

LEARNING MADE EASY



8th Edition

Genealogy

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Develop and organize
your research strategies

Use social networking and online
tools to find family members

Share information on
genealogical sites

Matthew L. Helm
April Leigh Helm



Genealogy

8th Edition

**by Matthew L. Helm and
April Leigh Helm**

**for
dummies**[®]
A Wiley Brand

Genealogy For Dummies®, 8th Edition

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Introduction

There could be any number of reasons that you picked up this book. Maybe you've become curious about genealogy after watching a television show. Perhaps you've always been interested, but you didn't have the time to pursue it until now. Possibly, you're a student with a project to complete on your family history. No matter what the reason, you probably need some help getting started, and we're here to help!

The amount of available family history resources has skyrocketed in the 19 years since we wrote the first edition of this book (boy, are we getting old!). This is an exciting time because scanned images of key records are coming online at an unprecedented rate. Also, technologies such as DNA testing have been refined and are now invaluable tools that complement evidence from paper records.

Although the technology and amount of material available has changed over the years, you still need a solid foundation for your research. We've written *Genealogy For Dummies* to give you the necessary resources and advice to balance online sources and DNA evidence with traditional research to ensure you are successful every step of the way.

If you're a repeat reader of *Genealogy For Dummies* (previous editions were known as *Genealogy Online For Dummies*), we think you'll be pleased to find all sorts of new and updated information, including how to use social networking for family history purposes and expanded coverage of DNA testing methods. And, if you're brand new to genealogy, we think you'll be equally pleased with the easy-to-understand directions and information about the resources that await you.

At this point, we feel obligated to give you a couple of warnings or reminders. First, genealogy is an addictive pursuit and a long journey. You might find yourself staying up all hours of the night chasing down that elusive ancestor. Please don't blame us if you start falling asleep at work due to your genealogical research routine. Also, on a more serious note, keep in mind that online research and DNA testing are merely two tools among others for finding information about your family. To thoroughly research your genealogy, you must use a number of tools — many of which we talk about throughout this book.

Now that the disclaimers are out of the way, put the kids to bed, let your pets out, and boot up that computer. Your ancestors are just waiting to be found!

About This Book

If you type in the word *genealogy* into a popular search engine like Google, you'll see millions upon millions of pages that mention the subject. In fact, at the time we wrote this, such a search returned 151,000,000 results. With so many choices, it's impossible to know where to start without a map. That's what this book is all about. Although we don't cover every available resource, we do point you toward the sites and technologies that give you the best chance for researching many different family lines.

You're probably asking yourself how this book differs from the many other genealogy books on the shelf. Some books tell you only the traditional methods of genealogical research that have you traveling hundreds of miles to visit courthouses and archives in other states. Unfortunately, these books neglect the many opportunities that online research and new technologies provide. Other books that do cover online genealogy tend to group resources by how users access them (all link-based sites are listed together, all subscription sites are listed together, and so on), rather than telling you how you can integrate the many online resources to achieve your genealogical goal. As genealogists, we understand that researchers don't conduct searches by trying all the link sites, then all the subscription sites. We search by looking for people or places anywhere we can find.

Web addresses (or URLs) throughout the book are in a different font to set them apart from regular text. This way, you can easily see the sites we recommend that you visit to try something or read more online. Additionally, to make it easier for you to follow a set of specific instructions, when you should type something, **bold type** indicates what to type.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing and revising this book, we made a few assumptions. If you fit one of these assumptions, this book is for you:

- » You're psyched up and ready to jump into researching your family history with both feet.

- » You have at least a little computer experience, are now interested in pursuing your family tree, and want to know where and how to start.
- » You have a little experience in genealogy and some experience with computers, but you want to find out how to put them together.
- » You're an experienced genealogist or family historian and you're looking for ways to make your research more efficient.

You can have a lot of computer experience and be a novice to genealogy or online genealogy and still benefit from this book. In this case, you may want to dive right into the chapters about strategies for finding online resources.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you get the most out of this book, we created some icons that tell you at a glance whether a section or paragraph has important information of a particular kind.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon marks important genealogical stuff, so don't forget it.



TIP

When you see the Tip icon, you know we're offering advice or shortcuts to make researching easier.



