



# Family History Search

## (How To Find Family You Never Knew You Had)

<http://www.EmbraceOurHeritage.org>

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## **Table of Contents**

Chapter 1 - Why Find Family? .....	3
Chapter 2 - Getting Started .....	5
Chapter 3 - Using Online Websites .....	7
Chapter 6 - Birth Certificates .....	14
Chapter 7 - Marriage and Divorce Certificates.....	16
Chapter 8 - Military Information .....	18
Chapter 9 - Immigration Information .....	19
Chapter 10 - Family From Other Countries .....	21
Chapter 11 - Getting Others In On The Act.....	23
Chapter 12 - Build Your Own Family History .....	24

## Chapter 1 - Why Find Family?

By now, you have probably seen commercials on TV about people who have found long lost family members using a popular website, Ancestry.Com. This site has been around for a while and has helped people find grandparents and even great grandparents that they wondered about. Most of the advertisements include those who found out about their fathers or grandfathers who they never knew and may have been told misleading information concerning the person. While this is a good place to start to look for long lost relatives, it is not the only site that offers you a quick peek into records that are public information. There are others and, if you dig far enough, you can get the information for free.

Information about long lost relatives takes two forms. It can be relatives that you have not seen in a while or never knew existed, or it can be your ancestors. To find your ancestors you have to go back a few generations. Finding out that your grandfather served in WWI is not finding an ancestor that you never thought you had. You knew you had a grandfather, might not have know much about him, but he is not an ancestor - he is a antecedent. Ancestors go many generations back and are people that you could not possible know because they died before you could have been born.

There are many reasons to find family members. Most of us have a desire to find out where we spring from. We may hope that we have famous relatives on our side. When I did my searches to find relatives I never knew I had, I found that one of the original "Untouchables" who worked with Eliot Ness was my second cousin, three times removed.

But there is much more than just finding out glory relatives when you are trying to find them online. It is about finding a connection with people who had the same blood as you, from whom you descended. And without whom, you would never be.

Another reason why people may look for relatives that they never knew that they had is because they want to connect with people who are still alive but who share the same bloodlines. I have found many cousins online that I never knew existed because of the internet. We have shared pictures of family members. One of my greatest feats was finding a family picture of my great grandparents and grandfather, along with his siblings, when he was a little boy.

Living relatives may have pictures of family members that can help you or they may have stories to tell about those you never got to know. One of the best things to come along for this is the internet and the number of public records that are now accessible online. Prior to the internet, you had to write to local counties and obtain information from their sources. It could take you many years to track down records about relatives through these government sources.

You can find relatives that you never knew existed by going online or you can find long lost ancestors, depending how far back you want to search. You can usually get to the era around the Civil War as this is when most records started to be recorded. In order to go further, you will have to go off line and do some searching on your own. There are always death records, marriage records and birth records that were recorded prior to these times, although do not be disappointed if you run into dead ends or that records were destroyed.

The main reason that people search for long lost relatives online is to tell a story. When you do this, you are giving an historical account of your life. From the beginning. Of how you came to be and the many sets of gene pools that created you. It can be an interesting journey, but one that is arduous, despite the convenience of the internet and sites like Ancestry.Com that make it convenient for you.

You may end up being surprised or disappointed at what you may find. You may have been told that your family members dated back hundreds of years and then find that they came over in the early part of the last century. You may find criminals and other notorious persons in your past. Or you may find a hero or two. Chances are that you will find a mix of people in your family tree that can help you understand where you came from.

Once you understand what you can find and are prepared to go find it, the next step in searching for relatives is to get started.

## Chapter 2 - Getting Started

Like everyone else, you have two sides to your family -your father's side and your mother's side. In my case, I knew all about my mother's people as far back as to the point where they entered this country. I knew that my great-grandparents were fishermen in Palermo, Sicily and that they came here as adults seeking a better way of life.

My father's side, however, was a mystery. No one knew too much about them, in particular, my father's father. My dad's father died young and his father had died after being shot during a holdup. He was a police officer and no one knew too much about him. My grandfather had two full blooded siblings and, after his mother re-married, two half-brothers. That was all we knew about him.

