

4H Western Heritage Project Genealogy Activities for Level 2

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Level 2

In level 1 you began your genealogy research. Now it is time to pull back the pages of the past and do some in-depth research! In level 2, you will go beyond the third generation (great-grandparents) of your family history. For this level you will be uncovering your 4th and 5th generation relatives' names, places of residence, birth, and death. Records can become hard to find when you start searching for your great-great-grandparents - especially for minority populations where records can be spotty. You will need to use every tool in your toolbox to uncover the mystery of your past. I promise it will be a fun discovery. So let's get to work!

Probably the easiest way of looking up your relatives is by doing a Google search. Sometimes you will get obscure results, and other times you may discover a website dedicated to your family by a relative you have never even met! Go to Google.com and type in the first, middle initial (if you know it), last name, and birthplace (if you know it) in the search bar. If someone is known by more than one name, put the alternate name or names in parentheses after the surname, preceded by "a.k.a." (also known as). As an example, John Smith (a.k.a. John Taylor). Be careful if you have a common last name. The key to good genealogy research is attention to detail. Some of you will be lucky and will discover your ancestors lived in the same county as you do currently. If this is the case, visit your Clerk of District Court's office or call them to see if records exist for your great-grandparents. Whether you are looking up birth or death records, you will find the parents' names of your great-grandparents. However, if multiple marriages occurred, you will need the marriage records to make sure your lineage is correct.

This will take time and dedication. Roadblocks will pop up. Be patient and back away for a day if you get frustrated when you hit one. It will happen. Recharge and remember you are doing this not just for the Western Heritage Project, but to ignite a passion for your family history, honor what they have done, celebrate how far your family has come, and rejoice in the triumphs they overcame.

If Google is not returning the results you want, try the website FamilySearch.org. You can browse their database of Census records from 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930. I have used this website many times, and am very pleased with the accurate results it returns. FamilySearch.org provides pictures of ancestors as well as other member's family trees to use as resources.

If you have chosen to work with Ancestry.com, your search will be a little easier due to their enormous database. You will notice little leaves that pop up next to the names of your family members' names. CLICK on these leaves! They are called "Ancestry Hints" and are critical to your search! From these hints, you will receive information about places lived; age and names of siblings and parents at the time of the record, as well as marriage, birth, and death records. You will have the option to add the record to your tree. Not all records will be accurate 100% of the time. Make sure that the dates and names on the record match up with the information you already have. Also, a fun feature of Ancestry.com is it can show you matches of your relatives on other people's family tree. This is a good way to gain new information and also start a relationship with a long-lost relative. You will see that Ancestry.com allows you to add information from these records to your tree. I encourage you to add the pictures of the records to your tree as well. You can also print out these records for your own keeping. Be careful not to add the same ancestor to your tree more than once!

If you are so inspired, you can even write a book about your family from this research. It makes a good Christmas or birthday present, trust me. If there is one thing that families do most when together, it is reminiscing about the "old days". Having printed records, dates, and addresses of homes/ranches is sure to warm the heart of your family members. Your family could even go on a road trip to visit houses or ranches where your ancestors once lived.