

# INVOLVE YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY IN FAMILY HISTORY

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## Introduction

You are not alone in doing family history. Your great-grandparents could have hundreds of direct descendants. Chances are that some, and possibly many, of their descendants have an interest in family history and are willing to help you in your efforts to identify and preserve your family's heritage.

## Identifying Your Resources

Your first efforts will be to identify family members who might be interested in family history. Some of them may not be interested in doing research, but they may be willing to help you gather stories or contact other family members to ask for information. Some might have computer skills and may be willing to develop a family Web site. Others may be willing to donate money to help fund family research.

The first step is to write down the names of family members. Then identify what skills or resources they might have that could be helpful. Your list might look something like the following example:

Mom	She keeps in touch with family members. She knows everyone.
Dad	He loves to tell stories about family members.
Brother Tom	He's fascinated with the idea of gathering physical and medical information from his cousins and other relatives.
Uncle Jim Larsen	He works with computers, scanners, and other digital equipment.
Uncle David Bowen	He's willing to donate generously to worthy causes.
Cousin Pattie Jacobs	She enjoys writing.
Aunt Theo Bickford	She's an expert scrapbooker.
Cousin Mary Samuels	She develops web pages for the Internet.
Cousin Peter Jacobs	He's a technical writer.
Uncle Karl Simmons	He has an interest in family history but doesn't like to do research.

**Expert Tip:** Finding a phone number and address of someone is fairly simple. If you know the town or the state people live in, you can use the Internet to find them. Web sites can help you quickly and easily find people in many countries.

## Sharing What You Have

Share what you have with the people on your list. If they don't already have an interest in family history, they may quickly develop an interest when they see what has already been done. Let them read stories and see pictures. Help them see the bigger picture of the value of family history. Once they see interesting artifacts relating to their family history or hear family history stories, they will see how serious you are and may become motivated enough to help you.

## Asking For Help

Don't be shy about asking for help, but be sensitive to people's individual circumstances. They may have a desire to do help, but present circumstances may now allow for time or financial assistance. They may respond readily to a simple request for help from you, especially if your request is specific. Help them see that there are many ways they can help and that their contributions will make a difference. Use the list you've created to coordinate their talents and resources. Guide them as they help you. Their success in a simple task might lead to a desire to be more involved. Be willing to trade labor. You could mow someone's yard or tend their children while they do something that you need to have done.

## Projects for Family Members

### Ask Family Members to Record the Data You Find

One simple thing you can do to involve family members, especially younger family members, in family history is to ask them to record the information from the records that you find. They could fill out family group records or pedigree charts or enter information into a computer (it will be important to have someone proofread the works to be sure that the information has been recorded correctly). These tasks will introduce them to the process of recording information and will help them become familiar with family history software. Furthermore, looking at old records often helps people develop an interest in the lives of ancestors. With this increased interest, they may want to help you find other records.

### Coordinate Research with Several Family Members

When several family members are interested in doing research and have the skills to do it. If you have several people willing to research, your job may be to coordinate research assignments. The key to coordinating research is to make sure that family members have assignments appropriate to their skills and that they fulfill their assignments. Be sure that assignments are clearly defined before you both agree.

### Create a Family Newsletter

Consider creating a family newsletter. Get others involved. Be creative. A well-written newsletter is a wonderful way of keeping families together. Newsletters can include stories about an ancestor or share research successes and assignments. You might have an entire issue dedicated to family history or a regular feature on family history.

The following Web sites and books can help you create a family newsletter:

<http://www.newsletterinfo.com/>

<http://greatfamilynewsletters.homestead.com/>

Jeanne Rundquist Nelson, *Absolutely Family! Editing and Publishing Family Newsletters*, Family Times Publishing (2000).

Elaine Floyd, *Creating Family Newsletters: 123 Ideas for Sharing Memorable Moments with Family and Friends* (1998).

### Create a Family Web site

A family Web site is a wonderful way of involving family members who have computer skills. Let them design, create, and maintain the Web site, while you and others contribute the information. The Web site will bless anyone searching for information on your family, and it will give your extended family members a presence on the Internet. It might also encourage them to contribute information to the Web site. By posting interesting facts;

pictures of people, places, and artifacts; and so on, you might encourage extended family members to take an interest in the family's history.

For help creating a family Web site, refer to the following:

<http://www.myfamily.com/>

<http://www.tribalpages.com/>

### **Organize a Family Reunion**

Most families love to get together. Discuss the possibility of organizing a special family reunion to discuss the history of the family. You could ask family members to research an ancestor or an ancestral family and make a presentation at the reunion. Invite family members to bring photos, artifacts, or other significant items that family members might find interesting. At the reunion, you could discuss strategies for researching specific family lines. Recordings of interviews and oral histories with family members could also be shared.

