

AARP

Genealogy Online

tech  to connect



From the makers of

FOR
DUMMIES

**Matthew L. Helm
April Leigh Helm**

AARP[®] Genealogy Online Tech to Connect

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***AARP[®] Genealogy Online Tech to
Connect***

**by Matthew L. Helm and April
Leigh Helm**



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Dedication

For Kyleakin and Cambrian

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We offer special thanks to our friends at John Wiley & Sons, who provided invaluable guidance and feedback on this book: Katie Mohr, Kim Darosett, Rebecca Whitney, Sharon Mealka, and Pat O'Brien.

Connections That Work for You

Are you searching for your ancestral roots, but you don't know where to look? Or have you started to pull together your family history and gotten stuck on a particular detail? You've turned to the right place for help.

Dedicated to helping you strengthen your family ties and navigate the world of technology, AARP has joined with the For Dummies brand to offer the best advice and solutions for using tech to connect.

This step-by-step guide offers ways to

- Find free and low-cost software, websites, and other resources
- Use social networking sites to locate family members you didn't know you had
- Build your own site to compile and share information with relatives
- Create a family project that will delight all generations

Whatever your experience with genealogy — online or offline — our easy-to-follow resource helps you build your family tree.

Ready to start digging? Let's go!



AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50 and older improve their lives. For more than 50 years, AARP has been serving our members and society by creating positive social change. AARP's mission is to enhance the quality of life for all as we age; lead positive social change; and deliver value to members through information, service and advocacy.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments at <http://dummies.custhelp.com>. For other comments, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

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Introduction

We authors like to think that we live in the golden age of family history. When we first began our personal research, the process was time- and travel-intensive. After visiting the National Archives (or one of its regional archives) to sign out a reader for studying microfilm, we would consult the archive's index books in the hope of finding a trace of elusive ancestors. When we were lucky, we would find a clue in an index, which enabled us to pull the correct microfilm from the long rows of cabinets. After shuffling to the reader, we would scroll, seemingly endlessly, to find the page number from the index.

Fortunately, over the past decade, family history research has taken a quantum leap forward. After the spotty transcription of key historical records on CD-ROM came the systematic digitization and indexing of census records, first on CD-ROM and later on the web. Now a new age has begun, as evidenced by the digital release of the 1940 United States census directly online rather than on microfilm, accompanied by the community effort to index this census in its entirety and to make the index available for free. Beyond traditional sources of family history research, science is advancing DNA techniques. First Y-DNA and mitochondrial DNA were used, and now refined techniques allow researchers to use autosomal DNA to fill in holes in their research. (That might sound complicated, but we'll show you that it's not.)

In addition to progress in the availability of census records, millions of military, vital (such as birth certificates and death records), tax, and land records are now digitized and indexed online. Though you still can't complete your entire family history exclusively from online sources, you can make a good start from the comfort of your own home.

About This Book

Though millions of records are now online, no single comprehensive way to find all of them exists. You need a strategy for locating and evaluating the evidence that you find online, and that's where this book comes in. We help you sort out where to begin your search and point you toward key sites. At the same time, we give you tips for using these sites effectively, to save you time and (we hope) frustration. And you can find easy ways to create a family tree and share that with the rest of your family.

Keep in mind that this book covers genealogical websites, software, and resources that are most commonly used and preferred at the time of this book's printing. We are not endorsing these sites and software over others, but in our experience and through extensive research, we have found these resources to be the most effective

and useful for our own online genealogy.

Before you start following the step-by-step instructions in this book, you need to know a few basic research strategies that can save you time in the long run. If you're at the beginning of your family history journey, we suggest that you keep these steps in mind:

Plan: Always start with a plan. Begin by thinking about members of your family whom you know something about, and jot down particular information about them that you want to confirm. For example, start by trying to find records that can confirm vital information about a parent or grandparent, such as the dates of their births, marriages, and deaths. You can better focus your research by establishing specific goals.

Collect: Before booting up your computer and going online, collect whatever information you can from records around your house (such as birth, marriage, or death records, insurance documents, wills, and deeds) or from interviewing other family members. In this way, you can build a foundation for evaluating the information you find online to ensure that you're on the right track toward tracing your ancestors.

Research: After you establish this foundation, you can start researching. Online research, as covered in this book, is only one of many tools you should use to paint the complete picture of your family history. You can also use a combination of online and traditional resources, such as records from county clerks, libraries, cemeteries, and genealogical societies.

Consolidate: After a trip online or to a local repository, organize all the material you've gathered. Consolidating this information into genealogical database software is an ideal solution to provide not only a storage location for your findings but also a safety backup. Remember to cite the sources of your evidence in the database to assist you in confirming information later, such as when someone retraces your research.

Distill: The final step is to use your genealogical database to distill information for your next search. You can use the reporting features of the software to find gaps in your records or to uncover conflicting information, such as different birth dates for the same individual. You can also use the information in your database to share with other researchers, who can help you by sharing their research. Always respect the privacy of living individuals, and respect copyright laws when sharing information.