My paternal grandmother also had mysterious roots. Her father left the family when she was young and her mother married another man. She had three siblings and the other man ended up to be a good husband and father to my great grandmother. I can remember my great grandmother and the stories that she told. She died when I was 12 and she said that her people came from the Mayflower, which I do not know to be true. My father is not even sure of where her people came from, but heard somewhere that they were English mixed with Scotch blood.

Like you, I had many choices when I decided to get started. As I knew so much about my mom's side of the family, I decided to find out about my dad's side of the family. I knew my grandmother, grandfather and both my great-grandmothers from this side of the family, but no one seems to remember the name of my father's paternal grandmother (her first name) although my dad is pretty sure that he knew her married name. It was very murky and I as I like a challenge, this was the side of the family that I decided to focus on. The side where no one knew where anyone came from, had trouble finding out names and had no idea how my great grandfather on this side ended up dying (I found out the information through my search).

As it turns out, this was the side of the family where one of the "Untouchables" hailed from. It was an interesting journey to discover this for my father and to be able to tell him that he was related to someone who made somewhat of a mark in history in Chicago. The funny thing is that we were all from the east and ended up in Chicago some 35 years ago. As was my dad's second cousin, who helped bring down Al Capone.

You have to know where to start when you are doing your ancestry searching. For some people, they may choose to find the easiest way to look up their roots. They may have extended family with whom they keep in touch and find out about relatives through stories and pictures. Others may want to delve into the unknown and discover the truth about missing relatives or those who had lives that were cut short or of whom people knew very little about. I chose this path because we heard that my great-grandfather had left the family (one of the many rumors about my dad's paternal family) so I decided to

go and find out for myself. The fact that he was shot on duty as a police officer - that he didn't leave the family and his children because he ran off, gives my dad comfort.

So pick a side that you want to investigate first. I say first because once you start looking up your family tree and finding relatives that you never knew existed, you might find that you are addicted to doing this and decide to look up all branches of your family tree.

Once you have decided on a side that you want to investigate, start gathering information about them. Get their last name and find out as much as you can about them. Bear in mind that stories about people get convoluted over the years as they are told and told again. Try to get as many facts as possible about the person. My paternal grandfather, who died when he was 50, for example, was in WWII and served in the Pacific. I knew this for a fact from my father and my grandfather. We had some photos of him as a young man. But nothing past his military status and his name was evident. We had nothing else to go on when it came to this man who I remember bouncing me on his knee and taking me to the five and dime to get candy and toys.

In the last chapter, I mentioned reasons why you may want to find missing relatives or get the story on those who have passed. There is another reason, as well. I felt that I owed something to my grandfather for the kindness that he showed towards me when I was a child. He died younger than any of my other grandparents, who all lived to old age. He died even younger than two of my great grandmothers. I never got a chance to know him and by discovering his family history, I felt that I was not only doing something for myself, but something for him as well. After all, if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here.

After you decide on where you want to start and have as much information as possible such as the following:

- Name
- Approximate birth date
- Approximate death date
- Where they lived
- Where they died
- Marriages

You are ready to begin. You need to have something to go on and the best place to start is to look at social security records. They keep records on everything.

## Chapter 3 - Using Online Websites

There are many online websites that will give you access to all sorts of records, including social security records. Ancestry.com is one of the sites that does just this. The problem with using this site is that you sign up for a monthly or yearly fee and then may forget to cancel it. You have to keep track of how long you are on the site and when you are finished, be sure to cancel, unless you plan on using this site for more information. They have access to all sorts of records, not just social security records. In addition to social security records, which are a great help, they have access to the following:

- Birth records
- Death certificates
- Military records
- Immigration records
- Marriage certificates
- Social security information

Yes, you can get all this information for free - it is all of public record and available to the public who wants to look for it. But this site cuts to the chase and saves you an inordinate amount of time in finding the information that you are looking for. Instead of spending weeks to get records from social security, you can get it in a matter of seconds when you use an online website. While you have to pay a fee for the online records, you still have to pay a fee to get anything copied at the county recorder's office or social security office.

While social security is your first step, it is only one of many. Social security records will tell you when a person was born and when they died, as well as the county in which they last lived. That's it. Finding your long lost relatives is like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. You have to go from record to another in obtaining information. So, yes, theoretically, you can find out information through the regular channels without having to pay a fee for the use of an online website, but it will take you a long time. If you want to find out the information quicker, you should use an online site.

