



Getting Started in Family History

Bob Alford

About Family History

Family History is a fascinating hobby. It is like a vast puzzle that is never completely solved. Still, one bit of information leads to another, and it becomes exhilarating when you find a book or a record on the Web on one of the family lines that tie in with your current tree and gives you names, dates, and places for several generations.

Much More than Names and Dates

Family History is not just about putting names and dates on a chart or looking to see if you are related to someone famous and influential. Our ancestors are our great, great ... grandparents. They were genuine people who lived interesting lives. They worked and struggled to better the world for their children, their children's children, and us. We are their legacy. We are who we are, and we are here because of them.

Footprints in History

While most of the details of their lives have disappeared in the mists of time, most of our ancestors left footprints in history. We know, or can learn, some things about them and what they did, we know some things about the environment in which they lived, and we know what history tells us about their time. Putting these together and opening our imagination helps us envision what it was like to live their lives.

It's About Your Family

Family History is about family, your family. We live in a very short window of the historical timeline. We know our parents as adults, our grandparents as older people, our children, and our grandchildren as young people. If we are fortunate, we may get a glimpse of the beginning of the life of a great-grandchild or the end of the life of a great-grandparent. That is only a handful of the many generations that have come before us and the many yet to come. Family History is about extending our knowledge of our families to those we never met in person, learning who they were, how they lived, and about the world in which they lived. Learning about our ancestors enriches and broadens our lives. Someday we too will be someone's ancestors.

It's a Hobby

- It's a Hobby – it should be enjoyable.
- There are no hard rules except “seek truth.”
- What I will show you are guidelines, meant to help you on your adventure.
- You don't have to do things my way, or anyone else's way (unless you are doing this professionally.)

A Step at a Time

1. What do you want to Achieve?
2. Start with What You Know
3. Get Organized
4. Label Your Old Photos
5. Start a Tree
6. Set Short term and long-term goals
7. Develop Your Research Skills

Step 1 - What Do You Hope to Achieve?

Some possible Objectives

- Document the lives of ancestors you grew up with so your children and grandchildren will know them.
- Trace your paternal ancestors back to their immigration
- Connect with living relatives
- Identify as many of your ancestors as you can
- Identify as many of the descendants of one of your ancestors as you can
- Tell the family story
- Find and document your ancestors in history

Choose a direction to focus on to start. You can always expand to other areas later.

Step 2 - Gather What You Know/Have

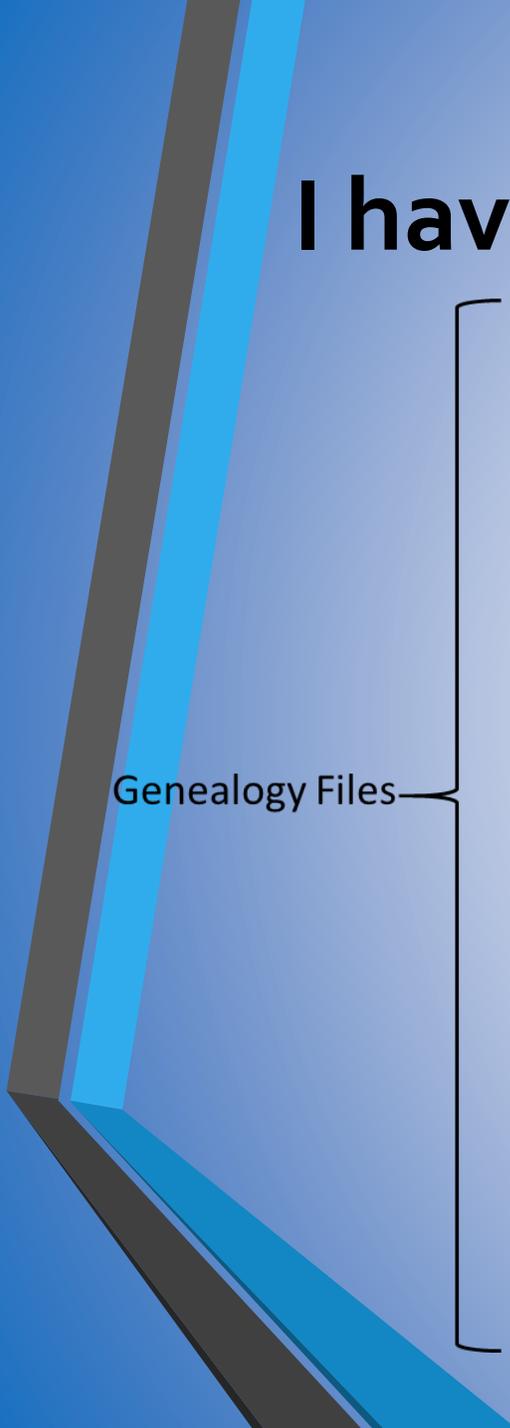
Take an Inventory of what you know and what you have

- Names and Dates of Family Members
- Photos, especially of earlier generations
- Old records,
 - birth, marriage, and death certificates, family bibles
 - School records, military records, awards, etc.
- Talk to Family members
 - Interview older family members to capture memories
 - Ask for old photos and documents

Step 3 - Get Organized

- Setup a digital filing system on your computer
- Scan files and documents and store by surname/generation
- Make notes of what you know and what people tell you, and store in filing system.
- Your filing system may be on your computer or in the cloud, but make sure it is backed up somewhere where you will have long term access.
- Example: mine is on the Microsoft cloud, but I periodically back it up to a 1 terabyte solid state drive.

