

Finding Yesterday

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
UNCOVERING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

JIM DANE

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Finding Yesterday

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*Dedicated to all those who have yet to
discover their family story or their family history.*

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A Rare Find: Shown here is my ancestor, Washington S. Dane, born in 1846. He is the man standing in the middle of the photo. This is most likely his marriage photo with his second wife, Sarah Adkins. Sarah's brother is on the right, holding baby Rado Dane from Washington's first marriage to Angeletta Gossage. Discovering photos like this adds to the excitement of the search.

FOREWORD

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, JIM DANE CAME INTO THE Family History Center (a genealogy library) where I volunteer and help patrons. I'm a professional genealogist nationally known for my many articles and lectures on using technology to help trace your family tree, but I also have a great deal of experience researching families in Kentucky and Tennessee (where my own ancestors lived from the earliest pioneer times).

Jim could find records tracing his family only so far back in Kentucky. Then they seemed to evaporate. He could find no mention of the name DANE before that time. I had him show me the records he had found and together we made some earlier searches. There were no DANES, but I noticed there were DEANS. I suggested the DANES might actually have been listed as DEANS. He was skeptical but agreed to investigate further. Just one correct spelling for a name is a modern myth. As a professional genealogist, I knew names were spelled any old way the record taker heard them.

Well, Jim worked hard. He made the connections taking his ancestral lines all the way back prior to the American Rev-

olution. What surprised me was his thoughtfulness. He came back to the Family History Center with a box of chocolates to say thanks and tell me of his progress. I shared his story (and the chocolates) with the other volunteers and we basked in the sweet taste of his success.

I hope you enjoy his family tree adventure back through history preserved here in Jim's book. And I hope you are inspired to find your family history as well.

— Barbara Renick

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of Directors*

PREFACE

I HAVE A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS FOR YOU:

“Do you know who your great great grandfather is?”

“Do you know the year that your ancestors came to America?”

“Do you know what county and country they came from?”

I am asking you if you truly know your family history on both sides—maternal and paternal.

If you are not completely sure or if you have only heard some vague stories handed down from relatives, stories that lack any kind of hard evidence, then this book is for you.

Many Americans are fascinated by popular television programs like “Who Do You Think You Are?” and “Faces of America”—shows that explore the family history and life stories of celebrities and other famous people. But I guarantee you that their genealogical discoveries are no more interesting than yours! In fact, I believe that *your* story is the best story.

And that is exactly why I wrote this book: To help you discover your own fascinating story.

I grew up not knowing anything about my family history. My parents told me the typical tale heard in so many American

families—that I was a “Heinz 57” mixture of English, German, and French with a little Irish thrown in for good measure. But for some reason, this just didn’t seem to satisfy my curiosity. I often wondered what was the name of our first ancestor that came to America? And where did he or she come from?

If you have the same desire as I did, to really know your family history, then you couldn’t have picked a better time to be alive! Today, with the Internet, a plethora of genealogy web sites, and so many other genealogical resources easily accessible (and many at little or no cost), discovering your family history and *Finding Yesterday* has never been easier. I guarantee you that after reading this book, and with a little bit of time and effort, you will discover the truth about your family history—including perhaps a few surprises along the way.

I worked for seven years to find my family’s story and now I want to give back and share a unique approach that will make your search easier, faster and a lot more fun. Most of the available genealogy books are packed with fact after fact about every possible record that exists; but that can feel overwhelming. In this book, I have streamlined ideas and resources so you can move quickly. I will use my own family history as a template for yours, showing you how I researched and discovered previously unknown facts about my ancestry and how to follow my steps and do it for yourself.

In the first chapter, I provide simple steps for finding your family information right now. Next, I will take you back in time, era by era, and share with you the important documents and records of each of these time periods—and where to find

them. Starting with the Great Depression, I then work backwards through the Post Civil War, Civil War, War of 1812 and the American Revolution eras—tracing my family history through each time period.