When you are using an online site, you are not limited to social security records or any one particular record. You can get other information. You can even share the information that you get with other family members who may be looking for the same information as you. By joining an online website to look up your family members, you can find family members that are long lost to you but are still alive, and seeking out answers the same way that you are. You can share information with them and they can also share it with you. It makes getting information easier.

Another online site that you can use to get information about your relatives is none other than Facebook. Through this site, which was originally exclusively for college students who were too grown up to use MySpace, I have been able to find out all sorts of information about my relatives from my distant cousins, who I met through other cousins

on this site. We have posted family portraits and photos that no one else had and shared them with one another. The old family photo of my great grandparents, my grandfather and his 7 siblings has made the rounds on this site.

You should leave no stone unturned when you are seeking out information. Facebook is a good way to connect with living relatives who may be able to provide you with leads on where you want to go. My children are on Facebook and although they do not deign to speak with me, they were fascinated with the photo of their great-great grandparents and great-grandfather, none of whom they ever got to know.

In addition to finding out this information for yourself, you should also think of your descendants who may one day ask questions about their ancestors. This is a nice gift that you can give to your children and grandchildren. Young people are not so much interested in this type of family history, but are very likely to be so as they get older.

The internet is a powerful tool for finding out information. And it is an excellent tool for searching for ancestors and long lost relatives. Online websites have not only helped hundreds of thousands of people connect with those with whom they have lost touch over the years, but they have also been able to answer burning questions that many have had about their own relatives.

Joining an online website is a good idea if you want to get some answers fast. There are many sites online that can provide you with ancestry information. Take a look at what the site provides by way of records, make sure that there are no extra fees for getting some records (some sites will give you a free sampling of the social security records as these are so easy to obtain but then charge for additional records) and then make sure that you can get a site that will give you unlimited access to all records for one fee.

It may seem to be costly to spend one fee for access to all records, but in the long run, if you are serious about finding out information about your ancestors, it will be the best option. As you continue to find out records and information, you will become increasingly reliant t on the site. If you have to pay for each piece of information that you obtain, you will end up paying a lot more than a membership fee to the site.

Take a look around and see which sites are out there to accommodate you. Make sure that they have a good rating when it comes to reviews. For example, I have checked out social security records (free) on Ancestry.com as well as other sites. I found that not all sites are created equal. Some of them did not have these basic records. You want to be sure that the site that you use is one that is accurate and up to date with all records.

You may think that using a cut rate site is the way to go, but chances are that you are going to end up with a lot of dead ends. You are better off to investigate the sites that are out there and go with one that you can trust.

Online relatives lookup is the best way that you can find long lost relatives and create a family history. Be sure to also take advantage of free sites like Facebook to find living



relatives who can provide you with a clue to where you want to head. Also, remember to look for the facts concerning your relatives and do not just go by stories and rumors that other people have been handing down from generation to generation.

## Chapter 4 - Social Security Records

As I said in the previous chapter, Social Security Records are the place that you want to start when you are looking for family history. You can use an online website to dig up social security records or you can go to [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) to find out about the registry. You will probably have a better time looking up the records at an online site than you will through the social security administration. This is just your first start on your journey to find out about your family history.

When I looked up my grandfather's history, I found the day he died and his birthdate. I found out the county where he died. This was the first step to the piece of the puzzle that I needed in order to get started on my search. The day that he died and the county in which he died was very important. This is because the county keeps copies of death certificates that tell you much more than just this piece of paper.

If you are not sure about the day of death for a relative, or if there are many people who have the same name who died around the same time that your relative died, this is where it gets confusing. You have to go into the records to find out more information about them. This can help you narrow down your search and prevent you from chasing after the wrong leads. I was lucky - my mother knew the day that her father-in-law died and the area where he was living when he died. This gave me a head start as I knew I had the right person when I pulled up the social security information.

Not everyone has this luxury of knowing about a person. And as you go further back into your family history, you will find that you go on many different dead end paths. This is the reason why it is a better idea to use a site that has all inclusive records rather than trying to write for records from different counties as it can be very time consuming and costly.

It helps, naturally, to know as much about your starter relative (this is the name that I made up to give to the person who you use to begin your search) as possible. The more you know, the better off you are. You can also use this information to narrow down your search field when you are searching for them online through the records.