WARNING

Look out! The Warning icon indicates something tricky or unusual to watch for.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that includes a description of how to use Helm's Genealogy Toolbox as well as discussions of genealogy myths, charts, and forms, among other things. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and enter **Genealogy For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

Depending on where you're reading this introduction, your next step is one of the following:

- » You need to go to the front of the bookstore and pay for this book so that you can take it home and use it.
- » If you've already bought the book and you're at home (or wherever), you can go ahead and start reading in depth, following the steps for the online activities in the book as they come along.

We don't expect you to read this book from cover to cover, in the order we wrote it. It definitely doesn't hurt our feelings knowing you may skip through the sections looking for only the information that you're interested in at a particular moment! Each section in each chapter can stand alone. If we think something relevant in another section can supplement your knowledge on a specific topic, we provide a note or reference telling you the other place(s) we think you should look. However, we tried hard to do this referencing in a manner that isn't obnoxious to those of you who choose to read the book from cover to cover. We hope we've succeeded in addressing both types of readers!

Now that we've explained a bit about the book, are you ready to get started and to become an official genealogist? You might be asking yourself, "What are the requirements for becoming an official genealogist?" You simply need an interest in your ancestry and a willingness to devote time to pursuing information and documents. It's time to dive in and start collecting the puzzle pieces of your family history and remember to have fun!

1

Getting Started with Genealogy

IN THIS PART . . .

Learn how to use information that you know about yourself to create a timeline of your life.

Discover how items around the house can jump-start your genealogical journey.

Locate large collections of records that you can use to find details on the lives of your ancestors.

Learn how census records can be used to track the movements of your ancestors every ten years.

Discover how you can use primary sources to find the details of your ancestors' lives.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Generating a family history timeline
- » Getting familiar with a genealogical database
- » Creating an online family tree
- » Entering data with an app

Chapter **1**

Beginning Your Ancestral Journey

Ready to dive into your family history? We certainly hope so! The best way to learn how to research is to jump right into it. We help you find the resources you need to be successful along the way.

If you're new to genealogy, we strongly suggest that you begin your journey with this chapter. (That's why we made it Chapter 1.) In this chapter, we walk you through the basics of recording genealogical data by starting with a very familiar person — you! We explore different methods of recording your research so you can see which way is best for you. Also, throughout the chapter, we provide some tried-and-true advice to keep you out of genealogical “hot water” in the future.

It's About Time(line)



TIP

Late one night, you decide to start looking for information on your great-great-grandfather Absalom Looney. After booting up your computer and connecting to the Internet, you put good old Absalom's name into your favorite search engine. Within a couple of seconds, a page appears telling you there are more than 51,000 results for Absalom Looney. How can you possibly sift through all the Absaloms

onscreen and find the one you're looking for? Well, before you go any further, we should let you in on a little secret: Instead of starting your journey with Absalom, it's better to begin with the information you have about someone you know better — yourself.

Regardless of what your spouse thinks, we're convinced that you know you best! You know your birth date, place of birth, parents' names, and where you've lived. (We recognize that not everyone knows all this information; adoptions or other circumstances may require you to do the best you can with what you know until you can discover additional information about yourself.) Knowing some things about yourself, it's time to start recording the events of your life and to start learning the good research skills that help you delve into the lives of others. An easy way to see your life at a glance is with a *timeline*. A timeline is a simple way to show the events of your life chronologically.

When working on your timeline, we recommend beginning with current events and working back through your life. This is the method you'll likely use when researching an ancestor. First, note the basics: the dates you were married, started a job, or moved to your current house or apartment. Then move back to your last residence, occupation, and so on until you arrive at your birth date. Make sure you include milestones such as children's birth dates, marriage dates, military service dates, educational experience, religious events, participation in organizations and sports, and other significant events in your life. If you prefer, you can cover your life by beginning with your birth and working forward to the present. Either way is fine, as long as you list all the important events.

You have several ways to store your timeline. Some people prefer to start with index cards, placing one event on each card. If you want to use a digital tool, you can store notes in a product such as Evernote (www.evernote.com) or Microsoft's OneNote (www.onenote.com). Of course, there are products specifically designed to help you create a timeline. If you are somewhat computer savvy and like to keep your timeline on your computer, you can use products such as Timeline Maker Pro (www.timelinemaker.com) or Tiki-Toki (www.tiki-toki.com/desktopapp). In the next section, we walk you through the use of an online timeline resource made specifically for genealogists.