I have a master directory I call Genealogy Files



Genealogy Files

In There I Have a Folder for Each Surname

Genealogy Files

- Alford
- Bailey
- Barron
- Beliveau
- Bennett
- Bilodeau
- Bosse
- Burt
- Burton
- Chase
- Church
- Culver
- Dorege
- Eames
- Hathaway
- Hebert
- Labadie

ETC

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ETC

- 1500 Robert
- 1532 Thomas Hatahaway
- 1560 Thomas II and Margaret
- 1595 Nicholas
- 1629 John and Martha
- 1650 John and Hannah
- 1677 Jacob and Phillipa
- 1704 Isaac and Rebecca
- 1729 Isaac and Phoebe
- 1771 Bailey and Peggy
- 1802 Henry and Hetty
- 1829 Bailey John and Margaret
- 1865 Frank and Beulah
- Beulah Elizabeth Hathaway
- Coat of Arms.jpg
- Fall River Land Purchase.pdf
- Hathaway Ancestry.png
- Hathaway Milestones.xlsx
- Taunton and spinoff cities.png
- Taunton Map.jpg

In each surname folder I have a folder for each generation

I also have files that pertain to multiple generations with that surname

I name the generation folders starting with the birth year of the male so that they will sort in order

Genealogy Files

- Alford
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- Burton
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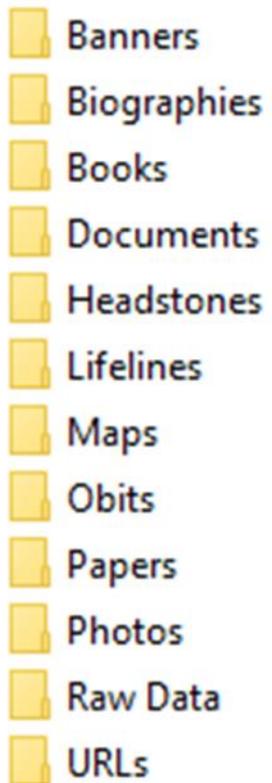
ETC

- 1500 Robert
- 1532 Thomas Hatahaway
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- Banners
- Biographies
- Books
- Documents
- Headstones
- Lifelines
- Maps
- Obits
- Papers
- Photos
- Raw Data
- URLs

In each generation folder I have a standard set of folders

I Keep a Template Folder



- I have a template folder in Genealogy Files with empty folders predefined
- When I create a new generation folder, I copy the template folder to it.
- I may or may not use all the folders in a generation folder. But I can quickly locate what I have by knowing the surname and the generation names.
- I have thousands of files in these folders and can locate exactly what I want in seconds

Raw Data

One of the directories in the template is called "Raw Data"
This is where I store my research notes

Example:

- Things copied from websites
- Notes from interviews with relatives
- My own notes and observation
- List of things to be proven and open issues to be researched

Raw Data is for my eyes only.

Organize your files anyway you wish

- What I just showed you is what I do.
- There are many other ways, some described in recorded webinars on the Internet.
- Another good way is to use Microsoft OneNote.
- Use what works for you but think long term. If five years from now you want to locate a document on a certain ancestor that you know you have, can you find it?
- I highly recommend that any document you attach to a tree, on Ancestry or elsewhere, you keep a copy of in your own filing system.

Now, before you go any further

- Organize your files any way you wish but get everything you have organized/digitized before you start researching.
 - Sort, scan, and store all photos and documents you have
 - Store any notes you have of your own
- If you want to use a paper system, there are presentations on the Internet that show you how to do this.

Step 4 - Label all Your Pictures

- From this



Label Your Pictures

- To this



Alphée Labadie Family 1948

Edward, Juliette (Lestage), Roland Landry, Sr. Irene, Bro. Albert, Laura (Chaves), Joseph Therese, Alphée, Anna, Carol

Which one will the family keep?



Alphée Labadie Family 1948

**Edward, Juliette (Lestage), Roland Landry, Sr. Irene, Bro. Albert, Laura (Chaves), Joseph
Therese, Alphée, Anna, Carol**

Use PowerPoint (or other graphics software

- Draw a box
- Place photo in the box
- Size as desired
- Type text in box below photo
- Select the box, picture, and text
- Group
- Select the group
- Right click and Save as picture