Glean as much information from the social security records as possible. They may have information such as spouse name, birth date and other information. Social security records only go back as far as the 1930s, at which time when social security was adopted. Anyone who died before the 1930s will be difficult to find from these records. But that does not mean that you cannot find them. There are many other public records that the social security records can lead you to after you have located your starter relative on them. For example, my grandfather's death certificate was of interest to me. Why? Because it gave me information as to his family. So the next step was to get a copy of that death certificate and find out just what the name of his mother was.

Social security records are easy to find and can be discovered for free for any deceased

individual. You cannot get social security records for living persons for obvious reasons. They are your first step in finding out your ancestors, but remember, they are one step of many that you need to take in order to find out your family history.

## Chapter 5 - Death Certificates

Death Certificates can be obtained from the county in which the person died. It is the law that a death certificate must be recorded and made part of public records. If you know the county where the person died and the date that they died (as well as their name and social security number - which you can get from the social security records) you can write to the county and ask them for a copy of their death certificate. You will probably have to pay a few dollars for them to copy it for you. You do not need a certified copy of the certificate, which usually costs more than double. You just need a copy.

Once you get the copy of the death certificate, you will find the following information:

- Place of death
- Place of birth
- Attending physician (the person who signed the death certificate)
- Birth date
- Name of spouse
- Name of parents (if known at the time)
- Date of marriage
- Area last residing
- Cause of death (this is being eliminated from death certificates in recent years due to privacy factors)

Once you have this information, you have more pieces to your puzzle that can be put together. The information that is put on the death certificate varies depending on the person who died and the circumstances. Not all of them carry the name of the parents. The one for my grandfather gave “unknown” for the name of his parents. So the elusive name of my great grandmother was once again elusive. The reason for this was that although the woman was still alive, my grandmother provided the coroner with the information and was never really close to my grandfather’s side of the family (they married and divorced young). She said that they called her “Mer” but that was it. She did give the last name of my great-grandmother, but not her first. Under the name of my grandfather’s father it was “unknown.” The man who supposedly left the family years ago was not found on this death certificate.

But this information did provide some very important clues. It gave the date of my grandparent’s marriage, which I already knew but can provide clues for others, it gave his birth date and the place of his birth.

Birth certificates are a good way to find out everything that you need to know about a person and their history. You can find out what hospital they were born in, the name of the mother and father. In most cases, especially when you are digging into the past, you can find out the name of the parents. Most birth certificates of the past give the name of the father as well as the mother. It was considered a shame, at one time, to have no father on the birth certificate as a child was labeled “illegitimate.” As this was the case,

most mothers did their best to get the name of the father printed on the birth certificate.

While the death certificate provides an abundance of information, it is a step towards getting to the birth certificate. By learning in which county the person was born, you can then find out who their parents were. Many of them give the age of the parents. You can use this information to find out the death certificates of the parents that are listed on the birth certificate and glean more information as you continue your journey in finding out your family history.

I was not able to discover much about my grandfather by obtaining his death certificate. I knew when he was born, when he died, where he was born and the county in which he was born. This was enough of a lead, however, to discover more about him.

If you are on a website such as Ancestry.Com, you can put this information into the website. This will enable others in your family, who are also looking up family history, to get this information. It can also help you discover them and what they know about the history. A great deal of information is shared in this manner. One of the reasons for using an online site is not so much obtaining records, but connecting with other relatives, such as cousins, who are seeking the same thing as you. They may have more information than you have and will be able to share it with you. If you are using a site that allows you to put this information into the family tree, you should do so. You never know where the leads are going to come from.

Discovering your family history is like detective work. You work your way back through the beginning and get different clues.

In addition to the death certificate, you can also look up the marriage certificate, although this will usually just tell you the county where the marriage was recorded and the names of the individuals. It is another piece of information that you can use to help you on your quest to find your missing relatives.

In my case, my next step was the birth certificate of my grandfather.

## Chapter 6 - Birth Certificates

Like death certificates, birth certificates are recorded in the county where the birth took place. Many people hit a dead end here because their relatives were born in another country. In my case, I was lucky because my grandfather was born in the United States. I was able, through the death certificate, to find the birth certificate and where he was born.

