



My topic for this month is genealogy. I've put together a number of links and a few PDF worksheets that are sure to get you excited about diving into your own family adventure.

My own intro into genealogy began with a simple 8" x 10" family portrait. The process resulted with writing my debut novel: LISTENING TO HER OWN VOICE. You can get it on Amazon for only \$8.99. The genre is fiction, because of the dialogue in the book.

Listening to Her Own Voice begins in 1866 as the Kerker family immigrates to America from Switzerland. I advise any reader to read it as non-fiction, though, as it is the true account of my 2nd great aunt Rosa. When I first learned about the challenges she endured on her way to living a most exemplary life, I said to myself: *This is a book and I have to write it!* Truth be told, I actually jumped out of my chair as I said it.

I believe everyone has an ancestor that they can get as excited about as I did and pass on their inspiring story to future generations. The year it took me to write the book gave me twelve months of endless joy as I learned about my protagonist, Rosa, her siblings and her parents. I felt as though the whole family had moved in with me for a year. Now that the book is published, I miss them.



This is my great grandpa Henry with my Grandma Monica and their five children. It's the very picture that catapulted me into genealogy. Isn't he handsome? In *Listening to Her Own Voice*, I write about Henry's work ethic, his sense of humor and his determination to get the family to the photographer to take pics for future generations (story conveyed to me by my 1st cousin). Thank you, Grandpa Henry!

Once I got my hands on this photo, I was off to the genealogical races. There was no turning back for me, and any genealogist will also tell you that once you start doing genealogy you'll never finish. There's an infinite number of people to track down. And I guarantee that you will find stories that'll blow your socks off. For example, my book includes a story about a ring that was handed down through the women on my maternal side. I weave the travels of the ring into my novel, and I know it is true because I am the current custodian of this fabulous ring! To view a picture of the ring, visit my blog on my website, www.colleenbooks.com.

As any genealogy instructor will tell their students, "Genealogy is not the act of finding and documenting dates of birth and dates of death, it is the stories." And thus, the journey begins. As a researcher, you've taken on the task of giving your ancestors a voice. This has great potential to be a source of pride for you as the genealogist. Have fun with it. You've taken on the task of puzzle master. Find joy in every reward, as they may be small and few and far between. But when that aha experience shows itself, you'll be jumping out of your chair with excitement.

Let's Begin:

Put on your thinking cap, grab a pen, a spiral notebook, and jot down where you might begin researching your family:

1. Find out if there's a local genealogy society in the state where your ancestors lived.
 - a. Make contact. Be friendly and introduce yourself.
 - b. Visit them and browse through their shelves for submissions of family histories provided by other patrons.
 - c. There'll be a library filled with useful books. You can check the books out if you are a member. Becoming a historian is a natural outcome of your research. History is what makes your work interesting.
 - d. There may be free webinars or lectures available.
 - e. You may get lucky and find that someone has already completed research on your own family. This in and of itself could be thrilling.
 - f. As you finish each project, you might want to gift your work to the society for some lucky person looking into your family. Pay it forward. It will be greatly appreciated.
 - g. Before I moved out of state, I turned over everything I'd done to the local genealogy society. Maybe someday someone will find my pictures, documents, and book and be grateful for the work I'd completed.
2. Locate the state history library.
 - a. The librarians at these facilities are there to assist in any way they can.
 - b. Inquire about mental health & substance abuse records, if applicable, and ask about the state's laws as to when you can access them. For example, in Minnesota, a relative may not access the records until 75 years have passed since the last date of discharge.
 - c. Look at the timeline of your ancestor's life. What historical events did s/he witness? What inventions were just becoming available?
 - d. Understand the dress of the time your ancestor lived in. For example, I found an historical site in Wisconsin that had published a brochure about fifty years of Wisconsin wedding fashion. It was a delightful read, and just what I was looking for at the time.
3. Civil War records
 - a. <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war>
 - b. <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/resources>
 - c. <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers.htm>
 - d. https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Union_Casualty_Records
 - e. There are resources too numerous to mention in this article, but as I wrote earlier, look for books at the historical society where your ancestor lived, and there's very likely an expert person or book who's authored a book about the civil war, the draft, volunteer army, or list of substitutes at your fingertips.

Here's a sampling of resources online:

Benefits of **Ancestry**: Ancestry is a great tool to build your family tree. Others will have access to it. Be watchful, though, because others might step in and change names. However, you'll be able to notify that individual and ask that they change their errors. Once you enter your ancestors name, a leaf might appear, which leads you to additional information on Ancestry. I find this quite exciting because you'll be led to others members lists and maybe even documents and picture. You have to be careful, however, because the other info may be incorrect. Their annual cost is currently \$229.00 per year. This adds up over a ten-year period! You could save money by spending more time in one year researching like crazy, but a word of caution it can be truly exhausting and it takes time to absorb and sift through all of the info. Plus, it takes time before others on Ancestry to add their tidbits too. It takes time to connect with others, and this cannot be rushed.

Newspaper.com is a great source to sift through US newspapers, and they are adding newspapers daily. Finding articles about your ancestors bring you their stories, and often very exciting stories at that. For example, I learned about a shoot-out at a saloon where my 2nd great uncle died. He was the one who was slower on the draw. Officials did not charge the other man, as it was determined by the officials that my uncle had the reputation as a 'hard-knocker.' You can subscribe directly to Newspapers.com only. They offer 6-month memberships and monthly options – the price is about **\$8 a month for basic and \$20 for plus** – with some pretty steep discounts for some 6-month memberships (\$45 and \$75 respectively).