Editing Text

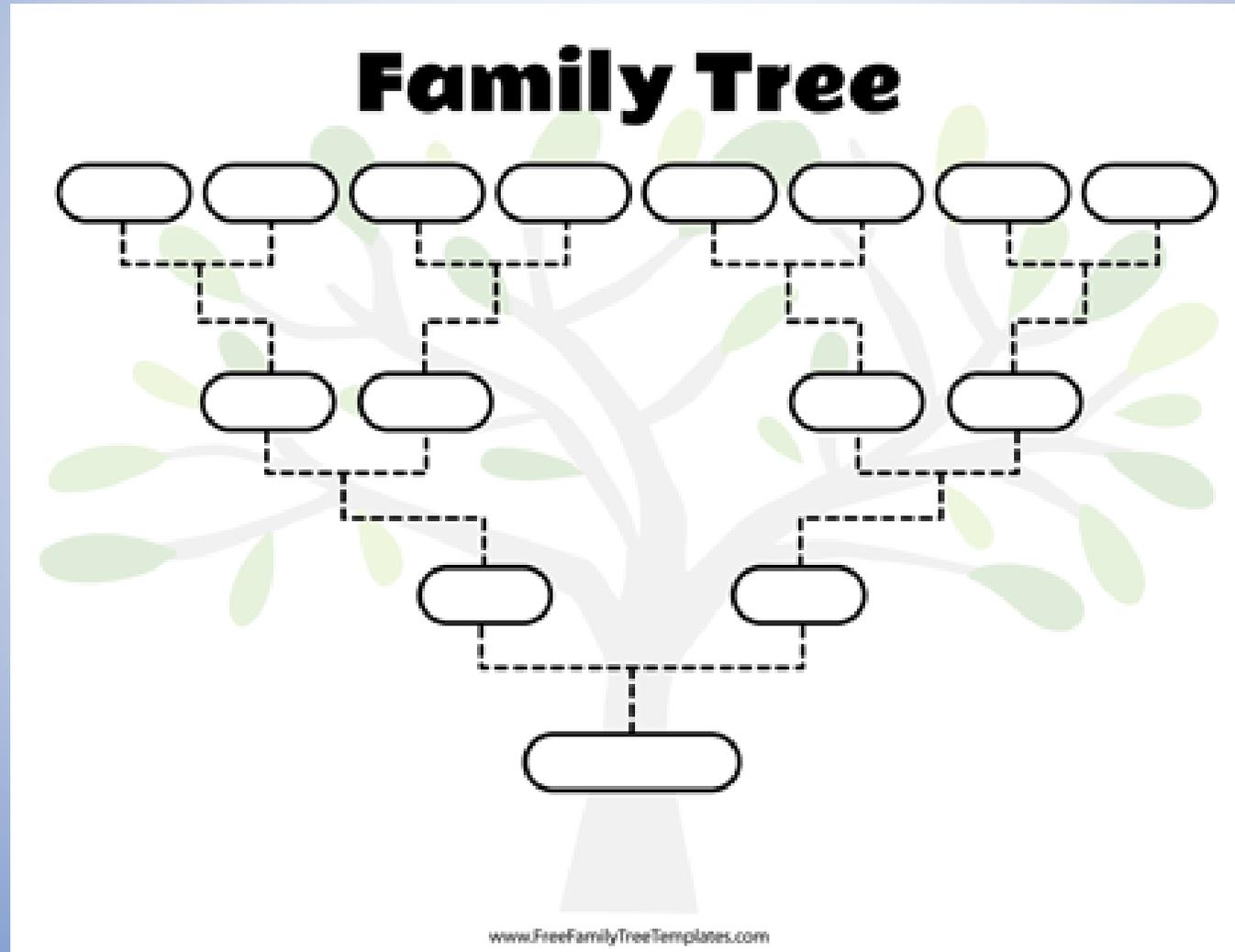
- Once the captioned photo is saved as a picture, the text becomes part of the picture and is not editable.
- To edit or replace text
- Insert captioned picture into PowerPoint
- Draw a solid box over the text
- Type new text in the box
- Select the box, picture, and text
- Group
- Select the group, right click, and Save as picture

Step 5 - Trees

Trees are the Roadmaps to Your Family History

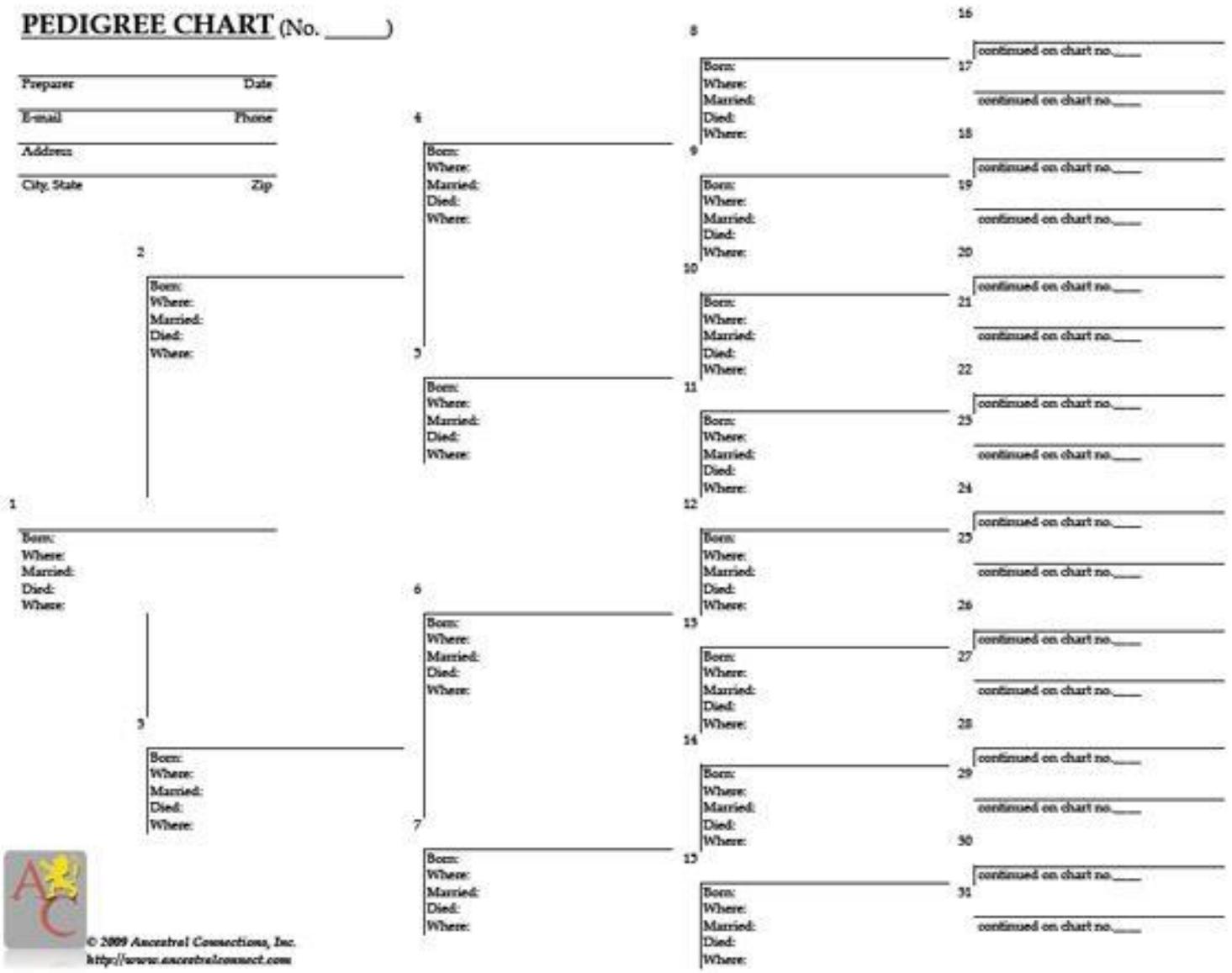
- Bottom-up Trees
- Top-Down Trees
- Broad-Based Trees