Many people know the birth date of their family members, including grandparents. My father knew his father's birth date, but had no idea where he was born. The death certificate provided me with this information. I was able to access the country records and came up with his birth certificate. Here I was able to find out the names of my great grandparents. The great-grandfather that supposedly deserted the family and the elusive first name of my great-grandmother. I was also able to find out my great-grandmother's maiden name. It was Mary Murphy. They called her "Mer" as short for "Murphy" because it was her maiden name. I have no idea how this nickname evolved, but at least I now know that her name was Mary. Her married name was the same as that of my grandfather.

I was also able to discover my grandfather's parents' names. The birth certificate, according to the county where it is recorded, can contain much information. The age of the parents is usually on there and perhaps the county where they were born. To my surprise, despite the fact that my father was sure that his grandfather was from Ireland, I found out that he was not. He was born in Philadelphia. I had another lead on this man. I knew where he was from, and the county where he was born. My grandmother's mom was born in Ireland. As I remembered my great-grandmother and the fact that she had a thick brogue, I was not surprised to learn this information.

I added this bit of information to my family tree on the website and continued with my search. I decided to go in pursuit of my great-grandfather - the man that so very few knew about. My father had never met his grandfather and, as his own parents divorced when he was young, he was a virtual mystery to the family.

I hoped that by finding the marriage certificate of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother, I would be able to learn more information. As most of the family lived in Pennsylvania, I was sure that they were married somewhere in this state. This is when the search goes to be a bit hairy.

I knew his name and his birth date. I decided to obtain his birth certificate and put it online so that maybe someone else who was looking up the same information would give me some leads. I also decided to search for death certificates for someone by his name in the county where he got married. Once I obtained the marriage certificate, I was able to see where he married, but very little information. I did find out his age, however. I decided to see if there were divorce records on file. As he left the family, I figured that a divorce must have taken place. However, my search for divorce records for both my

great grandmother and great grandfather turned up empty handed.

If you are planning on looking up your family history, do not expect to find it right away online. While online sites can easily take you back a few generations, records get more scarce as you go back in time. There are cases where records are destroyed in a fire. Or cases where someone was born in another country. Or cases where the records are lost. By making use of both birth, death and marriage certificates, however, you can find leads that can bring you to other leads so that you can put the puzzle of your family history together.

Do not be surprised to go back and forth between marriage and death certificates. As I said earlier, it is easy to obtain information for people who died after the 1930s through their social security records. But prior to that, it can be difficult. Although records of their death certainly existed, they are not as easy to find as you may think.

Birth certificates, marriage certificates, divorce certificates and death certificates are all recorded in the county where the event took place. You may go back and forth between marriage and death certificates, as well as birth certificates, frequently in your search for your family history.

As I could not find a divorce certificate for my great grandfather, I decided to look for a death certificate for someone who died and had his birthday and name. It took me several tries, but finally, I got lucky. He died in Pennsylvania, about the time that my grandfather was around five years old. I knew that he had died because I decided to look up my great-grandmother's marriage certificate.

## Chapter 7 - Marriage and Divorce Certificates

As I had no idea if my great-grandfather divorced my great-grandmother and “ran off” or if he died, I decided to look up her death certificate as well. I also obtained a copy of her marriage certificate with her second husband. It appeared that she married him in 1924. Her marriage certificate did not state if she was widowed or divorced.

Her death certificate was far more revealing. It gave the usual date of death and the names of her children. It also showed that she had been married twice but that both of her husbands were deceased. I could find no record of a divorce for my great grandparents. In 1924, my great grandfather was about 7 years old and he had two younger siblings. In order for her to marry again, she would have had to have been divorced or widowed.

Marriage and divorce certificates are like any other public record. In fact, unless a divorce is sealed, you can find out petitions for divorce and why the petitioner sought the divorce. Anything that goes through the court is public record. Some people find that members of their family were incarcerated or committed crimes through these records. The problem is that there are so many counties that the records can be contained in and narrowing it down to the right county.

I got a county map of Pennsylvania and went on a hunch that a woman who had small children back in the early 1920s would marry soon after her husband died. While single motherhood is far from unusual today, it was not the case in the 1920s. Especially for a woman who came from another country, most likely had little education and had children. I went on the hunch that my great-grandfather died a year or two before she remarried. I also went on the hunch since the family seemed to stay in the state, that he died in the state.

