

# Where in the World Did I Come From?

How to Write a Family Genealogy

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

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# Why Should I Write a Family Genealogy?

- It might provide information as to our family's origins
- It helps place us in our society and the history of our country
- We might discover family relationships and help us to form new friends and family.

# Now, Let's Get Started!

- What do you know about your family?
  - Names might tell us about origins. Russian? Polish? German? Chinese?
  - Make a list of parents, grandparents, and other relatives
  - Make notes about stories told by the family. What do they say about the origins of your family?

# Begin your research

The best place to begin is with our web-page, [www.pnmhs.org](http://www.pnmhs.org)

Here you will find links to our library, an index of our archival material and links to the wider Mennonite community historical archives.

You can always call our volunteer staff (Tuesdays, please) if you have any questions.

# Ellis Island – Landing Place of Immigrants

- Ellis Island, an island in the New York Harbor, close to the Statue of Liberty, serviced as the screening place for immigrants from 1892 to 1954.
- The Ellis Island Foundation is an excellent source of information. Their web site is at [www.libertyellisfoundation.org/](http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/) Here, you can find ship manifests, personal records and other helpful information.

# A Bit of Information About the Mennonites

- Mennonites, including Amish, Hutterites, and other related groups have been immigrating to the United States since 1683.
- Germantown Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania is the first Mennonite Congregation in North America.
- In the following years, Mennonites came from a various of locations in Europe.
- Poland and the Ukraine (South Russia). Mennonites moved to what is now Poland as early as 1550. They were given more freedom from persecution there than in Holland and Germany. In 1789, the first group of Mennonites immigrated to South Russia. In the decade of the 1870's, approximately 18,000 immigrated to the United States and Canada.

# Resources about Polish and Russian Mennonites

- The Grandma Database. The database lists people who were born in South Russia and both their ancestors and descendants are listed, if known. About 1970 the first version of this database was made available to the public. Since then the database has gone through 7 revisions with Grandma 7 now the current database. It is available on a CD format as well as an online format ([www.grandmaonline.com](http://www.grandmaonline.com)) The database now contains about 1.3 million names.
- Grandma 7 can be purchase from:
  - **California Mennonite Historical Society**
  - 1717 S. Chestnut Ave.  
Box 2300  
Fresno, CA 93702
  - Phone: 559-453-2225

# Ship Manifests and Passenger Lists

- Unless you are all or part American Indian, all of our forefathers (and mothers) immigrated to the United States. It is likely that they came to North America by ship.
- A good resource to use in researching your genealogy are ship passenger lists. These are available from a number of sources.
- The genealogy records at Ellis Island is a good place to start
- If your ancestors might be Russian Mennonites, you can research using Clarence Hiebert's book, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need (1870-1885)*, published in 1974. It has many of the passenger lists you might find helpful. This book is in our library.
- Genealogy.com has some passenger list available in its database.

# Individual Family Genealogies

- We are fortunate to have a significant number of family genealogies in our library. Most of these are families with Mennonite or Amish connections. You can find the index of books in our library on our website.
- These books are generally not available for checkout. However you are welcome to come and use them for research in our heritage center.
- The internet is a good resource for locating genealogies. Run a google search on your family name and you will be surprised about what you find.

# Genealogy.com

**Ancestry.com LLC** is a [privately held Internet company](#) based in [Lehi, Utah](#), United States. The largest [for-profit genealogy](#) company in the world, it operates a network of genealogical and historical record websites focused on the United States and nine foreign countries, develops and markets genealogical software, and offers a wide array of genealogical related services.<sup>[4]</sup> As of June 2014, the company provided access to approximately 16 billion historical records and had over 2 million paying subscribers. User-generated content tallies to more than 70 million family trees and subscribers have added more than 200 million photographs, scanned documents and written stories.<sup>[5]</sup>

# City, County, and State Records

- A good source of family genealogy information can be found using the records of the various governmental bodies.
- These records include birth certificates, county property tax records, court records (don't forget federal government courts)
- Probate Court records might provide information you need. These will include wills, family information, etc.

# Church Records

- Church records are often a good source of information. This might include official birth, baptism, and death information, depending upon the church involved and how far back their records extend
- Don't forget cemetery records. Many churches now have cemetery "maps" and location records. The information on gravestones is limited but can help to confirm birth and death dates as well as church membership.
- Related to church records are the Family Bibles which many families have maintained. Some of them can be quite old.

# Newspapers and Magazine

- Newspapers are an excellent source for obituaries, especially if your ancestor is a notable person in that community.
- Most newspapers keep their old editions on microfilm or microfiche. That is more easy to research than going through actual newspapers.
- More and more periodicals are making their indexes available on the internet. A good Google search can be most helpful in your research.

# Personal Notes & Journals

- As you are researching your family history, don't forget to enquire about dairies, personal memoirs and other family records

# Problems you may encounter

- Spelling of names – This is a common problem in the past.
- Be careful of Google Searches. Don't assume that everything you find is legitimate.
- Be careful with emails or regular mails that make offers to research your family history. They may contain viruses and other malware.
- Parts of the story is missing – Holes in your genealogy.

# Keep the Records

- There are a number of computer programs that help you put your genealogy into logical order.
- I have been using “Roots Magic” for many years. It allows you to enter names, relationships, dates, notes such as obituaries, newspaper articles. You can print out the information in a number of ways, such as a descendants list, Ancestor list, etc.
- The cost is \$29.95 for the current Version 7.
- The software can be found at: <https://www.rootsmagic.com/>

# Tell the Story

- Now that you have done your research, it is time to share your information with your family and friends.
- Set out the genealogy in a clear way.
- Tell the whole story – don't avoid information that might cause embarrassment such as divorces, etc.
- Don't forget great stories of the family!
- Don't forget an index.