Trees

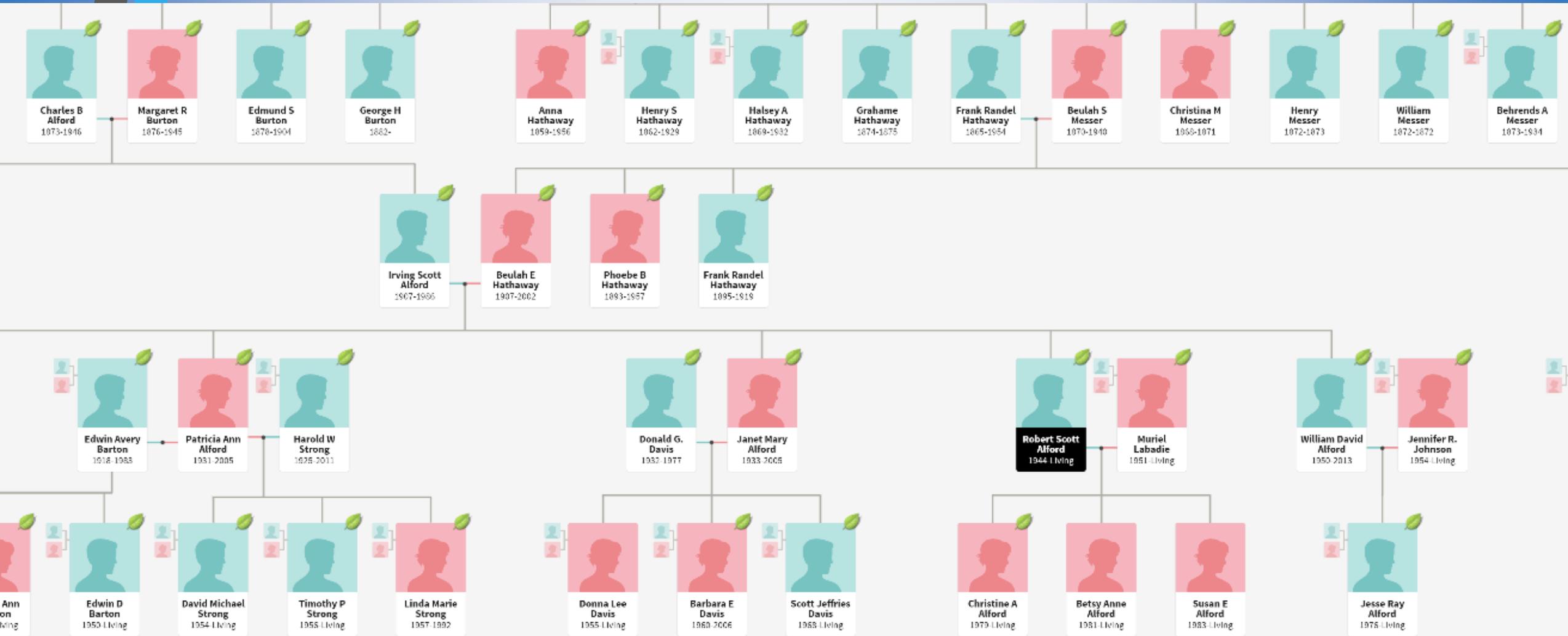


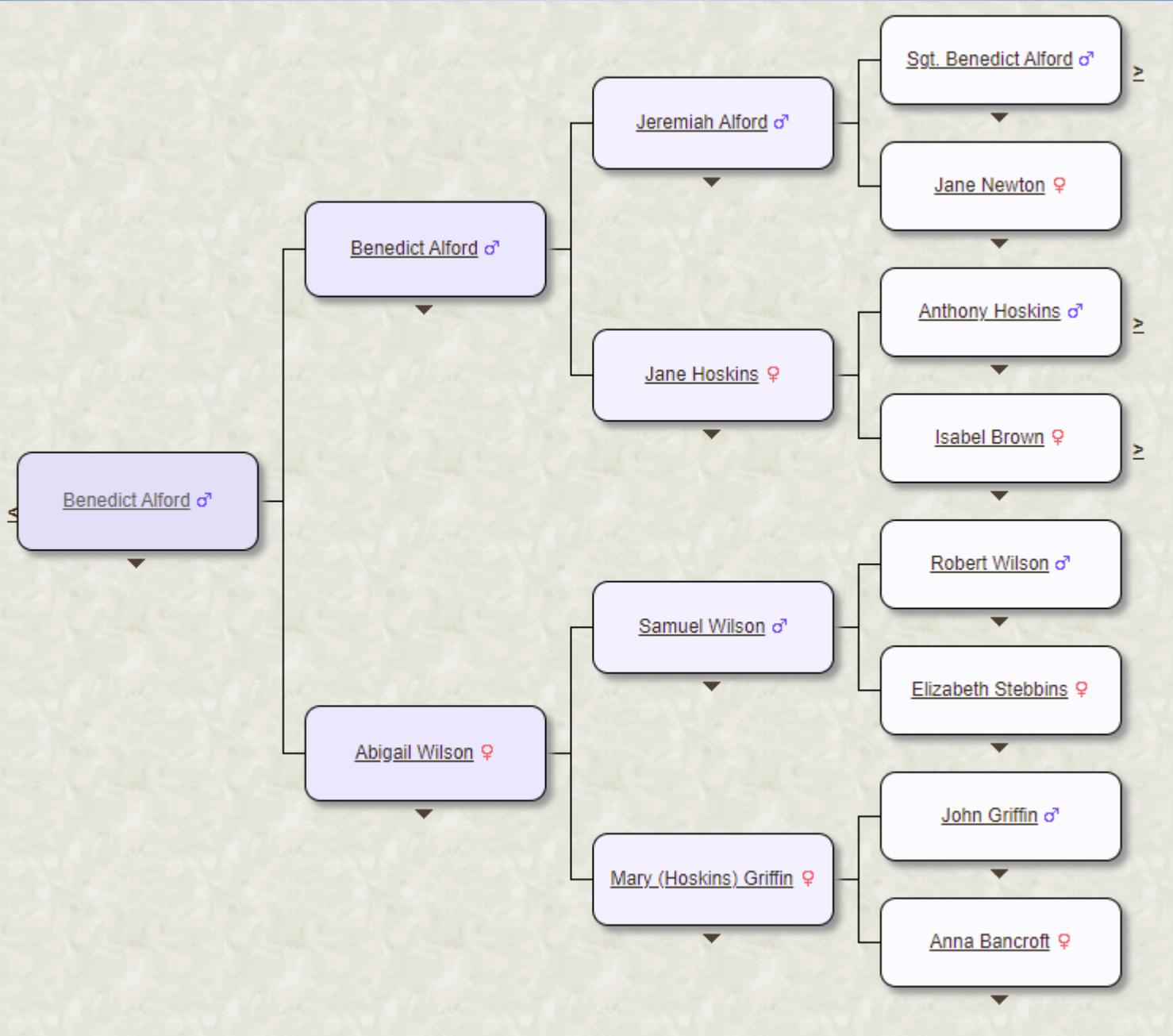
PEDIGREE CHART (No. _____)