I did have to go from county to county to try to get this information. It can be daunting and very frustrating to do this. When you have very few leads to go on, you can get frustrated easily. But you should not give up the search. You should continue to work with it and also seek help with online sites that may have others looking for the same thing that you are looking for.

I checked the site frequently to see if there were any leads posted by other members of the family. There were none, except for my first cousin who I was in touch with and who was also trying to research family history. But two heads are better than one, so we both kept on trying.

I finally hit pay dirt. I found out the county where my great-grandfather died through a search and obtained a copy of his death certificate.

The truth of the matter was far from what I was led to believe. My great-grandfather did not desert his family. He was a policeman who died in the line of duty. I was excited to be able to reveal this information to my father. I found out when he died and then



decided to do some research on my own. If my great-grandfather died in such a way, there must be newspaper clippings to reveal more information.

I decided to look up newspaper clippings from the date that my great-grandfather died. In the meantime, I posted this information online. I would like to say that I was able to find out information quickly, but this type of information only goes so far. I decided to contact the city library in the area where my grandfather died. I did not want to have to travel to discover this information.

I found out that there are more sites online that will help you get this information, such as old obituaries and newspaper clippings, about your family members. I decided to use this site after I was told by the library that it would be hundreds of dollars for me to obtain a news clipping of my great-grandfather's death. I was able to receive the information in a week. I copied it and sent it to my father, who was interested in reading this, naturally, added a copy to my file and online.

The newspaper clipping gave me even more information about my great-grandfather. It said that he served in WWI. I knew that my grandfather served in WWII, but had no idea that his father served in the first war.

I decided to then start to look up military records for my great-grandfather.

## Chapter 8 - Military Information

Military information is not difficult to get. Military records are usually immaculate and will give you the information about your relatives, where they served, if they died in combat, when they were discharged from the service, which branch of the service in which they served and if they were decorated with any medals.

I found out the military information easily since I had the name of my great-grandfather, his birth date and, thanks to the newspaper clipping, when he served in the service. I was able to not only obtain information about his service record, which was very good, but the one piece of the puzzle that was missing. His photo.

Military information contains photographs of those who were in the service. No one in my family had a photo of my great-grandfather. When I looked at the photo, I recognized him right away. He looked just like my grandfather.

The VA will also send you medals of your family members who have died and who earned medals during the war. I was able to send for them and they were very cooperative in sending me the medals. I cannot say that this was done in a hurry, but I can say that I did receive the medals.

Anyone who has a relative who was in the service can obtain information about them through this route. In this case, the information that I obtained was priceless. Not the medals, but the picture. I was able to give my father a case with the medals and a photo of his great-grandfather for his birthday.

Military information should not be overlooked as they have the best records available and date back to the Civil War. You cannot get photos, usually, of those who battled in the Civil War, but you can obtain information about them. Prior to the Civil War, it can be difficult to trace your ancestors as many records were destroyed or lost.

Do not overlook military records if you are searching for family who served in the armed forces. You can go to the Veteran's Administration to get this information. You can even call them and they will be able to direct you to where you need to be.

## Chapter 9 - Immigration Information

Most of us in the United States hail from immigrants. They may be recent immigrants or those who came over a long time ago. While my father's maternal grandmother claimed that her people were one of the first inhabitants of the country, they still came from Europe. There are very few people, however, who do not have relatives in their past who came over in more recent times. Through my searches in family history and my family knowledge, I knew that a great deal of my antecedents came to the United States during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Ellis Island is where the immigrants were processed. When you go online to look up relatives, you can find the names of the ships that they arrived in during the early part of the last century. Although my search for my mother's family was limited to the arrival of both sets of great-grandparents during the turn of the century through Ellis Island, I was able to find the name of the boat and the information on my grandfather's processing from the records online. I was even able to get a copy of this information to give to my mother.

The information told of the town where he came from in Sicily and when he arrived in the United States. Many Ellis Island records were lost or destroyed, but my great-grandfather's records on my mother's side are still there.

Finding information about immigration status is similar to finding information about veteran status. You can locate this information online easily enough. It is not difficult to find it as long as you know the name of the parties you are seeking and their approximate arrival into the country. Many online sites that help you find your family history have this information. They usually charge an additional fee for copies, but it is nominal. It was well worth the money to give my mother the picture of the ship and information as to when my great-grandfather arrived in the United States. He came as an adult and was from Palermo, as expected.