Keep in mind that you can't believe *everything* you find online, in books, or even in primary source records. You can't assume that certain information is factual simply because it's in print. We have found many mistakes in the research

of others — even in published research. New record sets are released every day that can change the conclusions made in previous research. When our youngest daughter was born, the hospital attempted three times to complete her birth registration paperwork correctly. Had we accepted the original paperwork without checking it, our daughter’s name would have been misspelled, the time of birth would have been off by 12 hours, and a parent’s name would have been incorrect. The lesson: Validate every piece of information you find, and even verify primary records with other primary records to form a conclusion supported by evidence.

Who This Book Is For

If you’re the kind of person who has an interest in family roots, who loves to solve puzzles, and who wants to use technology to discover a new wealth of resources, *AARP Genealogy Online: Tech to Connect* is definitely for you. Even if you don’t consider yourself tech-savvy, this book can be your guide to your past.

If you haven’t yet started researching your family history, you need to know that you’re likely to become hooked on it. You’ll always have another record to find, another person to connect with, or another resource to explore. Researching your family history can consume a lot of time, but it’s well worth the effort.

Conventions

To make this book as easy to use as possible, we have used certain *conventions*, or standard ways of identifying key concepts within the book:

- Whenever we introduce a new concept, we *italicize* the word or phrase (as in the following Bullet1) so that you can easily find it when you need it.
- Whenever we refer to a website for the first time, we include its web address (or *URL*) so that you can type the location into your web browser and immediately start your research on that site. If you’re reading an electronic version of this book, simply click the URL to pop over to the site.
- When we want you to type something onscreen, we spell it out in **bold** type.
- Whenever we introduce you to a web resource, we search as generically as possible so that you can find answers to your research questions no matter what they are.
- When we have more to say than will fit into a single step, we use sidebars to enhance the list of steps or to provide you with more useful information.
- The figures that we sprinkle generously throughout this book should be helpful for visual learners as well as for hands-on readers. The figures help you stay on

the path at key junctures in the activities in the book.

How This Book Is Organized

Though you have many ways to research your family history, you need some basic experience before we turn you loose on the larger websites and more complex resources. Here's a rundown of the order in which topics are introduced in the book:

Get your feet wet by researching yourself (Chapter 1). Chapter 1 explains the research techniques to use when researching family members, whether they're members of your current family or ancestors from long ago. We walk you through the steps to write an autobiography and use records from your own life as evidence — the same kind of evidence you need in order to fill in the family history of your ancestors.

Create family trees and store your research (Chapters 2 and 3). Your research isn't helpful if you don't keep track of the evidence you find online and via other research methods. We tell you how to use genealogy database software to create a family tree online — two resources that can help you focus your research and fill in any gaps that you find.

Search the web (Chapter 4). Millions of pages on the web contain family history information, and you have to find the right one to meet your needs. We walk you through the steps to use web search engines efficiently, and we provide you with search strings that can focus your results.

Discover the wealth of information at the big-name research sites (Chapters 5 and 6). Successful family-history research on the web usually involves either Ancestry.com or FamilySearch.org — or both. These two sites contain millions of records between them and research guides that can teach you ways to discover even more records in repositories around the world.

Take advantage of free information on government sites (Chapter 7). One thing the government does well is generate evidence for family history researchers. We cover some helpful websites that feature government records, including military, land, and immigration.

Map your research (Chapters 8 and 9). Using geographical resources helps you put your ancestors' lives into context. You can discover your ancestors' living conditions and use geographical records to locate their hiding places (in records, that is). And, of course, you can use maps to visit the places where your ancestors lived.

Capitalize on smaller record sites (Chapters 10 and 11). A number of smaller

sites specialize in a particular type of record set (or sets), such as military and local records. We describe how to use some of these sites and give you tips to discovering the unique resources of each one.

Communicate by using social networking sites (Chapter 12). Sites dedicated to genealogy and family history aren't the only places to discover hints about your ancestors. We introduce you to ways to use social networking sites, such as Facebook, to communicate with other researchers who can assist you with your research.

Explore DNA research (Chapter 13). DNA is truly the new frontier of genealogy research. Many tests are available these days, and we help you select one for the type of answers you're seeking.

Mobilize your research on a tablet or smart phone (Chapter 14). You can take your research with you almost anywhere you go. It's easily contained and accessed in a *tablet* — a compact and lightweight tool that uses applications (or *apps*) to maximize your research experience while you're in the field.

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Chapter 1

Writing Your Autobiography with arcalife

You can begin the journey to find your family history in many different ways. We believe that the best way is to focus on the person you know best — yourself. By completing an autobiographical sketch, you learn some of the questions to ask about your ancestors and start getting acquainted with the types of records you use when researching others. And, who knows? You might even learn a little about yourself in the process. For a fun way to start, follow a guided autobiography online.