Preparer _____ Date _____
 E-mail _____ Phone _____
 Address _____
 City, State _____ Zip _____



Trees





Trees

- Genealogy Trees existed before computers – on paper
- PC Based Trees
 - Run on your PC (Family Tree Maker, Legacy, Family Tree Builder, etc.)
 - Many Packages available
 - Very private – You must back them up
- Cloud Based Trees
 - Run on the Internet (Ancestry, MyHeritage, many more)
 - Sharable, but you are in control
 - Secure
 - Research Hints
- Custom websites (rtreeoflife.com)

Trees

Good News

- No need to spend money to start
 - Legacy and Family Tree Builder have Free versions for PC's
 - MyHeritage (online) is free for up to 250 people
- Your decision is not final
 - Trees can easily be moved from one platform to another using GEDCOM files
- So, just choose – you can change your mind later

Step 6 – Set Short and Long Term Goals

- Having goals is important
- Separating short and long term goals help's you focus
- Long term goals define where you are headed
- Short term goals define the next few steps you will take along the path.

Short Term Goals

- Keep a to-do list
- Keep items reasonable
- Don't get stuck on one ancestor
- Remember – this is a hobby
- It's supposed to be fun!

Getting Started To-Do List

- Make a simple list of all the family members you know with their dates (birth, marriage, death) and places.
- Setup a digital filing system on your PC so that when you find something new, you will know exactly where to store it
- Gather all your old photos and documents
- Digitize all the photos and documents into your filing system
- Start labeling your old photos
- Choose a software package
- Build a descendant's tree using your new software

Step 7 - Researching

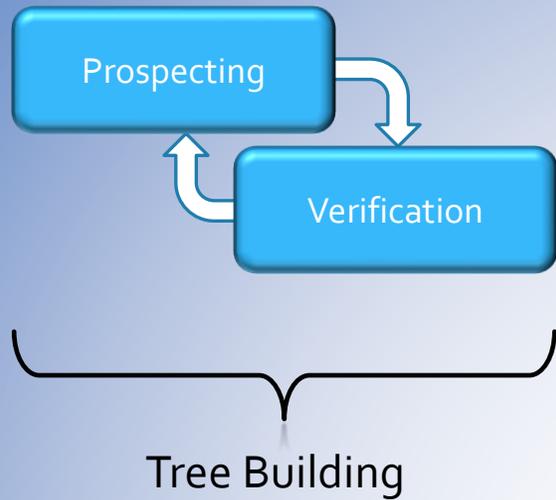
- Once you have completed your getting started To Do tasks, you are ready to start researching.
- Don't spin your wheels researching before you get through the basics and have a place to store things.

For Best Results

- Establish a Research Methodology
- Develop a Search Routine
- Stay Focused
- Keep Organized
- Take Great Notes
- Verify Everything
- Always Document Your Sources