Because of my Ancestry membership, I was able to meet and obtain a mountain of information from 3rd cousins plus view their trees on both my maternal and paternal sides. I actually found the Wills for three of my family members from 1800's – this was a real find, and I don't know where else I might have come across any of them.

The County courthouse offices have librarians who are extremely helpful. Libraries, historical societies and some court houses also have computers that visitors can use. Call ahead to inquire whether an appointment is required. Some of the best advice I ever heard was to be gracious and friendly to librarians. If you call to any office for historical information, be friendly but also be persistent. On any given day, the person answering the phone at the library or courthouse may not be inclined to be very helpful. That's fine. Call back a week or two later, and if a different person answers the phone, s/he may be friendly and more than willing to offer guidance.

Invariably, you'll realize that a trip to the county where your ancestors lived in the USA will likely be necessary. If you decide to make the trip, thorough preparation will be required. I find it hard to get organized AFTER I arrive at the courthouse, so organize your thoughts and what documents you need (including full names, DOB, DOD, address, etc.) before you leave your home.

Attached are forms / outlines I've prepared and used before I head off to the historical library, church, or county site. What available information is free varies from state to state. If you're unable to find a death certificate, for example, and are informed that you have to go to the county office where your ancestor died, you may find that the charge is \$16.00. Once you pay for this service, be prepared to be told that they cannot find the requested document. And because they did the research, they'll keep your check.

Once you've identified a particular ancestor, it is advisable to do a timeline about this individual. Develop a story line of his/her life beginning with date of birth. Add in places, births of siblings, marriages, disease, immigration, wars, politics. In other words, include anything notable. When doing genealogy, you become knowledgeable about history. What hardships did your ancestor face? The draft in the Civil War? The conditions of immigration? Landing on shore in America the first time? Timelines help genealogists make sense of things. Timelines are a uniquely important research tool. When done correctly, they can aid us in sorting out the "where," "when," and "why," of our ancestor's lives – shedding new light on the important events of those who came before us. And they can help us identify **holes and inconsistencies**, making new possibilities for research visible for the first time.



Courthouse Research
Preparation.pdf



Genealogy Timeline
Chart.pdf

<https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/passenger-lists.html>. A word about passenger lists: You'll become a detective as you comb through passenger lists. Your ancestor may well have been on the ship, but name is misspelled, age reported doesn't fit. There may be many explanations for this, so persistence is key. For example, the passenger may have lied about age, or the person completing the form may have guessed at the age.

All that said, if you're only just beginning, and just want to 'test the waters' without a big outlay of cash, there are several useful sights that require a minimum fee or are free. Just keep in mind you might not be able to establish your personal family tree on the sight or connect to others. Other sights, including newspaper.com, will offer a 7-day free trial.

<https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/free-resources/websites/>

The National Genealogical Society, accessed by the link above, provides a listing of several free online resources.

FamilySearch. <https://www.familysearch.org/> FamilySearch is the world's largest free genealogy website with a global index of millions of births, marriages and deaths,

plus millions of UK parish records and indexes to workhouse records, land tax assessments, school records, court books, manorial records and more.

<https://www.cyndislist.com/us/> An active website, with links and categories and an option to join her mailing list. Cyndi's list is a favorite of Jennie Gunther, genealogist, who I've interviewed for this month's newsletter.

The most welcome and long-awaited news is the availability of the 1950 census. How can I explore the 1950 Census for free?



Search the 1950 Census at **1950Census.Archives.gov**

On April 1, 2022, the 1950 Census was released, and users can access it for free through a dedicated website at 1950census.archives.gov. This population census is the 17th decennial census of the United States.

The following is a list of free resources on the Internet in excel:



Genealogy-Online-Resources2.xlsx

Additional bits to tickle your enthusiasm:

Meet fellow genealogists. They're as excited about your detective work as you are. There's always a convention, a conference, meetup groups, Osher Lifelong Learning groups available to senior adults, Source books, webinars and neighbors who've been bitten by the genealogy bug. Communicating with others helps to keep you motivated in addition to keeping you informed. Others will be happy to hear about your progress. An unfortunate experience is finding out that your children, siblings, cousins are not interested in genealogy, and this is often talked about in genealogy group meetings. My mother wrote to her aunt about me when I was only fourteen, bemoaning my lack of interest in my ancestry. I have my great aunt's letter in response to her, trying to console my mother that perhaps some day I'll come around. Well, .. I did. I wrote a

book born of pure inspiration and excitement. My mom passed away in 2008 before I started my genealogical journey. I hope I done good, mom.

And finally, remember to keep a sense of humor about being a genealogist. Here's a few gems to keep you smiling:

1. "My ancestors are so hard to find, they must have been in a witness protection program!"
2. Eventually, all genealogists come to their census.
3. Genealogists: The only people who are excited to read obituaries.
4. "Done! Everything in the family tree has been found and is completely organized" — said no genealogist. Ever.
5. Genealogist: Disturbs the dead and irritates the living.
6. "I'm more interested in what happened in 1816, than what's happened in 2016"
7. Only a genealogist views a step backwards as progress.
8. "I used to have a lot of free time... then I discovered genealogy."