



Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc.

Member of Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations Inc.
and Federation of Family History Societies (UK)

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Starting Your Family History Research

Genealogy is the charting of a family's descent through a chronological record of births, marriages and deaths; in short it is the bones of your research. It consists of a record of names, dates, places and relationships through which one can compile a **Pedigree Chart** or a **Family Tree**. This pamphlet will help you find these facts, record them and store them systematically.

In the process of your research you will amass a lot of other information, which will fill out the lives of the people you are researching and the conditions under which they lived. This is the flesh and bones of your research. It changes your ancestors from a set of facts into real, live, interesting individuals and is the material of *Family History*. You should file away any information you discover, no matter how unimportant it may seem at the time. Later it may prove to be the piece of information you need to fill in part of your jigsaw.

You do not require any special skills for family history research, but there are certain basic rules that you will find helpful. Some of the basic ones are listed below, but there are also many genealogical guide books which will help you learn more.

Ground Rules

1. To start with write everything in pencil. Not only does this make it easier to correct mistakes but in libraries and record offices you will only be allowed to use a pencil.
2. Always work from the known to the unknown. Start with yourself and work back to your parents, grandparents and so on. A systematic approach brings best results and saves time in the long run.
3. Prove each step as you go. Unless you do this you may finish up following a line of descent that is not yours and waste a lot of time.
4. Be methodical. Keep a record of all sources of information. When you make a duplicate of a permanent record make sure you include a reference to the source.

5. Set up a filing system that makes it easy to store your data and to retrieve it. There is no "right way" for this, only one that is "best" for you. It will depend on your needs and the facilities you have at your disposal. It is a good idea to have a separate working, and storage file.
6. Store your original documents, photographs, etc, in a safe place where they will not deteriorate. Acid free albums, acid free glue and copy safe plastic envelopes should be used. Never use sticky tape! If you want copies for working or display purposes, the best course of action is to make one photocopy and then use that as your "master" copy.

There are two internationally recognized forms for recording research data. Samples of these are available on the following links. They are:

A Pedigree Chart: This charts the direct line of descent of a family. You should start by entering all of the data you know alongside the headings on the chart. Remember to write everything in pencil to start with. Ink it in after confirming the accuracy of your data. Also record all dates as, e.g., 11 Jan 1885 (i.e., day in figures, months in letters, years in figures, in full). This avoids ambiguity with Americans or Europeans whom you may contact, as they tend to write the same date as 1/11/1885 (i.e. month, day, year). *Blank Pedigree Charts are available to purchase at the WAGS Library.*

A Family Group Sheet: This records all the basic data on a family group (father, mother and children). There is also room on the form to record the source/s of your information. When filling in this form the same rules apply as with the Pedigree Chart. *Blank Family Group Sheets are also available at the WAGS Library.*



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Sources of Information

The sources of information for the data needed to start filling in your charts are:

1. Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates.

You will probably have some of your own, possibly some of your parents' and even your grandparents' certificates. They will vary in the amount of information they contain depending on where and when the event was registered.

In Australian States registration started around 1850, England and Wales in 1837, and later in other parts of the British Isles. Details of what you can expect to find on certificates and information on Civil Registration commencement dates in Australia and overseas countries are available in the WAGS Library.

For some places there are indexes on microfiche, microfilm or CD, which you can access to ensure that you are requesting the right certificate. Some Registry Offices reduce the price if you can quote the Index Number. For information on where these indexes are held, the cost of certificates, and addresses to which to send your request, contact WAGS Library, either in person or by phone.

When purchasing a certificate always request a "Full Certificate", not an "Extract". Don't be surprised at minor discrepancies in ages or in the spelling of names. The information recorded is only as accurate as the knowledge of the person who supplied it. Always check to see who the informant was.

You can find out where to obtain certificates for Australian States on our Genealogy Links page at: <http://wags.org.au> look under the Birth, Marriage & Death Category, and then for the State you are interested in.

2. Information from Relatives and Family Friends.

These people can often provide you with information on your family and may even have photographs, family Bibles, letters, diaries, newspaper cuttings of births, marriage and death notices, obituaries, social notes, accident reports, and the like.

Interview these people personally if possible, otherwise write to them. It is a good idea to offer them some of your knowledge of the family first, to break the ice. Have a look at some of the literature available on basic interviewing techniques before your visit. Take notes while you are there, and ask if they would agree to you taping the interview, and offer them a copy of the written notes from the interview.

3. Cemetery Records and Monumental Inscriptions.

Many of these have been transcribed and are available in microfilm, microfiche, CD and book form. Enquire at the WAGS Library, as we have a large collection.

When you have documented all this newly gathered information, and proved what you can, you are ready to find out about the wealth of other information that is available locally to help you continue your research.

What next? We recommend that you attend one of the many educational courses that the Society offers. These are designed to cover the various stages of your genealogy research, there is something for everyone. Come along and learn. Course details, times and venues appear in the WAGS journal, "*Western Ancestor*"; they can also be obtained from the front desk at the Western Australian Genealogy Society Library, or, have a look on our website at: <http://wags.org.au> under Education & Courses.

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