My Methodology

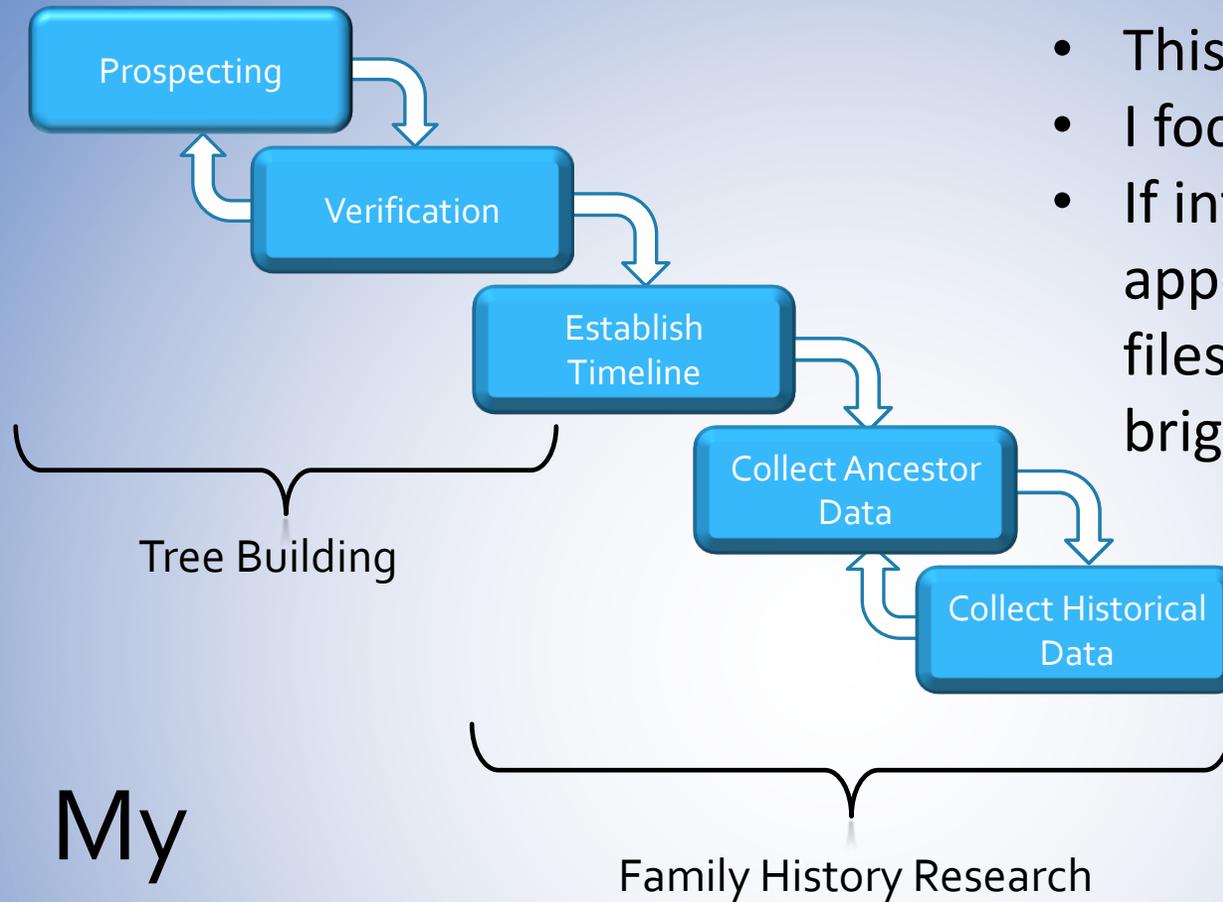
- Three parts
 - Tree Building
 - Family History Research
 - Telling the Family Story



My Methodology

- In this step I am just building out a branch of my tree.
- I select a known ancestor and try to find their ancestors, usually back 3-4 generations.
- It is OK to take hints from other people's trees and other questionable sources, but be skeptical. You need to verify the data or you might pollute a whole branch of your tree.
- I record verified data in my tree and any other information I come across in my notes file.