REMEMBER

The timeline that you create now becomes an important research tool for your descendants who decide to conduct research about you in the future. So, when you have the time, turn that timeline into a full-blown autobiography. This way, your descendants not only know the facts about your life, but also gain some insight as to why you chose the paths you did throughout your life.

Crafting an online timeline

If you're looking for an online way to create a family history timeline, then Twile (<https://twile.com>) may be the answer. Twile allows you to put events and photographs on a timeline, including the details that might give context to the event, such as the location of the event, who was present, and so on. You can share your timeline with other members of the family and view a growing collection of historical timelines to see what events were going on at the same time as the events in your life (or your ancestors' lives).

Twile permits you to add unlimited milestones and photos and allows you to import information from a GEDCOM file (see Chapter 14 for more on GEDCOM) and from the FamilySearch website (we talk more about FamilySearch later in this chapter). Also, it allows you to share your timeline with the family. When you are a member of Twile, you will receive emails asking questions that prompt you to add other memories to your timeline.

To begin your free timeline on Twile, follow these steps:

- 1. Point your browser to <https://twile.com/>.**
- 2. Click the green Get Started button in the center of the resulting page, or click the green Register button in the top-right corner.**

Either path allows you to register for free.

- 3. Fill out the personal information form, including your first and last name, email address, and password.**

You can sign in using your Facebook account, if you have one and if you prefer to have the two applications linked. Also, make sure you read the terms and privacy policy so you know how your information will be used.

- 4. Click the Sign Up button.**

A page appears asking how you would like to start your timeline.

- 5. Select Create a New Timeline.**

A page appears to walk you through adding your first milestone — your birth.

- 6. Select your birth day, month, and year from the drop-down boxes. Check the appropriate box for your gender. You can optionally add your maiden name (if you select the female gender) and a photo of yourself. When finished, click the green Next button.**

A new page appears with questions about your father.

7. Fill in your father's name and birthdate, and indicate whether he is deceased. Then click the green Next button.

If you click on the Deceased? box, the date of death information appears. Also, if you prefer not to enter information on your father, you can click the Skip for Now link at the bottom of the page.

You guessed it: After submitting this page, you are taken to a page about your mother.

8. Fill in your mother's name, birthdate, and maiden name, and indicate whether she is deceased (and enter date of death, if applicable). Then click the green Next button.

You can also choose not to enter this information by clicking the Skip for Now link. A new page appears asking about the wedding of your parents.

9. Enter the date of your parent's wedding using the drop-down boxes and click the green Finish button.

If you don't know the date or prefer not to enter it, simply click the Skip for Now link. You are taken to the timeline page displaying the milestones that you just entered, with a pop-up window asking whether you'd like to take a look at the milestones you've entered so far.

10. Click on the green Take a Look button to view your timeline.

The timeline looks similar to the example in Figure 1-1. You may also see a message under the Add button prompting you to click it to add more milestones.

11. Click the Add button and select to Add a Milestone.

Twile walks you through the process of adding a milestone. For example, you might wish you add a significant birthday, your marriage information, or emigration information.

12. Click on the green Next button.

Twile updates your timeline.

Within a milestone, Twile gives you the ability to add extra information, such as location, photographs, and documents related to the milestone. For example, for the marriage milestone you can add information on the reception venue, best men, bridesmaids, and ushers. Be sure to use the words and documents features to provide evidence of the event and to cite your sources. To reach these features, try the following:

