



Unearthing Your Roots

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When families are born and raised in the same region for centuries, lineage remains intact. But in North America, a cultural melting pot of immigrants and native peoples, detailed genealogy is a mystery for many. Television series such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* on CBS and *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* on PBS use well-known celebrities to showcase the process of discovering ancestry. Fortunately, you don't have to be a star to research your personal genealogy. Pay tribute to Family History Month this October by taking steps to uncover your past.

Start at Home

When you embark on this historical journey, start by talking to the older generations in your family. Matriarchs and patriarchs hold a wealth of information and anecdotal stories that you'll never find on the Internet. Conduct and record informal interviews and ask questions about ancestors, names, birthdates, accolades, and interesting stories. Later, transcribe the interviews so they won't be lost with technological transitions. Additionally, look for clues and stories in old letters, journals, legal documents, newspaper clippings, photographs, or a family Bible.

Fill in the Blanks

Once you've compiled all the relevant notes, dates, and names from your living relatives, take to the Web for more information. There are hordes of websites dedicated to researching family history, but the top dog is Ancestry.com. Many other sites are powered by Ancestry.com or point to it because it boasts an incredibly comprehensive database of digitalized historical records, including military draft cards, ships' passenger lists, death and birth indexes, original census records, and many others. Find historical photos uploaded by distant relatives, connect with relatives you didn't know existed, and, as you research, store your discoveries in the online family tree.

Other sources for informative records are the US National Archives and Records Administration, local libraries, historical societies, religious institutions, the Daughters of the American Revolution Library, the Library and National Archives Canada, the Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island Foundation, and even cemeteries. If you know what you're looking for in a specific region or city, you may find more detail or surprising stories from a local source. Keep in mind that some records might be lost in translation, so try searching for alternative spellings or nicknames. If your ancestors came through New York's Ellis Island, San Francisco's Angel Island, or Nova Scotia's Pier 21, it's likely that names were Americanized or misspelled, or nationalities may have intentionally been changed to gain entrance.

FamilySearch, sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is a viable resource no matter your religion. The organization offers online and in-person access to its genealogical database. Visit locations for help from professional research consultants, to look through microfiche, or to take classes on researching genealogy. Searching through records will only reveal so many generations of history, however. These leads may start, for example, when your ancestors came to North America or

when records started to be kept. For history older than this or from another country, consider taking a research trip or hiring a professional genealogist for deeper digging.

Genetic Testing

If you are searching for your ancient global origins, consider DNA testing. A simple saliva sample is all it takes to have your DNA tested and analyzed to help trace maternal or paternal bloodlines. Genetic testing services such as 23andMe, African Ancestry, and Family Tree DNA offer packages ranging from \$150 to \$600 depending on the extent of testing. Roots aren't always tied to genetics, though. If you are adopted or identify with a family whom you aren't genetically related to, DNA testing might not be important—or it might be exactly the diagnostic tool you need to connect with blood relatives or reveal medical predispositions. Regardless of genetic relation, understanding your family history helps develop connections to the past that ultimately might shape your future. *Written by Maresa Giovannini. YHL*

If you love the idea of displaying a family tree but an arbor illustration doesn't mesh with your decor, here are a few alternative presentations:

Map

If your family boasts an eclectic mix of ethnicities, pay tribute to them with a framed world map. Make black-and-white copies of photographs of relatives and affix them to their countries of origin.

Silhouettes

A chic silhouette is appropriate for any generation. Trace photos of your family members onto black paper, cut them out, and mount them onto the background of your choice to create one-of-a-kind portraits. Put faces to the names of ancient ancestors with stock male and female silhouettes. Then, frame and display your creations linearly on a wall or layered on a picture ledge or mantel.

Fan Chart

Take advantage of the free template at www.marthastewart.com to create a family tree fan chart. Use calligraphy or your personal writing style to fill in the names and birthdates of family members.