such as Family Search or Ancestry for collaboration with others, it is fairly easy to do so. Using other programs, it is possible to download much of the same information from such organizations.

For those who are cheap, or computer challenged

Go to the Roots Magic web site and download “Roots Magic Essentials” or download a copy of Personal Ancestral File (PAF) from the web. PAF may be an old program but it is still very powerful. There are over 50 tutorials on the Roots Magic web site to teach you how to use the program. There are similar tutorials for PAF Learn to use the program. If you don't know how to use it, then it is worthless.

Original Research

Once you have done the above, you can graduate to the next level of genealogy which is – **Original Research**

All of the stuff done before the topic “Original Research” is work done just to make sure you are not reinventing the wheel by researching that which has already been researched. After all, do you want to waste what time and money you have left redoing that which has already been done?

Let's assume that you have contacted the cousins, searched the data bases, contacted the genealogical societies, entered the data in a computer program and done all of the above recommended items.

Warning: Just because you found it in a book or on the net doesn't mean it is correct. People make mistakes, guesses, assumptions and sometimes stretch the truth. Unless the information is properly documented, check the data before you publish it, enter it into a data base or share it with another.

Now you have to check the information you have been given to see if it is accurate. If a person has listed the film number, volume and page of a primary document for the source of the genealogical information and you do some checks and find that they are accurate, you should be able to trust their work. If they did not do that level of documentation, you need to check their work and document the work to the film, volume, page and entry level. Books containing genealogical information which do not document their source to that level are considered secondary sources and you cannot trust them.

The old saying is, “Garbage in, garbage out”.

Using the information that is on the pedigree chart you have filled out, continue your research and document your information. If you live in the US, traveling to Germany might be a little expensive. Go to the Family Search catalog. Type in the name of the town your ancestors came from in the place search. Order the film(s) that will help you verify or research your ancestors. On the average, it takes about three weeks to get the film in once it is ordered. It will be available at the FHL for about a month. If you need help reading the films, FHL staff and other patrons will help you do your research.

Real Life Examples -

I asked my Great Aunt Helen if she knew any genealogy. She was the baby of the family born in 1898. Since she was the baby, she was not involved with the “adult” business. She did know however that her second cousin Clara was doing “something”. She gave me her cousin's address and I phoned Clara. Clara was a retired school teacher in Wrightstown Wisconsin. She had written a book about all of the descendants of Jacob Kettenhoffen who came to the USA in 1863. I was listed in the 7th generation in that book. She gave me a copy. It cost me a total of three phone calls. It had birth, marriage and death dates and places. Not bad huh!

I continued to ask Great Aunt Helen if she knew more. Again, she was the “baby”. She referred me to her second cousin Heinrich Knuppel. He didn't know much so he referred me to his brother Anton, who again didn't know much. Anton referred me to his brother Otto who still lived in Germany. Otto was a soldier in WWI and had a head wound. He became a school teacher which in Germany in 1939 was a Civil Servant Job. He had to prove to the German SS that there were no Jews in his family to keep his job. Otto sent me four generations of genealogy certified by the SS. It cost me two phone calls, one letter, two international reply coupons (international postage stamps) and took about three weeks' time. Not bad huh!

Otto had met my grandfather Arens after WWI. My grandfather was on the American side shooting at the Germans and Otto was on the German side shooting at the Americans. My grandfather gave Otto's family money and food. Unknown to me and to repay that kindness, Otto put an ad in the Dortmund newspaper in the personal column. He asked for help finding any descendants of Otto Arens who came to the USA in 1892. Otto Arens, reading his Sunday paper, drinking his orange juice read that ad. He knew his genealogy because his father was also a civil servant during WWII. Again, Otto Arens sent me four generations of genealogy certified by the SS. Are prayers answered? Duh!

About two years after I started doing my genealogy, I asked my mother for help. She referred me to her sister Pat. Pat gave me a book of five generations of genealogy including pictures and documentation that she had done by a professional genealogist. Seems that the genealogist was a cousin of ours. Oh, I fell into the pig pen and came up with the diamond ring!

I was looking for information on the Brenzel line. I knew that they were from a small town in Wisconsin. I asked the long-distance operator if there were any Brenzel families in Wrightstown. There was one listed, George. I called George. Like most husbands, George knew nothing. However, George's wife knew that George's cousin was doing something. She gave me the phone number of his cousin's mother, Rose Endressi. Rose gave me the phone number of Gilbert Endressi. Gilbert had contacted the parish priest in Niederurff Germany and paid for a certified extract of the church records which covered seven generations of Genealogy. He sent me copies of it. Four phone calls, two hours of work, seven generations. Do you see the point of what I am trying to communicate?

I walked into the local library in Combined Locks, Wisconsin. I asked the reference librarian for help. She showed me the three books that they had on local history. None of them seemed to contain my families. I turned three pages and there was the picture of the great grandparents of my mother. The name had changed. The book, “Wooden Shoes West” contained nearly 150 years of the Van de Hei family. I was looking for Van de Hey. It listed almost all of the descendants of those who came to the Holland, Wisconsin area from three adjacent villages in the Netherlands. Am I good or is God blessing me? I will let you decide.

Urban DeBruin was just starting out in genealogy. He found my name on the Ancestral File as having the same grandfather. He sent me a letter asking for my help and asked me to share my research. I got on the internet, located his phone number and gave him a call.

Urban had downloaded the PAF computer program and was computer literate. I culled my information, generated a GEDCOM and sent it to him attached to an e-mail. The GEDCOM contained 1733 individuals and covered 10 generations of fully documented genealogy. It cost him one 39 cent stamp and he had the information within two hours of my opening his letter. That's the way it is supposed to work.

I knew that the village of Freudenburg was where some of my German ancestors came from. I typed "Freudenburg genealogie" on the Google search site and up came "Familienbuch Mettlach und Umgebung". The town Freudenburg was listed in the bibliography of the CD which was available for a price of 35 dollars. The CD contained the complete church directories of 24 villages in a certain area. Eight of those towns contained my ancestors. The author of the CD had indexed every family and individual in the 24 villages and when and where they were born, married and died. They were all linked together. I ordered the CD and checked the author's work. He was very accurate. I picked up between four and six generations from the CD. Several hundred individuals. \$35.00 was a reasonable price for all of the work I found.

I did the same for the town of Irsch and found that someone had indexed all of the church records of Irsch and put them on the internet.

The history teacher at the Catholic school in Little Chute, Wisconsin has all of his students fill out a four generation or more pedigree. He has done this for the past 13 years. He has put almost all of the information on the internet. My Dutch ancestors settled the Little chute area. The internet site has over 300,000 individuals on it as well as 15 generations of my genealogy. I have used that site to flesh out.

Shared by:

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Dick volunteers at the Family History Center and has offered to assist you with your family search.