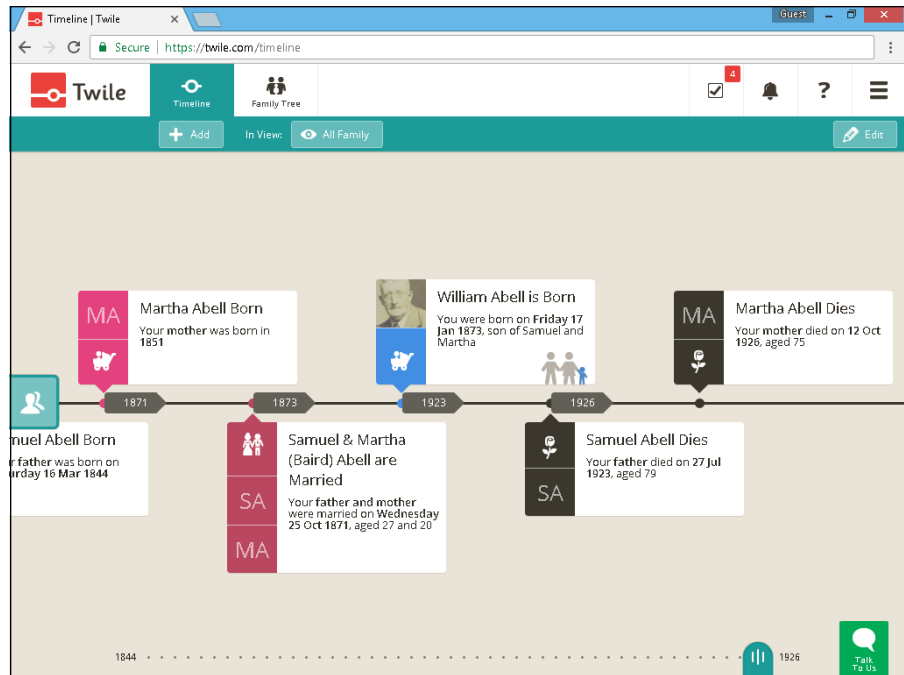


FIGURE 1-1:
The Twile
timeline.

1. From the Timeline view, click on a milestone.

If you are not already on the Timeline view, click the Timeline button in the upper-left corner of the screen. On the Timeline page, the milestones appear above and below the timeline. For example, if you entered your birthdate, a milestone titled [Your Name] Born should appear. Grab your birth certificate and click anywhere on the milestone to see the pop-up box with further information.

Before going any further — if you are concerned about privacy, please take a quick look at the last paragraph of this section — or use the information from the birth certificate of a relative who is deceased.

2. Select Add Birth Weight from the Extra Information section.

The Extra Information section is located on the left side of the screen. A pop-up box with pounds and ounces fields appears. The birth certificate probably contains your birth weight, so feel free to enter it.

3. Enter your birth weight in the two fields and click on the green Save button.

The weight now appears in the Extra Information section.

4. If you have a baby picture of yourself that you want to include, click on the Photos button.

The Photos button appears on the right side of the screen under the title Add Something. After clicking on the Photos button, a dialog box appears.

5. Select a photo on your computer to upload and click the Open button.

When it has uploaded, the photo appears on the screen.

6. If you would like to add anecdotal information about your birth, click the Words button.

The Words button appears on the right side of the screen under the title Add Something. A pop-up box appears asking you to add a memory or comment. You might want to add a story your mother told you about the day you were born, or provide information on historical events from that day.

7. Enter a memory or comment and click the green Save button.

The memory or comment appears on the page.

8. Select the Document button.

To add a copy of the birth certificate as evidence of the event, click the Document button. A dialog box appears.

9. Select a document on your computer to upload and click the Open button.

When it has uploaded, the document appears on the screen.

10. Click the Add a Location button.

The Add a Location button appears on the right side of the screen under the Add Something box. After you click it, a pop-up box appears.

11. Type a location into the box and click on a location match.

As you begin typing, Twile tries to match a location to the text you're typing. When a match appears, click on it. A map of the location then appears on the page. An example of a completed page appears in Figure 1-2.

You can choose to share milestones from Twile on Facebook. There are a lot of other features within Twile. We encourage you to experiment with adding and editing milestones to learn them.



WARNING

Please keep in mind that the information you are entering is being stored online in another location. Although Twile does its best to secure all the information uploaded on its site, it's still a good idea to carefully read the Privacy Policy. If you are concerned about privacy, consider only posting information that you wouldn't mind other people seeing if it were inadvertently disclosed.

