

START YOUR FAMILY HISTORY JOURNEY

(Family history = Genealogy)

Are you curious about your family history, but don't know where to start? The team at the Geelong Heritage Centre has compiled this handy guide to help you start exploring your history.

Start with yourself:

- The best idea is to work backwards: from the known to the unknown.
- Write down your birthday details, then your parents' birthdays, then your grandparents' birthdays.

Fill in a generation chart

This is a chart that allows you to fill in all the known dates, places and other details that you know. You simply add more information as more is found.

Simple charts are available on Ancestry Library Edition. Temporary remote access to Ancestry Library Edition is currently available to our library members. Click the '[Ancestry](#)' link on our [eCollections page](#). All you will need is your library barcode and PIN. You won't be able to access the free Library Edition if you go through the Ancestry website directly.

Begin your search at home

There may be many sources of information lying around in your home: diaries; letters; photographs; the family bible or other religious text; birthday books; newspaper clippings; scrapbooks; baby books; birth, marriage and death certificates; legal documents; wills and more. All of these documents could help you start piecing together the puzzle.

Talk to the family

When you've found everything you can at home, the next step is to contact relatives and other members of your family and talk to them. Older relatives often have memories, photographs or documents that may be helpful to your search.

- Write down information gathered from these conversations
- Record stories using your mobile phone (there are plenty of apps to help)
- Hints on interviewing your family: www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Creating_Oral_Histories

Organise your information

As you start gathering information, you'll often quickly accumulate lots of material. It's useful to set up a filing system, both to safely store your collection and to allow you to easily retrieve an individual item/s as required. There are different ways of organising information, some options are:

Pen and paper

- Use plastic sleeves (polypropylene) to store sheets of paper.
- Use a separate book or folder for each grandparent or family member you plan to research. Write a surname on the cover and write down everything you know about them.

Digital: Word documents/spreadsheets

- Create your own filing system using surnames as folder names.
- Write up all the information in Word documents and file in individual folders.
- Scan documents found into folders.

Pre-printed family tree information sheets

- Free charts are available via Ancestry Library Edition.

Family tree software

- Access free or paid family tree software. Read [this Choice article](#) to find out more.

Searching outside of known information

Another resource to help build a picture of your family history are original records. They might help you find out where ancestors were born and died, when they married, what they did. Resources include:

Explore Geelong Heritage Centre's Resources

The Geelong Heritage Centre offers access to indexes and other local resources e.g. births, deaths and marriages notices from the *Geelong Advertiser*; baptisms; church and cemetery registers; rate books, images, among other resources: www.grlc.vic.gov.au/glhc/heritage-centre

- **Geelong Heritage Centre Reference Collection:** listed on Geelong Regional Libraries' catalogue www.grlc.vic.gov.au
- **Archives:** www.archives.grlc.vic.gov.au
- **Geelong Heritage Centre images:** a selection can be viewed on GRLC catalogue under: [Heritage images](#)
- **Email us to ask a question:** Send your questions, including as much detail as possible to heritagecentre@grlc.vic.gov.au. The team will endeavour to get back to you within two business days for straightforward requests.

External Resources

- **Explore online resources:** See Choice article: 'Online Family History Services': www.choice.com.au/electronics-and-technology/internet/using-online-services/articles/online-family-history-services
- **Trove** can be used to search Australian historical newspapers for family references. The *Geelong Advertiser* is online 1840-1929 www.trove.nla.au
- **State Library of Victoria.** <https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/>
- **Public Record Office of Victoria.** <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/family-history>

- **Birth, Marriage & Death Certificates:** These are important as they are ‘primary (first) records’ with information that was given by your ancestor to the officer who recorded it. These certificates are obtained from Australian State Registry Offices. The cost varies for each state. Information on certificates depends on the accuracy of the original information. Victorian Births, Deaths and Marriages : www.bdm.vic.gov.au/
- **Wills & Probate online:** In Victoria the Public Record Office of Victoria offers access to *Wills & probate*, and *Inquests to deaths* <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/family-history>
- **Death and Burials:** Explore your local cemetery trust. Geelong Cemeteries Trust : www.gct.net.au/
- **Check for notices in the local newspaper**
 - **Geelong Heritage Centre** in house indexes to G.A. Births, Marriages & Death Notices 1840-current. Email the Heritage Centre to enquire: heritagecentre@grlc.vic.gov.au
 - **Ryerson index:** death notices & obituaries: <https://www.ryersonindex.org/>
- **Finding your mob:** Koorie Records Unit promotes awareness about Aboriginal records within the Public Record Office Victoria collection and aims to improve accessibility of these records to the Aboriginal community. <https://prov.vic.gov.au/koorie-services>. Also take a look at:
 - Researching Aboriginal family history at the Victorian Archives Centre: <https://prov.vic.gov.au/finding-your-mob>
 - State Library of Victoria guides may also be of interest: <https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/indigenous>

Important hints to remember when doing family history:

- It is important to see if you can verify your information with a second source. Sometimes information on official documents can be incorrect including names and dates.
- Never completely trust the spelling of surnames, place names, etc.
- Always check surname variants when researching.
- Remember that everything is only speculation until verified.

Collecting and preserving the information you find:

- Always photocopy certificates and important documents and keep originals safe.
- Share your information with family members and other researchers.
- Find out more by reading the *Heritage Centre Conservation Resources Guide*.

You decide the scope of your research.

You can decide how extensive you want your search to be. Perhaps if you have limited time you might start with your own direct line only, or your paternal or maternal line. In time you may want to expand the search to look at other parts of your family history.

How do I find out more?

- Read books and journals to find out what sources are available, and how to use them effectively. State and local libraries have relevant material, and family history libraries, including the Geelong Heritage Centre, have extensive collections of local histories, guidebooks, indexes and records.
- With your library membership you can access to family history magazines: *Traces* and *Who Do You Think You Are* via RBDigital and many history eBooks and Audio Books <https://catalogue.grlc.vic.gov.au/>
- To delve deeper explore these links:
 - **Public Record Office of Victoria:**
<https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/family-history>
 - **State Library of Victoria:**
www.slv.vic.gov.au/search-discover/family-history-tools-resources
www.slv.vic.gov.au/stories/ebooks-family-historians
- **Join a group and learn from the locals:**
 - **Geelong Family History Group** <https://geelongfhg.com/>
 - **Geelong Historical Society** www.geelonghistoricalsociety.org.au/