

TRACKING PEOPLE

Get prepped

- Start at your local library. Even if you're only investigating a person, and not an entire family tree, there are many great books on genealogy with useful research information.
- Birth and death records are a great place to start searching. You can find where to send your requests for birth, death or marriage information online (www.health.state.pa.us/HPA/obd.htm), or may complete the search yourself at the municipal archive.
- You may learn a lot just from basic documents such as the birth, death and marriage records. Be open minded to the idea that your name may have been spelled differently in the past, or your dad's birthday and your parent's wedding date turn out to be only six months apart.
- Search out local historians and the local historical and genealogical societies. They often have an encyclopedic knowledge of local history (or know the person who does). They can provide clues and insights you never dreamed of.

Get researching

- Know the history of the time your researching. An understanding of local culture and climate can offer many clues as to your ancestor's experience.
- The census for the years 1790-1930 is available for research purposes. The National Archives have detailed instructions (www.archives.gov/research_room/genealogy/census/using_census_microfilm_catalogs.html) on how to best do a census search. Read up online, then find where the microfilmed records are located nearest to you. For a list of libraries with the census information, see our "More Leads" list.
- In order to do a search, you must know the state, county and town of the person you're researching. You must also know the surname of the head of the household.

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- The National Archive has an online listing of National Archive centers near you. While these holdings may be more limited than the Washington, D.C. headquarters, regional archives are also great sources for local information.
- When you know a little, you can find out a lot: there are bankruptcy files to review, court files, homestead land grants, shipping lists and veteran's information, just to mention a few of the options.
- Consider joining a local genealogical society if your research is localized. they'll have good tips and a great understanding of the records available.
- Stymied? Many archive facilities offer genealogy research workshops. For a list of one's given by the National Archives across the country, click here http://www.archives.gov/research_room/genealogy/.