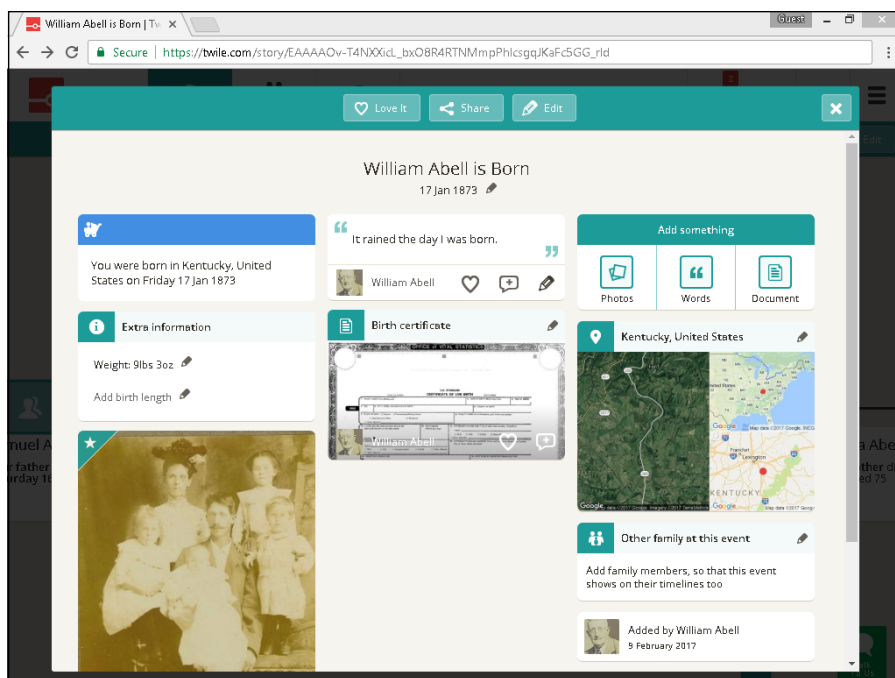


FIGURE 1-2:
A completed
milestone
information page.

Learning about Sources

As we just talked about using your birth certificate as evidence in the last section, now is a good time to talk about using sources in your family history research.

If you're like most people, you think you know a lot about yourself. If we ask you what your birthday is, you can tell us without batting an eye. But how do you know the birth date? You were obviously there, but you weren't in a condition to be a reliable witness, given that you were a newborn and most likely not fully aware of what was going on. This is where primary sources come in handy. Most likely, witnesses were present who helped create a record of the event.

Primary sources are documents, oral accounts — if the account is made soon after the actual event and witnessed by the person who created the account — photographs, or any other items created at the time of an event. Some primary sources include birth and marriage certificates, deeds, leases, diplomas or certificates of degree, military records, and tax records.

For example, a primary source for your birth date is your birth certificate. Typically, a birth certificate is prepared within a few days of the actual event and is signed by one or more witnesses to the birth.

The timeliness and involvement of direct witnesses makes the information contained on the record (such as the time, date, and parents' names) a reliable first-hand account of the event. It's important to recognize that just because a record was prepared near the time of an event doesn't mean that every fact on the record is correct. Typographical errors can occur or incorrect information can be provided to the creator of the record. Often, these errors are not caught when the record is created. For example, in the case of a birth certificate, new parents are preoccupied with things other than government paperwork during their stay at the hospital. When our youngest child was born, the birth certificate application was created and presented to us for signature. After reading it, we discovered three pieces of incorrect data. Fortunately, we were able to correct the birth certificate before it was submitted to the county clerk — even though the hospital clerk wasn't too happy about re-creating the document multiple times. So, it's always a good idea to try to find other primary records that can corroborate the information found in any record.

Secondary sources are documents, oral accounts, and records that are created some length of time after the event or for which information is supplied by someone who wasn't an eyewitness to the event. A secondary source can also be a person who was an eyewitness to the event but recalls it after significant time passes. You might encounter records such as a Delayed Report of Birth or an affidavit that contain a birth date that is based upon a person's recollection of when a birth occurred. Some of these records may have a witness who testifies that a birth occurred thirty years earlier.