This book will prove that one does not need to be a king or queen, or a famous celebrity to have a good story. Every American has an interesting tale to tell, a priceless legacy that deserves to be passed down to future generations before it is lost.

5 Generation Ancestral Chart

Chart # _____

Not on this chart is the same as # _____ on Chart # _____

The boxes by each name may be checked to indicate that all the details have been completed.

1 _____
 Born _____
 Place _____
 Married _____
 Place _____
 Died _____
 Place _____

Sponsor _____
 Born _____
 Died _____

Children of # (for chart #)

2 _____
 Born _____
 Place _____
 Married _____
 Place _____
 Died _____
 Place _____

3 _____
 Born _____
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4 _____
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31 _____
 Born _____

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 www.TracingYourGenealogy.com

Example of an Online Genealogy Form: Ancestral Charts (also referred to as a “Family Tree Charts” or “Pedigree Charts”) like this are used to record the ancestors from whom you are directly descended and are available at little or no cost from a number of sources. (Courtesy of tracingyourgenealogy.com)

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GETTING STARTED

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO seem to have little or no interest in their past. Or they think that trying to learn about it will take too much effort, cost too much or might even prove to be disappointing. My friend Ron was like this.

We have known each other for over twenty years. We played racquetball together and often on our way to the courts would have deep discussions on everything from religion, war, and retirement to personal issues. One Saturday, I was excited to share some new found family history discoveries I had made. Ron sort of rolled his eyes as if to say, "Oh, not this again."

So I dropped the subject but later that evening, I did a quick search on his family's past, starting in the Civil War era. His surname is fairly rare and that makes searching easier. For instance, if his last name was Smith, thousands of names would have appeared in a search. However, because his last name was unusual, when I searched for all Civil War soldiers from

1861-1865 that used that surname(I will show you this link later), I found only one page of names. On that page was each soldier's full name, home state, unit name and rank. With the click of a mouse, I was able to also find the places where those units fought and which battles they were involved in.

The next Saturday that we drove together, I simply handed him this Civil War document on his family and waited for his reaction. He was amazed. "Wow, how did you get this?" he asked me. "This is really cool, I am calling my dad today and sharing this with him!" He then added, "I hope Dad can tell me which one of these men is ours!" (his father was eighty-five years old at that time).

Ron's reaction was typical of every person that I have helped over the years. None of us knows how long our parents and elders will be with us and these conversations become very important as time goes on. Even people who think they have no interest become "hooked" as they discover a long hidden document revealing a heretofore unknown ancestor.

So now it's time for you to become a family history detective. Here are some simple steps to begin your family search:

Interviewing family elders

There is obviously an urgency with this method. Our family elders aren't getting any younger, and for many, time is running out. You may even have elders living right now of whom you aren't even aware. And trust me, they all provide an invaluable resource and possess key knowledge of your family's history.

Start with your own parents

Interview your parents separately with pad and pencil. Tell them you are putting together a family history and you need to record everything they know about their parents and grandparents—full names, dates of birth, the states where they were born.

Ask each parent for any known pictures, documents (e.g., birth, death, and marriage certificates and/or military documents).

Ask each parent which living relatives may hold key family history information. At this point, collect all phone numbers and/or addresses.

Begin calling the various relatives and ask them these same questions.

Calling old and new relatives

When calling an unknown relative for the first time, make sure to say that you are a relative and you are not selling anything. Tell the relative that you are just calling to collect family stories and information. Ask them if they also have any old pictures of great grandparents or even second great grandparents that they can share.

Make sure to say that you will make copies and get the pictures back to them ASAP. FedEx/Kinko's stores are located all over America and have excellent Sony picture copying machines.

Many elders believe that they don't have any pictures but through my experience almost all have a hidden box of pictures somewhere. The problem is they may have forgotten where it is. I offer to help them do the searching and lifting. Also, I ask them to please take time to think of where these pictures may be.