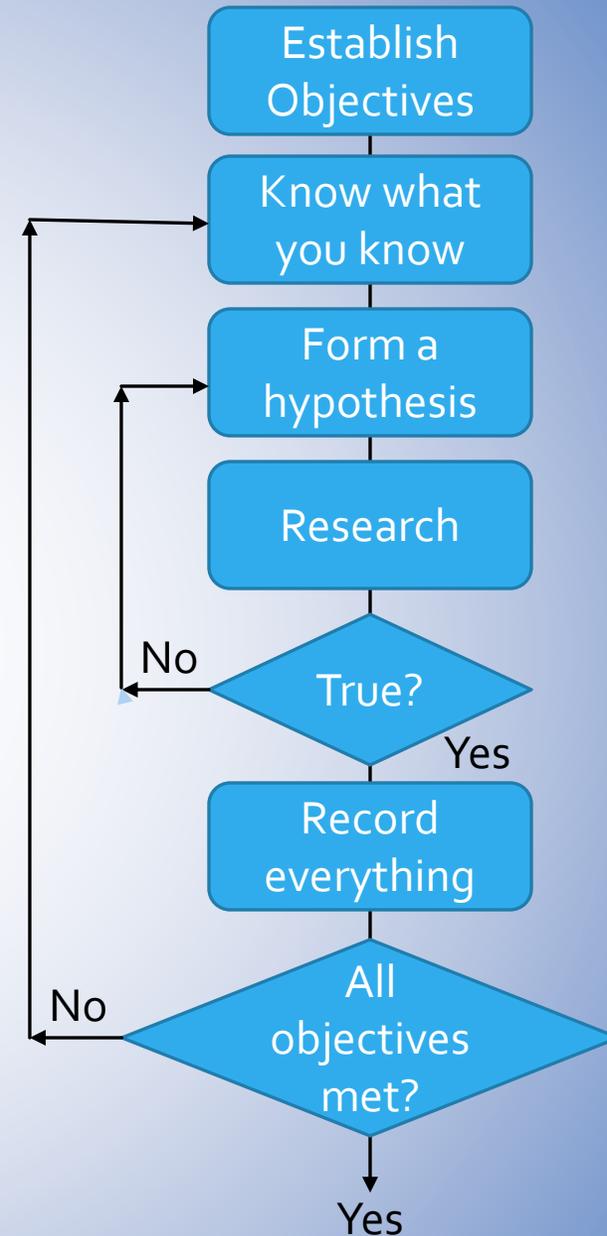
My Methodology



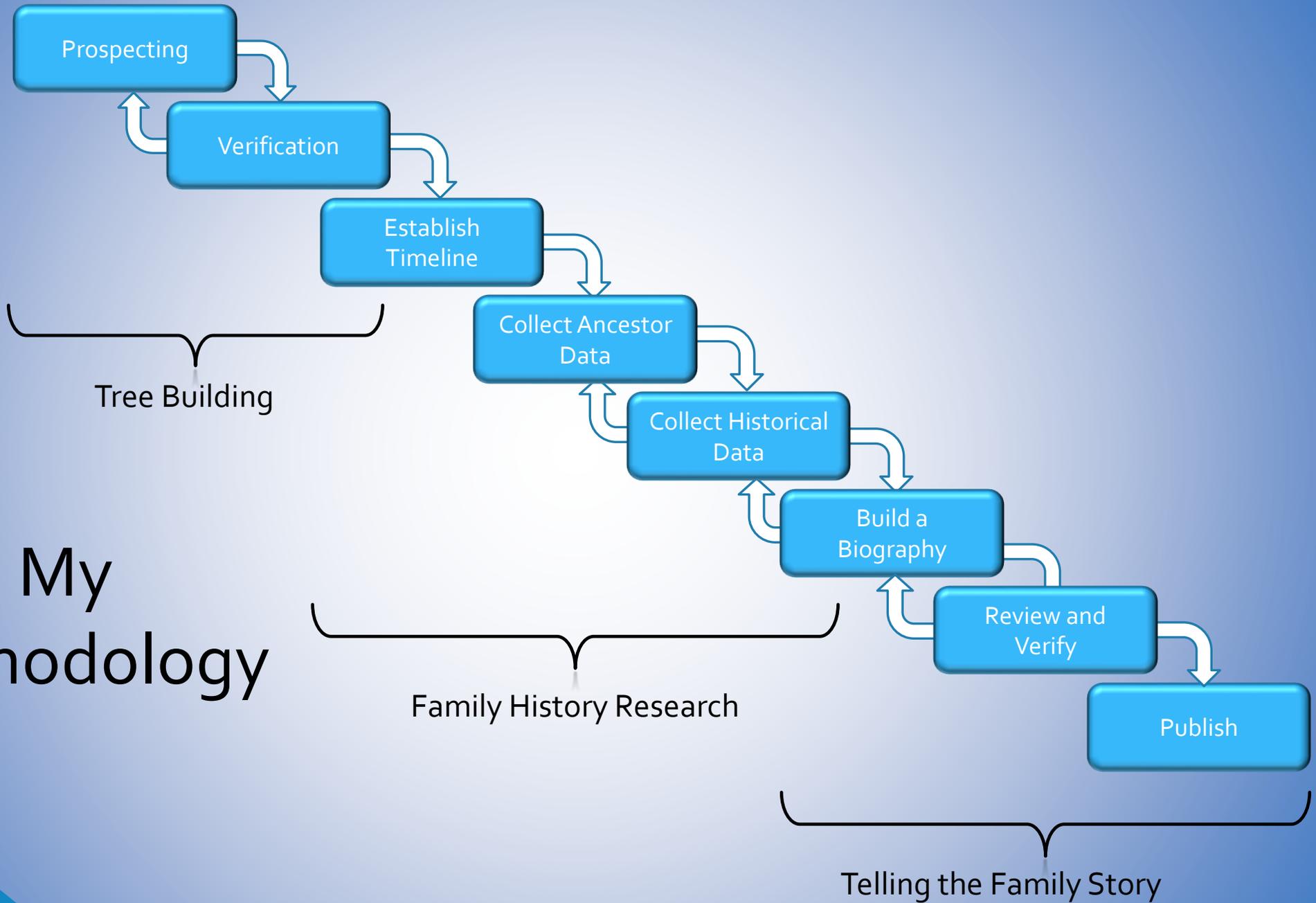
- This is the real research phase
- I focus on one couple
- If information on other generations appears, I copy links into my notes files for those individuals, but I avoid bright shiny objects

Follow a Plan

- Know your objectives
- List, or at least know what you already know
- Form a hypothesis – “based on what I know, I think this is what happened”
- Identify sources to prove or disprove your hypothesis
- Research the records – genealogical and historical
- Verify everything
- Record your sources
- Loop until all objectives have been met
- Don't get stuck



My Methodology



Develop a Search Routine

- My Five Top (free) Go to sites
 - Google.com (use special characters or advanced search)
 - FindaGrave.com
 - FamilySearch.org (including the Wiki)
 - Archive.org
 - Researchguides.net
- Paid sites I use often
 - Ancestry.com
 - MyHeritage.com
 - AmericanAncestors.org

Hints for Better Searches

- Keep it simple. Enter the minimal amount of data in the search field(s). Usually, the first and last name and a date or range of dates is sufficient. Over specifying the search will eliminate useful records.
- If your search returns too much data, add additional parameters one at a time.
- Take advantage of Google Advanced Search
- Learn to use special characters in search strings. Not all sites recognize them, but many do, including Google
- Use Google targeted searches to search websites that have slow or inadequate search engines.

Stay Focused – Keep Organized

- When prospecting – stay on one Surname
- Record others you encounter but don't let them distract you
- When doing Family History Research – stay on one ancestor at a time.
- Record locations of information about others you run into, but don't get distracted.
- Use your digital file system
- Don't bang your head on Brick Walls

Take Great Notes

- For everything you find
 - Record the web address so you can return to it
 - Copy via cut and paste or screen grab all interesting info
 - Add your own comments to record your thoughts at that the time
- Your note file or files are for your eyes only.
 - They don't need to be neat, but do need to be readable by you
 - They don't need to be verified. Note if the data is verified or not and/or what you think (needs verification, possible, but not likely, verified, etc.)
- Keep all your note files in your digital filing system

Verify Everything

• Good Sources

- Vital Records
- Court Records
- Obits
- Birth, Marriage, Death certificates
- Family Bibles
- Church original records
- Wills
- Deeds, Contracts, other legal documents
- Firsthand historical accounts
- Genealogy Papers/ Books with sources
- Newspaper reports

▶ Be Skeptical

- ▶ Other People's Trees
- ▶ Papers/Books without sources
- ▶ Family Folklore
- ▶ Newspaper articles about past events
- ▶ Ancestry or MyHeritage Hints

Always Document Your Sources

- Far too many websites, newspapers, and books (new and old) provide useful and interesting information, but don't provide a reliable source.
- If a reliable source is provided, check it, then quote that source.
- If you must include something that you can't verify, refer to the unreliable source and state that you have been unable to verify this information.
- Don't add to the vast amount of false and unverified data on the Internet.

