



ROUTES TO ROOTS NEWSLETTER

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*Re-energize your
genealogy research...*

Happy New Year

2009

In This Issue:

1. *Your 2009
Genealogy "To
Do" List*

It's a new year and time to re-energize your genealogy research...

Items to Add to Your Genealogy 'To Do' List

By Kimberly Powell, About.com

No more excuses! Almost all of us can admit to getting wrapped up in the hunt for ancestors and letting other important things slide (and I am not talking about the laundry). Most of us have notes piled on the floor, shoeboxes full of unlabeled photos, classes we have planned to take, relatives we have been meaning to interview and other researchers we have been intending to contact.

If you're like me and want to take your genealogy research to the next level, choose a goal (or two or three) from this genealogy "To Do" list and get started. Let's make this the year that we finally get organized and really work on improving our genealogical or family history research skills.

1. Interview a Relative

One thing many of us postpone until it is too late is talking to our own family members about our shared heritage. Now is the time to get in touch with those relatives you've been meaning to contact. If you are fortunate enough to have older members in the family, approach them first. Some of them may have information about the family that can't be found elsewhere. If you have already spoken to your parents and grandparents, then extend your research net to include extended family such as brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins.

2. Take a Class or Learn a New Research Skill

Whether you are a novice or have been researching your family for over 20 years, there is always something new to learn. Get out of your research rut by taking a genealogy class, attending a conference, reading a new genealogy book or learning about a new research skill online. Maybe you have been intimidated by land or probate records, or have been meaning to tackle your ancestors from Germany. During the next year, make it a point to read and educate yourself about at least one new research technique and then use it to find out something new about your ancestors. There are hundreds of free resources for learning right on the Internet so you have no

3. Get Organized

This is the goal most genealogists dread, but which could make our research time so much more effective! Take some time away from your research and organize those genealogy files, clean out your bookmarks and input your scribbled notes into your genealogy program. If you are overwhelmed by the accumulation of family history records and notes that you have stuffed in boxes and drawers, then set aside a regular time each week for organizing a little at a time. Take heart - you will most likely find all sorts of new clues as you sort out the records you have already found and add the data and notes to your genealogy program.

GenealogyResults can create that extra special gift for your hard to buy for family member. Contact us now to get started on your family history project.

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4. Don't Put Off Until Tomorrow...

Sometimes it seems as if everything else gets in the way of quality genealogy research time. You use a calendar to schedule other important activities, why not genealogy? Whether you use a standard paper calendar or an online version, make it a point to set aside time for personal genealogy research or schedule special events such as genealogy conferences or research trips. Setting aside time for genealogy is only the first step, however. To really make the most of your precious genealogy time, you also need to take time to plan ahead and prioritize your research.

5. Label & Store Your Family Photos

Most of us have piles of precious family photographs sitting in piles or boxes waiting to be labeled, organized, put into scrapbooks, digitized, etc. Don't let another year go by with those photos fading both from light and from people's memories. Get together with relatives and identify as many people as you can and label those pictures. Be sure to use a photo-safe marking pencil or pen! If you have access to a scanner then consider digitizing the photos onto CD-ROM to preserve them indefinitely. Even if you don't have time to create scrapbooks and really get the photos organized right now, make sure you get them out of old envelopes and shoeboxes and into archival quality plastic sleeves or acid-free photo boxes before they are lost forever. Make copies of important photographs and other important documents and share them with another family member. The recipient will no doubt enjoy the gift, and a second copy will help to ensure that these precious photos will not be lost forever in the event of an unforeseen disaster.

6. Two Heads are Better Than One

One of the best ways to further your research is to join forces with other people researching the same surname or in the same area. Join a genealogical or historical society in an area in which you are researching a primary family line and then get involved in some way. You will meet fellow researchers, benefit from members with years of experience with the records and history of the area and have many opportunities to help others by working to preserve historical and genealogical documents, recording cemetery transcriptions and more. If you spend a lot of time online, then join a mailing list for your surname or area or participate in chats and/or forums with other genealogists with similar interests. I belong to several informal groups of researchers who work closely to piece together information on a particular family - all groups of people whom I have met online.

7. Keep Track of Correspondence

How many times have you left a question in a genealogy forum and then forgot to go back and check for an answer? How do you find the person you corresponded with last year about your Smith family again now that you have new information to share? Most of us have address books to keep important phone numbers and contact info for family and friends, so why not use it for genealogy contacts? Make sure to add a note to yourself about the person's surnames and research locations! There are also a wide variety of free correspondence records and forms available online which can provide you with a framework for logging your correspondence. Then at a glance you can determine whether you have written to a specific person or place, whether you received a response, whether you need to follow up and the results of your inquiry.

8. More Than Names & Dates

Sometimes in the rush to get our lines as far back as we can we forget to take the time to learn more about the people our ancestors were and the times they lived in. Take time this year to record family stories, either electronically or on paper before this oral history is lost forever. Go out and find at least one additional record on each of your direct ancestors, choosing a record which will hopefully tell you more about them than you already know. Census records include interesting information such as your ancestors' occupation, education level and property value. Wills and probate records can provide you with all sorts of fascinating information including debts, friends and even the bed covers and pots and pans your ancestors owned. Tax rolls, immigration records and land records are other good sources for information about the lives of your ancestors. You can also chart your ancestor's life against a historical timeline and learn more about wars, plagues, crop shortages, big storms and other noteworthy things

your ancestor may have experienced.

9. Put Your Research To Good Use

The biggest thrill for me in researching my family's history is in sharing the things I find with others. Your family members may be more interested that you realize and would probably love to receive copies of old family photos, printouts of the research you have done or a book of the collected memories and stories of your relatives. It doesn't need to be professional and it doesn't even need to be complete (when is your genealogy research ever complete?). Even a quick email every now and then to update people on new findings will be very much appreciated and may even spark new findings and memories.

10. Volunteer to Help Others

Think back to when you were a beginning genealogist and how difficult it was for you to learn proper research methodology and documentation techniques. Remember also all of the help and expert advice you probably received from other genealogists as you were learning the ropes. Look at this new year as the perfect time to return the favor. Many libraries, including Family History Centers, welcome volunteers to help newcomers in their genealogy departments. There are a lot of online sites where you can volunteer your time to look up records or take photos of tombstones for researchers who can't make the trip to do it themselves. You can also help answer questions by joining a mailing list geared toward "newbies" or by answering questions in forums or chats. No matter how you decide to help, you will be rewarded with that warm and fuzzy feeling that comes from helping others. By introducing newcomers to the kindness which is inherent in most members of the genealogy community, you will be encouraging them, in turn, to become involved. As the popularity of genealogy grows, so will the records made available to us, either online or through preservation initiatives in libraries and archives. Therefore, the help you give to each individual researcher also helps us all.

These ten resolutions are all suggestions only - there are many others which may be more appropriate for you based on your own unique research circumstances. The point, however, is to use this year as an opportunity to make changes and improvements in the way you approach your research. Genealogy is a scientific research field as well as an enjoyable hobby which means you should strive to get and stay organized, pay attention to the quality of your sources, stay on top of changing techniques and standards and use excellent documentation procedures. But don't forget about the reason you are doing this in the first place! Make sure you take time to enjoy learning about your family's heritage and share the fun with others. Just do the very best job that you can and the rewards will come.

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