Some records may be considered both primary and secondary sources. For example, a death certificate contains both primary and secondary source information. The primary source information includes the death date and cause of death. These facts are primary because the certificate was prepared around the time of death, and the information is usually provided by the medical professional who pronounced the person dead. The secondary source includes the birth date and place of birth of the deceased individual. These details are secondary because the certificate was issued at a time significantly later than the birth (assuming that the birth and death dates are at least a few years apart).

Secondary sources don't have the degree of reliability of primary sources. Often, secondary source information, such as birth data found on death certificates, is provided by an individual's children or descendants who may or may not know the exact date or place of birth and who may be providing information during a stressful situation. Given the lesser reliability of secondary sources, we recommend corroborating your secondary sources with reliable primary sources whenever possible.



Although secondary sources are not as reliable as primary sources, that doesn't mean secondary sources are always wrong or aren't useful. A good deal of the time, the information is correct, and such records provide valuable clues to locating primary source information. For example, in the case of a birth date and birthplace on a death certificate, the information provides a place and approximate timeframe you can use as a starting point when you search for a birth record.

You can familiarize yourself with using primary sources by collecting some records that document the milestones that you created in Twile in the previous section. Try to match primary sources for each event in your timeline. If you can't locate primary source documents for each event in your life, don't fret! If you remember an event and provide details about it on the timeline, it can serve as a primary source document — because you write it about yourself.

For additional information on primary sources, see *Using Primary Sources at the Library of Congress website for teachers* at www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources.

We should also mention *tertiary sources*. Tertiary sources are compilations of primary and secondary sources, such as articles found online or in encyclopedias or almanacs.

For comparisons of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, and examples of each, see James Cook University's overview of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources at <http://libguides.jcu.edu.au/scholarlysources>.

Or check out William Madison Randall Library's guide for identifying primary, secondary, and tertiary sources at https://library.uncw.edu/guides/primary_secondary_and_tertiary_sources.

For strategies on using primary sources online, see the Reference and User Services Association (of the American Library Association) page at www.ala.org/rusa/sections/history/resources/primarysources.

Using Genealogical Applications

You can use an online timeline to document your life (as described in the *It's About Time(line)* section earlier in this chapter), but a full-featured option is to use a tool of the genealogy trade from the beginning — a genealogical application. Over time, you'll collect a lot of information on your ancestors. You need something to help you keep everything straight and make sense of it all. Not only can a genealogical application keep track of the names, dates, and places of your ancestors, but it can also show you the gaps in your research and point you where to go next.

Nowadays, you encounter two different flavors of genealogical applications — those installed on your personal computer and those available on online family trees. Each type of application has pros and cons, so over the course of the rest of the chapter, we look at both types to illustrate them. Of course, you don't have to pick one or the other — you could be like us and use both kinds at the same time!

Both types of applications can store and manipulate your genealogical information. They typically have some standard features in common. For instance, most serve as containers for family facts and stories, have some reporting functions to see the data contained within them, and have export capabilities so that you can share your data with other family historians (or with another application). Each application may have a few unique features that make it stand out from the others. For example, one might have the capability to take information out of the application and generate online reports at the click of a button or integrate with data stored on subscription genealogical websites. Here's a list of some simple features to look for when evaluating applications:

- » **How easy to use is the application?** Is it reasonably intuitive how and where to enter particular facts about an ancestor?
- » **Does the application generate a view of its data so that you can take the next step in your research?** For instance, if you're partial to Family Group Sheets, does this application display information in that style?
- » **Does the application allow you to export and import a GEDCOM file? What other formats does it export to?** *GEDCOM* is a file format that's widely used for genealogical research. For more info about GEDCOM, see the sidebar in Chapter 14 titled "GEDCOM: The Genealogist's Standard."
- » **What are the limitations of the application?** Make sure the application can hold an adequate number of names, documents, and photographs (and accompanying data) to accommodate all the ancestors about whom you have information.

Keep in mind that your genealogy continues to grow over time.
- » **Can your current computer system support this application?** If the requirements of the application cause your computer to crash every time you use it, you won't get very far in your genealogical research.
- » **Does this application provide fields for citing your sources and keeping notes?** Including information about the sources you use to gather your data — with the actual facts, if possible — is an important and a sound genealogical practice. Take a look at the section "Learning about Sources," earlier in this chapter, for more information about the importance of citing sources and understanding how to do so.



REMEMBER