What puzzled me was that they had no record of my great-grandmother. This could have been lost or destroyed in some manner. The spelling of the name was also incorrect. It was spelled with an "a" instead of an "o" as we always expected. When you are looking for those relatives who were processed through Ellis Island in the late 1800s, you should know that the amount of immigrants was overwhelming, most of them did not speak English although there were interpreters, and many of those who processed them got their names spelled wrong.

It was my mother's maternal grandfather who came to the United States in 1898. Her paternal grandparents came to the United States in 1900 and had their name spelled wrong. Two brothers and their wives arrived. I was able to find out the maiden name of my great-grandmother who I remember vaguely, through this search. I was also able to find out that they, too, came from Palermo. They arrived already married, so there is no information about their marriage in this country, although I have managed to find their

death certificates as they both died after the 1930s.

Through this information, my mother found that her maiden name, which she used until she married my father, was spelled wrong. We were also able to find many cousins who moved to Chicago as well and connect with them. My mother was able to find second and third cousins in this way.

If you want to go back further than immigration, you have to write to cities and regions where the relatives were born and hope that they have good records.

## Chapter 10 - Family From Other Countries

Everyone is familiar with Alex Haley's saga, "Roots." This took him years of research to write as well as the necessity to travel to other countries. In his case, his ancestors came from Africa and were brought to the United States by English slave traders. He spent many years tracing his family back to Africa in order to write his family saga. This book, which sold millions of copies and was made into a television mini-series, inspired others to find their roots as well. Unfortunately, slave ships did not keep information as to the people that they stole from other lands and brought to the United States. Much of Haley's research was done by researching various records about the ships that docked at the time his ancestors were brought to the United States.

If you have relatives from other countries, the first thing that you need to do is to find out when they came to the United States. If you are fortunate enough to get immigration records, you can then seek them out by writing to the towns where they were from and seeking birth records. This can be difficult to do, although there are sites online that can help you trace your family back to other countries. In many cases, there is a language barrier that will make it difficult for you to write to the towns where your family members emigrated from and can just end up being a waste of time.

The internet, as well as sites that offer ancestor tracing, have come a long way in recent years to help those who want to find ancestors or relatives from other countries. You may be able to get information about your ancestors while you are sitting at home at your computer. It make cost you more money to access archives about your relatives, but not nearly as much as it would take to fly to the country where they were from and start rummaging through information archives.

Most countries keep records of births, deaths and marriages. Record keeping dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century for most countries, although there are incidents where records are lost or destroyed. You can, however, find living relatives in other countries who may be distant cousins who can help you on your search.

You can find living relatives by doing a people search online. Many people search companies will only search for people who are in the United States, England, Australia or Canada. There are people searches for other countries as well. Bear in mind that the person you meet must also be looking for the same thing as you. You may meet many people who share your last name, but unless you are both willing to go back in time to do some relative searching, you will be reaching a dead end.

Living relatives are another way that you can help your search for family history, especially if your family immigrated to the United States from another country. This can also end up causing you to hit a lot of brick walls and, of course, your family members must have internet access in order for it to work. But if you both go on the same track to see if you are related, you may be able to find more information about your ancestors through someone from another country.

One of the best aspects about the internet is that it has made the world smaller. An increasing number of people are going online in all parts of the world. And it is human nature to want to know where we came from, who our ancestors were and what they did.

One caveat about using live people from other countries to help you with your family history search is to make sure that you are not giving them money or end up getting taken from a ride. Unfortunately, there are those who would be happy to give you “information” but will ask for money. While most people are honest when it comes to searching for relatives, there are always those who will take advantage of any situation to try to make a few bucks off of you and your labor.

You should also be aware of the fact that because you are looking for relatives and stating this fact, this may put off those who could potentially help you. There have been ongoing scams online about inheriting money and wills that have put people off answering emails from strangers. You should provide them with information about yourself to make them feel secure that you are in earnest as to what you are looking for, but not too much information so that you sacrifice your own security.

One way that you can make sure that others believe what you are saying about your quest to look for relatives is to join a site where you can post updates as to your family history search. This lends a little credence to your quest and will make people see that you are actually trying to find out about family history and not just trying to get someone to part from their money.