While there are several sites that allow you to enter biographical information as a way of producing a print publication, arcalife is the only site that we have found that asks you a set of interview questions, and your answers are then merged to form a family history. But rather than suggest that you create a complete family history with arcalife, we recommend that you start with your own autobiography so that you can become comfortable using online resources to help with your research.

tech to connect activities

- ▶ Creating a free arcalife registration
 - ▶ Specifying the privacy settings
 - ▶ Noting memories on the site
 - ▶ Listing experiences
 - ▶ Assembling your online autobiography
-

Creating a Free arcalife Registration

The first step in writing an autobiography on arcalife is to complete the free registration. You can sign up by using the site's 1-Step Free Signup option, as described in these steps:

1. Point your browser to www.arcalife.com.
2. In the rightmost column, find the area marked 1-Step Free Signup (see Figure 1-1).
3. Fill out your name, e-mail address, password, birthdate, and gender in the appropriate fields.

4. In the Enter Code box, type the code that appears to the right of the Enter Code field.
5. Read the terms of use and then select the Agree to Terms of Use box.
6. Click the Sign Up button to continue. The page redirects you to your personalized arcalife home page.



Figure 1-1

Controlling Privacy Settings

Before entering your personal information at the arcalife site, you must choose who can see the information you're placing there. An easy way to do this is to change the privacy settings on the site. Until you're more comfortable with how arcalife works, we suggest that you set the privacy settings to their highest settings. Keep in mind that you can always restore less restrictive settings later. Follow these steps to change your arcalife privacy settings:

1. Log in to the arcalife site. To do so, click the Login link in the upper-right corner of the home page. When the Login pop-over box appears, type the e-mail address and password you used while registering and click the Login button. (This *pop-over box* is similar to a dialog box except that it expects you to complete its fields and click a button to make it disappear.)
2. In the Tools and Settings section of the leftmost column on the page, click the Privacy Settings link. The Privacy Settings page appears, as shown in Figure 1-2. You can set the privacy settings for every area of the site.
3. To set the privacy settings for the Life Archives section, click the Change Settings button in the Life Archives box. The Privacy Settings pop-over box appears.
4. To choose the highest privacy level, click the Private radio button.

5. Click the Save button to save the settings.
6. Repeat Steps 3–5 to set the privacy settings for the remaining areas of the site.

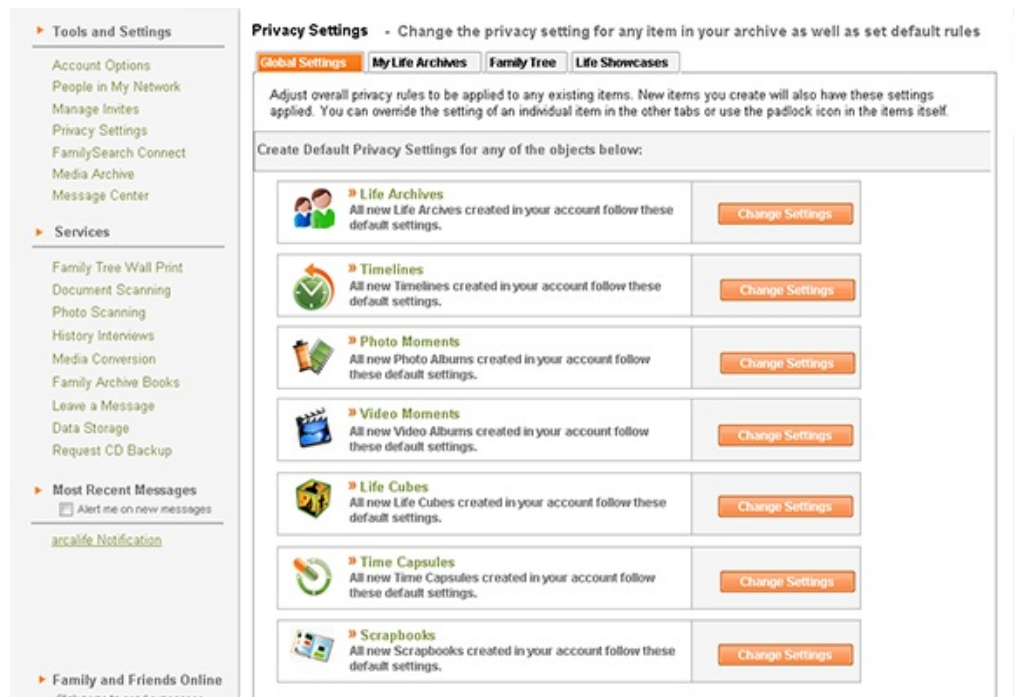


Figure 1-2

Noting Memories on the Site

After you have set up an account on arcalife and set its security level, it's time to begin listing memories. Include your own memories and the memories that other people have of you. Follow these steps:

1. Log in to the arcalife website. (See Step 1 in the preceding section.)
2. From your personalized page, click the My Life tab at the top of the page. The tab is on the green arc that spans the top of the personalized page.
3. On the My Life page are a number of tabs on which you can provide information. Fill out the information on the Profile tab for yourself, and then click the Save button. Note that some of your information is already prepopulated, as a result of your site registration.



The Profile tab has some fields that you don't need to worry about, such as Date of Death, Place of Death, and Final Resting. These fields are used in other areas of the site, if you later choose to use the site to enter information about your ancestors.

4. Click the Memories tab.
5. Click the New Memory link. The Write a New Memory dialog box appears.