

Important Information for the Family Researcher

General Interest

Posted by: Jack Nida

Posted on : 2006/6/26 20:20:00

During the past ten years I have helped hundreds of researchers with information regarding their family history and have thoroughly enjoyed doing it. It gives me great pleasure to see so many young people become interested in their roots - perhaps that is the reason that I am a GenWeb volunteer lookup for Roane Co., WV and a member of their Historical Society. Becoming involved creates a learning process that is required of those who want to become good genealogists. Here are some of the "rules" that I have learned and will share with you.

There are three important requirements for data that you find and record - **SOURCE, SOURCE, SOURCE**. Documentation is required so that proper recognition of the work of others is acknowledged and that follow up research may be initiated in later years. Be thorough and specific about where you obtained the information. Try to identify the primary source for your information, especially dates. Develop a pecking order for the most accurate sources and try to obtain data from those sources nearest the top of the list. Birth, death, and marriage certificates rank near the top. Census records after 1850 are excellent for obtaining names within a family and their approximate birth dates. County tax records, deeds and wills are also very high on the list. Obituaries can offer a lot of family information to you. Family Bible information is important BUT should be used with extreme caution. I have found many errors (including one in my own father's Bible) in family Bibles due to information being added by a family member from memory that has faded with the passage of time. Information contained in a family Bible is often added after the original owner is deceased. Don't assume that all data collected from handwritten information is accurate. Join a local Historical Society. You may find others that are researching the same family surname as yourself and are willing to share their information with you. Most organizations also publish records that were taken from the local courthouse such as Birth, Death, Marriage and Cemetery listings. Go to the libraries and courthouses in the area where your ancestors lived and search their records. Birth, Marriage and Death records are stored here as well as Tax Records, Deeds and Wills. These are the most important source documents that you can find for a high degree of accuracy. Census records are often found in libraries and are an invaluable source of data. They also supply information regarding the area of the county where each person lived in relation to other families in the same census record. Talk with some of the older family members and take good notes about names, dates and places. Be careful not to give the impression that you are prying. Everyone wants to feel that you are genuinely interested in the knowledge and experiences of their past. Do not rely on their memory for completely accurate information. Follow up with research for other primary documentation. Search the internet for information at web sites such as GenWeb and RootsWeb. They have many links to other genealogy sites that will aid in your research. For the new researcher, here is a must to see: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~rwguide/lesson1.htm> Church records are also important sources of research, especially in the old countries where our ancestors lived before coming to America. Old family pictures are extremely important to obtain. Offer to pay for having a copy made for your personal use and be sure to obtain information about everyone in the picture and the approximate year that it was taken. A good PC scanner is worth its' weight in gold for copying and storing data

and pictures. Remember, pictures do not deteriorate on your hard drive or storage disks like they do on paper. Post queries about an ancestor that you are having trouble in finding. Look for message boards and register the surname that you are researching in counties where your ancestors lived. I recommend a computer software genealogy program such as Family Tree Maker for recording your information. **BEWARE** of copying information from internet sites and then publishing it under your own name with a genealogical organization, a web site, or in any other printed form. You may be in violation of copyright laws and you will certainly be in violation of the ethics of family history research. Obtain permission from the source before copying and distributing this information in any manner. Most genealogists are happy to share their work with you as long as you adhere to their guidelines for publication of their information. Check out the data you receive from the internet to be sure that it is accurate. I have found many, many errors on Family Home Pages, World Family Tree, Ancestry, and other publishers of family tree information. Be aware that these organizations DO NOT edit the information that is given to them before they make it available to the public. I have seen erroneous information copied over and over from one person to another as a result of someone copying another's data with absolutely no real research of their own to substantiate the information. If you want to leave a legacy for future generations, learn to do it right and avoid the mistakes of others.

Submitted by Jack Nida

*Publisher of the book, **The Family von Nida**, From Germany to America 1262-1998*