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UNLOCKING
THE PAST:
TELLING
YOUR FAMILY
HISTORY
STORIES!

Kickstarting Your Ancestral Research Journey!

Introduction:

Welcome to the exciting adventure of family history research! This e-book is designed to inspire you to document and publish your family history stories. It's meant to motivate you to launch the research into your roots. The book offers reasons why this research is important. It offers resources to help you get started.

By documenting and publishing your ancestral history, you not only honor your heritage, but you preserve it for your children, grandchildren, and generations to come. Persons outside of your family might be inspired too!

In my case, I've scoured census tracts; deed records; birth and death certificates, and more. I've interviewed family members. I've traveled to my family's ancestral home after slavery, Sumter County Alabama, for research. Still, I have miles to go in my research.

It's been a rewarding adventure!

Step 1: What are the benefits of documenting and publishing a family history?

In exploring my family's Deep South story, like others, I've discovered multiple benefits of this type of research.

Not only does it deepen appreciation of one's ancestry, but it uncovers when and where family members lived; why they made certain choices, and how their decisions shaped the future for younger generations.

As my cousin Kim Croom puts it: "It helps me to know who and where I came from. We come from a long line of folks who can be traced. We need to pass that information along to future generations. They need to know our story."

"Our ancestors made it possible for us to succeed," she said. "They sacrificed for us, and all of that history needs to be recorded and made known."

First-person narratives, and family histories, also serve as important historical documents. “Family histories tell what happened to people during a particular era,” said St. Louis metro area journalist and editor Linda Lawson. “They preserve the details of our culture and our lifestyles back then. It is critically important that we bear witness to those times, to combat revisionist history.”

Also, documenting and publishing the *stories* of our families goes beyond listing names on family-history tree charts, typically exhibited at family reunions. With the content of family history books, “We get a chance to say what pushed our family members to do the things they did; what inspired them to keep going in tough times; what helped them to overcome obstacles,” said Anthony Franklin Sr. of Chicago, whose family has long traced its ancestral roots. “When we publish our histories, we pass along these stories forever. Our stories live on.”

Finally, children who know their family histories are more likely to develop stronger self-identities, to exhibit greater self-confidence and resilience, according to research studies. For more on this topic, see a blog post titled, “[This Father Has Taken The One Step That Researchers Say Matters The Most.](#)”

Step 2: How should you begin your research project?

Checkout these websites! They offer tips for researchers:

[How to Begin Genealogical Research](#), by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

[Researching African American Ancestors: A beginner's guide to starting your African American family history research](#), by the State Library of North Carolina.

[Afro-American Historical And Genealogical Society](#): a rich collection of resources

[Researching African American Genealogy](#): by Family Search

KICKSTARTING YOUR ANCESTRAL RESEARCH JOURNEY

- Use a [pedigree chart, or a family group sheet](#), to record information you already have, including birth, death and marriage data. These family history [forms](#) can be found online, free of charge. Here's an [example of how to fill out a family tree chart](#). As your family tree grows, you might try [free genealogy software](#) to record your tree chart information.
- Interview family members. I've found that family elders offer valuable stories and they often suggest leads for further research. I make clear to relatives that I want to hear the stories behind the names, as well as key dates and places. Also, don't forget to ask about old photos, family Bibles, funeral programs, letters, and even incomplete family history charts, created by other family members.
- A reminder: Search multiple historical archives, including the US Census, immigration, military, and cemetery records.

For African Americans, the [1870 census](#) is especially important because it was the first census to include all African Americans by name.

The 1870 census also contains five detailed schedules, including General Population, Mortality, Agriculture, Products of Industry, and Social Statistics. The agricultural schedule offers information about a family's farming operation, such as improved or unimproved acreage and the cash value of a farm in that era.

Check local county government records, such as probate court documents, as well as voting records. African American men had voting rights during the Reconstruction era. Were your family members registered voters during that era?

Additional links for African American genealogy research:

[Allen County Public Library: Genealogy Center African American Gateway](#)
[Researching Your African American Ancestors: Ancestry.com](#)

KICKSTARTING YOUR ANCESTRAL RESEARCH JOURNEY

- When organizing your research, a [research log](#) is useful. Not only does it organize findings, but it helps to pinpoint gaps in your research and to generate additional questions.
- Create an online file to collect copies of documents, such as a family group sheet or a pedigree chart; birth and death certificates; research logs, newspaper clippings, photos, etc. After you make copies, store the originals in a secure location.
- Join a genealogy or historical society. Members in these groups offer suggestions about how to reach research goals. See this [article](#) for links to websites of national, state and local genealogy groups. Also, check your local library for listings of genealogy and historical societies in your area.

Step 3. What happens after you have unlocked the family history? Should you publish?

Yes! Publish your findings as a way to share your work with future generations.

Your research findings could produce multiple products: an article; book; online family history tree; newsletter; reunion booklet with photographs and text, and a documentary.

Solicit feedback from family members about the various content forms for your projects.

Invite younger generations to get involved with these projects! Perhaps a creative talent in your family will produce a documentary utilizing your findings.

Bio of Lillian Williams, Ph.D.

Lillian Williams is a former professor at Columbia College Chicago; and a former newspaper and TV reporter. She began her family-history research journey in 2020. She has found valuable genealogy data. She has miles to go in her research journey!

Her website: documentyourfamilyhistory.com

Her Facebook page: [Family Stories Forever](#)

Where To Donate Family History Research?

Donate copies of your work to institutions and other repositories that you think might be easily accessible for younger generations in years to come! Send a copy to the U.S. Library of Congress, for example, as that institution accepts family history books from all over the world for its permanent library collection. Seek the assistance of a [librarian](#) there.

Also, local libraries and historical societies sometimes accept family history manuscripts. One family historian donated her family history manuscript to her ancestral Mississippi hometown library.

The Society of American Archivists also offers suggestions for repositories at its website: [What Is a Repository and What Can It Do for You?](#)

CONCLUSION

In summary, ancestry research can preserve the rich tapestry of your family's history, including unique stories and experiences that accompany the names, dates and places. Your research can unfold the tough choices your ancestors made; the challenges they faced, and the legacies they left behind.

To begin this journey, take practical steps first, such as recording the information you already have, interviewing family members, and delving into census and other historical records.

As you progress, remember the importance of organization, creating a research log, and preserving valuable documents. Joining genealogy and/or historical societies could provide valuable support and guidance.

And finally, consider sharing your findings with the world. Again, you should consider donating copies of your research to institutions like the U.S. Library of Congress and to local libraries and historical societies. These repositories make your work more accessible for future generations in your family and others.

May you embrace the adventure of your ancestral research journey!

MR. AND MRS. NOAH
AND CARRIE CROOM OF
SUMTER COUNTY
ALABAMA, AND THEIR
DESCENDANTS

