

Beginning your family history research

The information in this fact sheet will help you start researching your family history. It also provides some tips for visits to institutions which, like the National Archives, hold records relevant to family history research.

Starting the process

Within your family

- Assemble everything you can about the people you are researching – begin with yourself and work back by generations.
- Collect family records such as letters, photographs, journals, memoirs and diaries.
- Document as many family anecdotes and events as you can, noting the source of the information.
- Obtain official certificates of births, deaths and marriages – these events were recorded by the registrar-general of the State or Territory where they took place. For more information on births, deaths and marriages please see *Fact sheet 89 - Births, deaths and marriages*.
- Make two copies (a 'master' copy and a 'researching' copy) of your original documents. Keep original and master documents in a safe place and use the researching copies – they are the copies you can afford to lose.

Beyond your family

- Join a genealogical society. This will give you access to resources, courses, information days, publications, and links to organisations across Australia and overseas. It will also enable you to contact people who can help you with your research or do it for you (as research agents).
- Read publications on family history research. The publications listed below (and anything else written by these authors) will be useful:
 - Nick Vine Hall, *Tracing Your Family History in Australia: A Guide to Sources*, 2nd ed., Albert Park, 1994
 - Nancy Gray, *Compiling Your Family History*, 19th ed., ABC Enterprises and the Society of Australian Genealogists, 1993
 - Janet Reakes, *Our Family History: How to Trace Your Family Tree*, Pymble, 1997
 - The Heraldry and Genealogy Society of Canberra, *Family History for Beginners and Beyond*, 10th ed., Canberra, 1998

- Visit libraries. The National Library of Australia, for example, has a section dedicated to genealogical research. It holds microcopies of records for viewing (including some passenger records and electoral rolls) and you can obtain information sheets on a variety of topics. Most state libraries (and some local libraries) offer similar services.
- Search the internet for genealogy websites. Using search terms such as 'family history' or 'genealogy' will give you a good start. Some search engines have genealogy as a selected subject heading, and using their links will streamline your research. Your local family history society will be able to direct you to the most helpful sites.
- Contact historical societies for local knowledge, publications, photographs, memorabilia and links to other families.

Finding out about records held by the National Archives

Read Finding Families: The Guide to the National Archives of Australia for Genealogists, and other research guides and fact sheets produced by the National Archives.

Visiting the National Archives

The National Archives has offices in each capital city. If you intend to visit one of these offices, plan your research before you arrive.

Be specific about the material you want to see. Use the National Archives [RecordSearch](#) database, available in all research centres and on our website, to find records relevant to your research.

- Confirm that the National Archives has records of interest to you, and determine which office holds them.
- Give ample notice of your visit to allow National Archives staff to locate and retrieve your records.
- Allow yourself enough time during your visit to read all records of interest to you.

Other information on family history

The following fact sheets provide further information on how the National Archives can help in your family history research:

- *Fact sheet 201 - Tracing ancestors in the National Archives*
- *Fact sheet 202 - Tracing ancestors beyond the National Archives*
- *Fact sheet 270 - Indigenous family history beyond the National Archives*