Start building an organized chart of ancestors names that you have collected

These are basically pedigree charts that start with your parents but work back in time from your grandfather to your great grandfather, 2nd great grandfather, 3rd great, 4th, 5th and so on.

It is best and easier to just work on one parent at a time. For various reasons, you may decide to work on just your mother's descendants. Or like me, you may be inclined to start your research on your father's side.

Start with a single goal and follow it through. My main goal in the beginning was to discover the first Dane in my line to immigrate to America. The next goal was to find out what city and country they came from and what date they arrived in America. Stay focused on your main goal!

DNA Testing

For many people there may be no knowledge of the father and/or mother possibly because of adoption or early divorce. For these people DNA testing is a perfect way to begin. One of the least expensive is through www.ancestry.com or call 1-800-ancestry. Another well recognized source for tracking DNA is www.familytreedna.com.

A more expensive alternative is www.23andme.com, however, they focus mostly on disease states that show up in your DNA and give you an analysis of your probable illnesses.

All of these sites use a mouth swab or saliva kit which you mail back to a lab. They get back your DNA results in about a

month and this reveals many things. It will give you a general idea of what country your ancestors originally came from. You also get a list of living people that exactly match your DNA. This can be very helpful in discovering a relative you never knew existed.

Researching at your local LDS church

No matter what religion you are, head over to your nearest Church of Jesus Christ of Latter- Day Saints. In your city white page directory, you will find a listing of local LDS churches that have Family History Centers (FHCs). There you will find family history volunteers that are happy to assist you for no charge.

Most FHCs have Pedigree Charts you can purchase for very little, or more expensive computer driven software such as Legacy.

You simply sign in and you can ask for help in using their computers and free websites while you are there. Religion is never discussed. They are there to assist you and they do need to collect a small fee for any copies you will want.

Bring your basic family chart or even a notepad listing all of your grandfathers that you have discovered through your own family phone calling and interviewing.

Make sure that next to each person you have listed these three important items: full name, date born and the state where born. Start with finding your most recent grandfather on U.S. census records (1910, 1920 or 1930). Census records were gathered every ten years starting in 1790 and up to 1930. From 1850 on, they list ages, where everyone was born, the value of their house and land, and line of work. The 1900, 1910, 1920

and 1930 census records are packed with valuable family information. Again, the volunteers can help you access these.

In the beginning, another good strategy is to check for family trees that have already been submitted online. One of the largest databases for these is *www.ancestry.com*. Look for the "Public Family Trees" tab.

Another good website for finding pre-existing family trees is *www.rootsweb.com*. Simply type in one ancestor's name along with date of birth and state of birth and hit the search button. Many times you will find ten or more trees that are about your family! However, you must double-check the data. Even though the information is similar, some are incorrect, listing an incorrect spouse, date or even different countries of origin.

This is why you must find "proof papers" such as land records, court records, census records, marriage records, death records, wills, and Bible records. These items will help you put together a solid proof documentation that you have the correct families listed in your tree. When you discover the first family tree about your family and it states that your roots go back to Denmark and you are related to a Danish king from 1300 AD, while very exciting, you need to make sure it is true.

National Archives Research Centers

Our government provides computers and research assistance at these facilities, which are located in Alaska, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming (see

www.archives.com for exact addresses). If you don't live near a research center, you can access many of the same records through the same website.

You can also find all government military records going back to the American Revolution and it is also an excellent place to research Native American roots.

The points above will help give you the foundation for what will hopefully become a productive and fruitful search. As we move forward, I will use examples of my own family search and the techniques used to find valuable information. Of course I am excited to share my family story with you, but I do so primarily because each step of my search will be similar to yours.

In the next chapter, we will take a look at my grandfather's historical period of the Great Depression/Dust Bowl era. Then we will work back through history and discover more easy-to-access resources to guide you in your search.