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## **Genealogy: Where Do I Begin?**

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### **TIPS AND WARNINGS ABOUT GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH**

- **Consider all records as wild cards. Odd information can show up in odd places.**
- **Find the complete paper trail. Do not talk yourself out of searching for a record by making assumptions or “stat” your way out of a search or because it is not online.**
- **Ancestral lines (grandfather, great grandfather), Collateral lines (uncle, aunt, cousin)-look at the paper trail of all people in the family. It may come down to just 1 record giving the original place name in the old country.**
- **Family archives are often deposited at the last location of the family, not the first.**
- **Look at the history of neighbors, especially with ethnicity-based communities.**
- **Critique online collections before searching on the site. What is included and what is not included. Date updated? Locations included? Dates included? How to find originals?**
- **Read descriptions of collections to understand why they were created and what they will hold about your ancestor.**
- **Ask for related collections when calling or talking to a Reference Librarian/Archivist.**
- **Prepare before you go into a research institution or record repository.**
- **Read your history. Immigration patterns and routes are often explained in general history books. National/State/County/Town histories. Timelines of Naturalization Laws could hold the reasons for your ancestor becoming a citizen. Look for online articles.**
- **Print and digitize all records. Keep digital copies in more than 1 location (hard drive and external hard drive)**
- **Bring flash drives everywhere.**
- **Family Tree Software: [www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com) for reviews**
- **Storing documents “in the clouds”**
- **Online family tree websites.**

## **DEFINITIONS OF RECORDS**

**Primary:** Created at the time of the event. Often these are geographically based.

**Secondary:** Reflect on the event, usually not created at the time. May lead to a primary document.

**Indexes, databases, abstracts and transcriptions:** Partial information. Demand and find the full record.

**Public records:** Original documents, usually created by government. Not always online. Courthouse, school, etc. Informant is not always given.

**Private records:** Original documents, usually by private organizations. Not many online. Church, cemetery, funeral home, etc.

**Author of the record:** Who created it and why? What other records were also created around an event?

## **PHASE 1**

- Organize what you already have collected.
- Know the source to validate each piece of information. Also note websites that gave information if you found it online.
- Put the information into a timeline to use the information more effectively. It also helps you identify the gaps in the stories. Compare timelines of people in the family who live in the same town. Question how they may have interacted. Families that lived near each other took pictures and noted family stories about each other. Track down these family lines! [www.ourtimelines.com](http://www.ourtimelines.com) and Google for Wisconsin timelines or United States timelines or Prussian timelines
- Evaluate what you already know and note it clearly and concisely to work with a librarian/archivist.
- Interview family members at this point only if you feel that you may not have access to them soon. Share photos and bring gifts. Record conversations. Bring timelines to help spur memories. Interview family members separately but also as a small group so they can feed off each other. Wait to interview if you can so you can be more organized.

## PHASE 2

Collect these basic records to get a core amount of information on **each person** in the family. One record of one sibling, aunt or uncle could give that important date, name or place that is missing from your ancestor's paperwork.

- **Vital records** (WHS, County Register of Deeds, State Bureau of Health, FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com)
  - Birth
  - Death
  - Marriage
  - Divorce, Adoption, Probate, Coroner
  - Online indexes and records ([www.Deathindexes.com](http://www.Deathindexes.com)) (An index is not a record!)
  - Social Security Death Index (send for SS Applications) (limited access)
- **Census records** (Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org, consider special schedules not online-Manufacturing, Agricultural, Mortality and State Censuses, FamilySearch.org to borrow film, also WHS)
  - Federal (1790-1940), population schedules, special schedules)
  - State (varies by state)
- **Newspaper articles** (WHS and Interlibrary Loan, NewspaperArchive through [www.Badgerlink.net](http://www.Badgerlink.net), [www.GenealogyBank.com](http://www.GenealogyBank.com), [www.WorldCat.org](http://www.WorldCat.org), [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov), [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com))
  - Obituaries
  - Marriage announcements and anniversaries
  - Birth announcements
  - Stories
  - Try more than 1 newspaper