

HOWARD THE GENIE PRESENTS

THE GENEALOGY ADVENTURE

From Curious to Confident

A self-paced Getting Started experience for people who want to discover their family story—and do the research right.

Guiding idea: “If you’re going to do it, you’re going to do it right! But have fun and enjoy it!”

How to Use This Guide

- Move at your own pace. There are no grades, tests, or quizzes.
- Complete an Experience when you feel comfortable with the ideas and can try them yourself.
- Backtrack whenever you want. Re-read, repeat, skip ahead, or return to an earlier Experience.
- Keep this guide as your personal progress record.
- Use the websites as a toolbox, not a race. You do not need every subscription or every app.

1. Light the Lantern — Where Do I Begin?

Set a goal, choose a person or family line, and start with yourself and what you already know. Learn the basic language of genealogy: person, relationship, event, date, place, source, evidence, and record.

Try it: Write down yourself, your parents, and grandparents. Mark anything you know that needs verification.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

2. The Family Treasure Hunt — Start at Home

Discover the evidence hiding in plain sight: birth, marriage and death certificates; obituaries; Bibles; letters; photographs; school records; military papers; deeds; family files; and stories. Learn to interview relatives and capture memories before they disappear.

Try it: Find three family sources and record what each one tells you—and what questions it raises.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

3. Build Your Base Camp — Organize Before You Roam

Explore ways to record people, relationships, dates, places, sources, notes, images, and research questions. Compare paper charts, spreadsheets, genealogy programs, and online trees. Introduce Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, Family Tree Maker, RootsMagic, and other approaches without declaring one “right” system.

Try it: Choose a primary place to keep your working family tree and a backup method.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

4. Follow the Paper Trail — Understanding Genealogy Records

Learn what major record types can reveal and when to use them: birth, marriage, death, census, church, military, immigration/passenger, naturalization, land, probate, newspapers, obituaries, school records, and city directories.

Try it: Pick one ancestor and list three record types that could answer questions about that person.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

5. Census Sleuth — Read Between the Lines

Use the U.S. census as more than a list of names. Learn to extract household relationships, ages, occupations, birthplace, immigration clues, neighbors, addresses, and changes over time. Learn why every field can be a clue and why census information can be wrong.

Try it: Find one census household and build a mini timeline from what you see.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

6. Passport to the Past — Migration & Immigration

Follow people as they move. Explore passenger lists, border crossings, passports, naturalization, immigrant communities, and changing place names. Learn why an arrival record is a clue—not automatically proof of identity.

Try it: Trace one move in an ancestor's life and identify the next record you would search.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

7. The Address Book — Cities, Streets & Communities

Use city directories, maps, newspapers, local histories, church and cemetery records to place an ancestor in a real community. City directories can bridge census gaps and reveal addresses, occupations and household connections.

Try it: Find an ancestor in two different years and note what changed.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

8. The Evidence Test — Don't Believe Everything You Find

Learn the habit that separates a growing tree from good genealogy: evaluate evidence. Distinguish original from derivative information, direct from indirect evidence, clues from conclusions, and a record hint from proof. Introduce source citations, conflicting evidence, identity problems, and “same name” traps.

Try it: Take one fact in your tree and ask, “How do I know this?” Then attach or record the best evidence you have.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

9. Choose Your Compass — Ancestry, FamilySearch & the Rest

Understand the different philosophies and strengths of major platforms. Ancestry is primarily a personal-tree and records ecosystem; FamilySearch combines historical records with a large shared Family Tree; MyHeritage offers tree-building, records, matching and family-history tools; desktop programs can give you more local control. Learn how to move information between systems without losing sources or context.

Try it: Compare the same ancestor in two platforms. What agrees? What differs? Which source supports each claim?

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

10. Cemetery, Newspaper & Community Clues — The Fun Stuff

Go beyond the standard vital records. Learn how Find a Grave, obituaries, newspapers, cemetery photographs, local histories, yearbooks, and community records can add relationships, stories and context. Treat user-contributed material as a clue to investigate, not automatically as authoritative evidence.

Try it: Find one contextual record that tells you something about an ancestor's life beyond a date or name.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

11. Leave Breadcrumbs — Record, Cite, Preserve

Build a repeatable research habit. Learn what to save, how to cite a source, how to name files, how to preserve images, how to record negative searches, and how to keep a research log. Introduce the idea that another person—including future you—should be able to reproduce your work.

Try it: Create a simple citation and research note for one record you found.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

12. Your Next Adventure — Think Like a Genealogist

Bring everything together. Turn curiosity into a research question; plan the next search; gather evidence; evaluate it; record the conclusion; and preserve the trail. Learn when to pause, when to change direction, and when to ask for help. Finish by creating your own small research plan.

Try it: Choose one unanswered question and write a three-step plan for finding the answer.

Progress: ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable enough to move on

My Genealogy Toolbox

- **National Archives — Genealogy:** <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/start-research>
- **FamilySearch — Getting Started:** <https://www.familysearch.org/en/gettingstarted/>
- **Ancestry — Genealogy 101:** <https://www.ancestry.com/c/discover/genealogy-101>
- **MyHeritage:** <https://www.myheritage.com/>
- **Find a Grave:** <https://www.findagrave.com/>
- **Library of Congress — Genealogy Guides:** <https://guides.loc.gov/genealogy>

- **Library of Congress — U.S. City & Telephone Directories:** <https://guides.loc.gov/united-states-city-telephone-directories>
- **National Genealogical Society — Getting Started:** <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/getting-started/>
- **National Genealogical Society — Genealogy Education:** <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/genealogy-courses/>

My Progress

01. 1. Light the Lantern — Where Do I Begin? ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
02. 2. The Family Treasure Hunt — Start at Home ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
03. 3. Build Your Base Camp — Organize Before You Roam ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
04. 4. Follow the Paper Trail — Understanding Genealogy Records ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
05. 5. Census Sleuth — Read Between the Lines ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
06. 6. Passport to the Past — Migration & Immigration ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
07. 7. The Address Book — Cities, Streets & Communities ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
08. 8. The Evidence Test — Don't Believe Everything You Find ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
09. 9. Choose Your Compass — Ancestry, FamilySearch & the Rest ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
10. 10. Cemetery, Newspaper & Community Clues — The Fun Stuff ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
11. 11. Leave Breadcrumbs — Record, Cite, Preserve ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____
12. 12. Your Next Adventure — Think Like a Genealogist ☐ Explored ☐ Tried it ☐ Comfortable Date: _____

The goal is not to finish quickly. The goal is to become confident enough to keep going—and to leave a trail that proves how you got there.

Howard's Rule of Genealogy

**“If you're going to do it, you're going to do it right!
But have fun and enjoy it!”**