Genealogy DocumentsBasics Checklist for Getting Started

Your ultimate goal is to find each family member’s birth, marriage, and death records. For everyone except you, always start with death and work your way back to birth. Non-vital records (census, naturalization, estate papers, military records, etc.) may help you to determine when a birth, marriage, or death event occurred, which is why they are listed here. I’ve provided a starting “laundry list” of documents for the first three generations in your family (back to your grandparents). This is a good place to start as parents and other relatives may have or remember some of the information on the list. You can use this document as a checklist for records to obtain for each generation. Be prepared to collect the same information for the 4th generation and beyond.

1. Start with yourself (1+spouse)
   a. Do you have your birth certificate?
   b. Adoption records?
   c. Do you have your marriage certificate(s)?
   d. Do you have your divorce records?
   e. Military Records (service and pension)?
   f. Do you have your immigration records? (If not born in the U.S.)
   g. Have you labeled/tagged family photographs where you appear?
   h. Do you have copies of deeds for the properties you’ve owned? Or any additional information that might help future genealogists locate you?
   i. Do you have copies of the same information for your spouse?
   j. Do you have your siblings’ names and birthdates?
   k. Are you old enough to appear on Federal or State census records (1940 and before)? Do you have copies of these?

2. Your Parents (2+, including step parents)
   a. Do you have their death records, obituaries, grave information, and estate papers? (If they are deceased)
   b. Do you have their marriage certificate(s)?
   c. Do you have their divorce records?
   d. Military Records? (Service and Pension)
   e. Their immigration records? (If not born in the U.S.)
   f. Their public census records (if old enough to appear in 1940 or earlier)?
   g. Property deeds?
   h. Adoption Records?
   i. Their birth records?
   j. Names and birthdates of their siblings?
   k. Labeled family photographs in which they appear
I. Their parents’ names?

3. Your Grandparents (4+ including step grandparents)
   a. Do you have their death records, obituaries, grave information and estate papers? (If they are deceased)
   b. Do you have their public census records? (1940 or earlier?)
   c. Do you have their property deeds?
   d. Military Records (Service and Pension)?
   e. Immigration Records?
   f. Family Photographs or other memorabilia?
   g. Divorce Records?
   h. Their marriage records?
   i. Names and birthdates of their siblings?
   j. Adoption Records?
   k. Their birth records?
   l. Their parents’ names?