For help in organizing a family reunion, refer to the following resources:

<http://www.familyreunion.com/resources>

<http://family-reunion.com/>

### **Write a Family History Book**

A family history book is a major undertaking, but it might provide a wonderful opportunity to involve extended family members. You might ask them to contribute information on their own family or research information on a specific ancestral family. (Refer to lesson 5 in this series of lessons for more ideas and information on how to write a family history.)

### **Gather Oral Histories**

Recording or transcribing oral histories is an excellent assignment for someone who loves to talk with older family members or for someone who is a good typist. Not a lot of training or equipment is required to record or transcribe these histories. A good quality tape recorder or video camera, batteries, tapes and a curious mind are all that is needed. Many older family members love to talk about their lives to younger family members. These older family members are usually quite honored to have someone in the family interested in what happened to them in their earlier years. Most of these oral histories are full of wonderful family information and can be a great legacy for future generations. (Refer to lesson 2 in this series of lessons for more ideas and information on how to record an oral history.)

### **Start a Family Research Fund**

Some family members are so involved in their careers or in raising their families that they have little time to help with any aspect of family history work. Yet they do have an interest in learning about their families and in preserving their family's heritage. These people might be happy to make a financial contribution that would help finance research projects or purchase family photographs or artifacts that have been found. Or they might be willing to help finance the publication of a family history. Do not be shy about sending a letter to the entire family, inviting all family members to contribute to this effort. You might consider asking for an annual membership fee or for a one-time contribution toward a specific project. A request for financial assistance is an excellent way to get some family members involved and to finance family history research projects.

### **Use Collaboration Software**

Many people record information about their family history in an electronic database that they store on their own computer. Unfortunately, sometimes it can be accessed only on that computer. Collaboration software allows many people to see and contribute to your information. This marvelous tool helps extended family members work together on their family lines.

Some examples of excellent collaboration software can be found at the following sites:

[http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Share/Preserve/frameset\\_preserve.asp](http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Share/Preserve/frameset_preserve.asp)

<http://www.ancestors.com>

## **Help Create New Family Artifacts for Future Generations**

Many family members have talents and skills that can be used to create family artifacts for future generations. These new family keepsakes could include scrapbooks, quilts, photograph collections, journals, letter books, and many other things.

## **Begin Creating a Family Health and Genetic Database**

Something that has become popular with the development of medical technology is the creation of family genetic databases. More and more, doctors use family health histories to help diagnose medical problems and to determine the potential for future problems. New software programs have been developed to help genealogists gather and use family medical information. Remember, however, that a person's medical information is extremely sensitive information. A database of this nature must be carefully managed with necessary approvals and with definite policies for handling and dispersing this information.

Below are some Web sites that will provide information about creating a family health and genetic database.

<http://www.kumc.edu/gec/pedigree.html>

<http://www.cyndislist.com/dna.htm>

[http://genealogy.about.com/od/dna\\_genetics/](http://genealogy.about.com/od/dna_genetics/)

## **Summary and Conclusion**

As you begin reaching out to family members, you may find others who share your passion to learn about deceased ancestors. You will make new friends who share with you a common interest and a common heritage. You will enjoy sharing in your search. Most importantly, you will gather information on your precious ancestors and their families before it is lost.

## Ideas for Teachers

### Lesson Plan

Tailor this lesson to the students in your class. Ask yourself:

- *If I were a student in this class, how would I best learn this material?*
- *What do I know about the students in the class that might influence how the material is presented?*
- *What should my students know before I present this material?*
- *Would students in the class understand better if certain parts of the lesson were presented first?*
- *How might I divide this material to make it more digestible in the class time allotted for it?*

### Teaching Goals

- *Help class members identify what resources are available in their family.*
- *Provide examples of activities and projects a person can use to help involve other family members*
- *Teach where a person can go to get additional information and examples of family history projects and activities.*

### Preparing to Teach

Bring paper and pens for students to use.

If you or another family member has examples of the activities mentioned in this lesson, bring the examples to class and show other class members what can be done.

Before you begin teaching this class, go over some of the activities and projects listed in this lesson. Visit some of the Web sites. See what they have to offer, and decide if there are any activities you'd like to focus on during your class.

### Classroom Activity

- *Pass out paper and a pen to each student.*
- *Have students think of five family members and write their names on the paper.*
- *Next to each name, have them write a talent or skill that the family member has that could help further the family history efforts of your family. In some cases, a person might have more than one skill, talent, or resource to share. Have class members list each skill, talent, or resource they come up with.*
- *Commit class members to contact someone on their lists this week and ask them if they would be willing to help in some way.*