Some Useful Guidelines

- Know what you are looking for
- Be realistic in your expectations – don't rush
- Record then ignore “bright shiny objects”
- In your raw data, note what websites you visited
- If you add data to your raw data, note if it is proven or not and any further research suggested.
- If you find something, and it specifies sources, check those sources
- Keep your digital files organization simple and consistent
- Don't bang your head on brick walls
- Celebrate victories.

If You Use Ancestry

- Ancestry will “help” you with your research but be careful!
- Ancestry hints are often wrong
- Make sure the hint or the results from a search are
 - Really for your ancestor
 - Are a verifiable record
- Beware of OPT data (Other People’s Trees
- Ancestry has many short videos on researching at <https://www.ancestryacademy.com/browse>

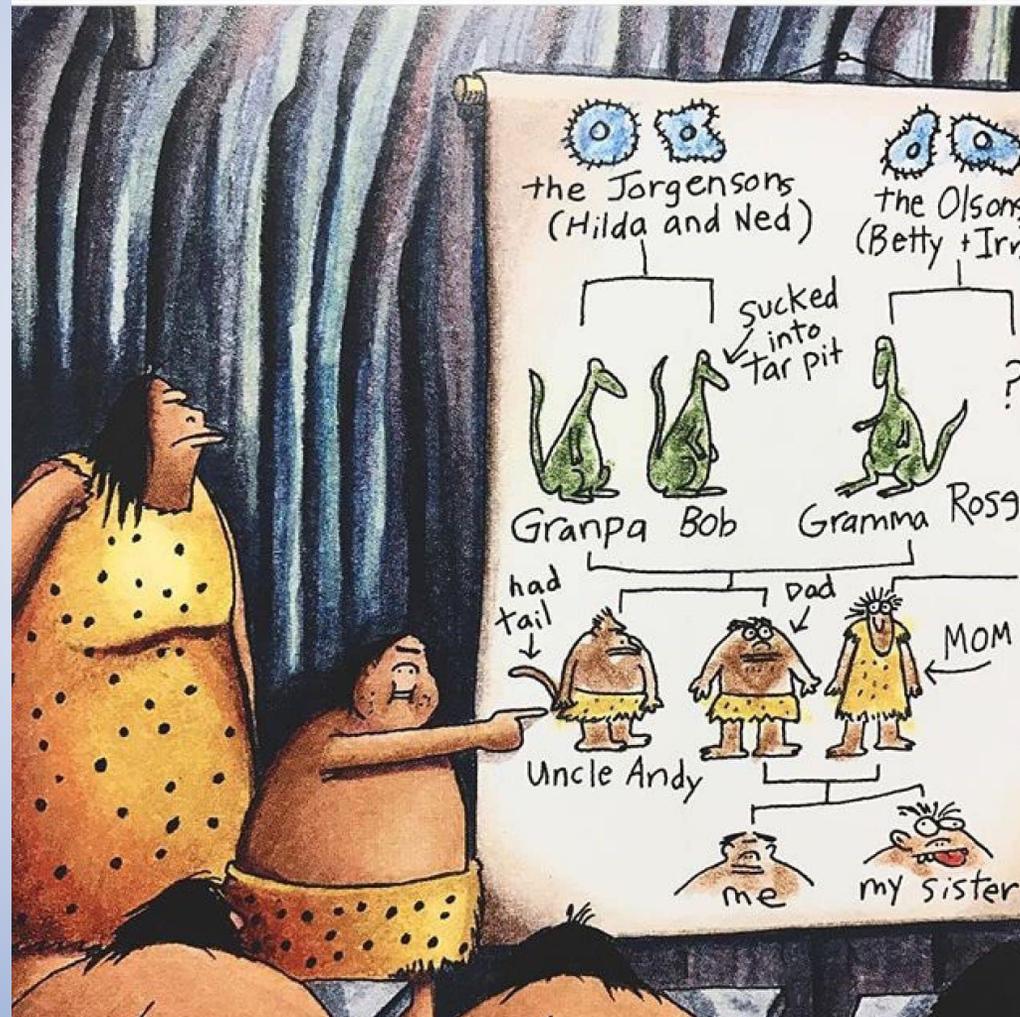
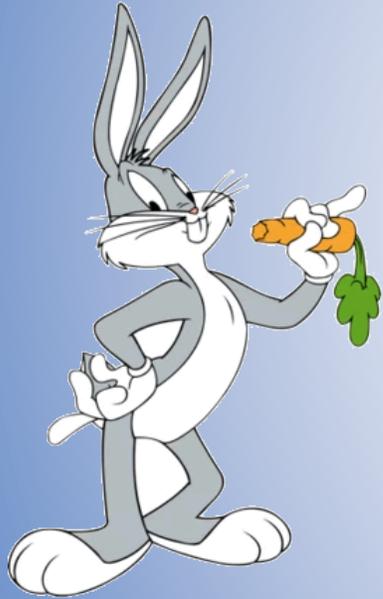
OK, Then What?

- What I showed you is just the beginning
- Explore other presentations on this website
- To access recorded webinars, go to Rootstech.org or search for Genealogy or a specific genealogy topic on YouTube.com.

But I'm stuck. I can't find my

- You have what we call a brick wall. Everyone has them.
- Some ancestors don't want to be found.
- There are advanced techniques.
- DNA might help.
- To learn more, search for webinars or papers on "cluster research" or "proof arguments".
- Don't bang your head on a brick wall.

Enjoy Your Adventures in Family History



**That's
All
Folks!**