Living relatives are an excellent way to find out not only about people from other countries who may be your relatives, but also those who may be related to you, doing the same research as you, and living right here in the United States.

## Chapter 11 - Getting Others In On The Act

It is important that you get others in on the act when you are searching for your family members. Earlier in this book, I told you that I was a distant cousin to one of the men who helped Eliot Ness nail Al Capone. This man was from Scranton, Pennsylvania and is my second cousin, three times removed. I did not find this information out on my own.

Because I was connected to a site that allowed me to post information regarding family members, someone else who was also a member of the site was able to find me. They posted more information regarding my father's family. This went on for several months until I found the connection. I also found a distant cousin who I can email on a regular basis who had some photos of my late great-grandfather that they were able to share with me.

The more people you get involved in your search, the better off you are. They may have pictures of relatives that you do not have. They may have stories to share or information to give. They may be able to clear up misconceptions that you have about your relatives. They are your distant relations and part of your family history, too.

You can join several sites, if you so choose, to connect with long lost relatives. Many of these sites charge an annual fee to belong, but sites like Facebook are free. I have been able to connect with many cousins through this site and have been gifted with many photos of relatives that I did not have. I have, in turn, given the same photos to relatives who do not have these photos.

My mother has double cousins. Two sisters and two brothers met and married, making her share both sets of grandparents with her first cousins. Some of the cousins have lost touch with one another and some were closer to the maternal side of the family while others were closer to the paternal side of the family. Because everyone started to connect on Facebook, we began to exchange pictures and get interested in family history. Everyone now has the Ellis Island information and I received many photos in return of my grandparents when they were young. These are not things that can be replaced. A picture, once lost, is gone forever. In some cases, it can be all that anyone has to remember another person by.

Not only will you get more information when you join in with others when you are researching family history, but you will also get to connect with relatives that you never even knew existed in this manner.

Our family, because of our interest in family history, is planning a family reunion of my mother's paternal side of the family. This reunion was brought about by a family that was all interested in family history and the desire to connect with other members who had the same ancestors.

## **Chapter 12 - Build Your Own Family History**

You may think that family history is something that goes back in time. But you are actually living your own family history right now. Your children are the product of history. One day, their descendants will wonder about you. It is important to keep records and memories so that they can be passed down from one generation to the next.

You can do this by keeping scrapbooks, bits of information and giving your children and grandchildren as much information as possible about your own family. While my own kids, who are teenagers, are not much interested in their ancestors, I trust that one day, like me, they will be. This is why the information that I get from searching for family history is not only important for me, but also important for my children. I want them to be able to make it easy for them to be able to at least trace my roots when they get older and know who their relatives are.

You can keep the information online as well as in scrapbooks. Make copies as so many records can be lost. If you use an online site, you can easily create a family tree. You can put in as much information as you can into the family tree so that your children and their children will not have to wonder about you.

By researching your family history, you are doing much more than just finding out your own roots. You are building your own family history for your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and your descendants. Some day, you will be the person who someone will want to know about. Have fun finding your own family history, but be mindful of the fact that as you live, you are also making your own family legacy.

Take a look at the sites that are online that can help you find your family history. Ancestry.com is one of the oldest sites online that allows you to look up family records and find out about your relatives. You never know who you are going to find in your family history when you use this site.

Once you have your family history completed, it is a good idea to preserve it. You can do a scrapbook and include photos and documents that you find when you use online sites. This can be a great gift to give to someone in your family, or a good keepsake to keep for yourself and future generations.

Be prepared to hit a lot of dead ends when you are researching family history. You may find some family members who you would rather not acknowledge as well. A friend of mine was doing some family history research and found that she was related to Frank Nitti, who was the right hand man for Al Capone. This was something that she found embarrassing, but it is important to realize that you may find all sorts of people when you go online to look for your ancestors.

You never know who you may be related to distantly when you search out your family history. You may, like my friend, find that you are a descendant of a notorious gangster



who wreaked havoc in Chicago in the 1930s. Or, you may find that you are the descendant of those who crossed the plains in a covered wagon. You may be related to a president, a movie star or just about anyone, depending how far we go back.

Or, like me, you might find that you are the descendent of a man who really gave my friend's ancestor a really hard time back in the 1930s.