

Get paid to research family histories!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Genealogist**



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1. Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to become a professional genealogist! You're about to join a profession that comes with many rewards, and, at the same time, brings great pleasure to many people around the world. As a professional genealogist, you have many exciting family history research projects ahead, and lots of interesting stories from the past to learn and tell.

You're probably already aware that genealogy is a branch of the study of history. Unlike those who study or teach history, though, genealogy allows for the creation of a marketable and profitable business. Professional genealogists can earn very handsome salaries researching family histories for individual clients or consulting for TV shows, film documentaries, government agencies, and the military. You can also earn extra money by teaching others how to research their own family histories.

There has never been a better time to become a professional genealogist. If the proliferation of websites dedicated to the study of family history is any indication, then genealogy is a very popular hobby worldwide.

Recent TV shows like *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Faces of America*, and *Ancestors in the Attic* have only helped to increase awareness of genealogy and genealogists among the general public.

Genealogy is one of those careers that many people envy. What many people may not realize, though, is that professional genealogists do not always have history degrees. In fact, they come from all walks of life and some have little formal training at all. Whatever you're doing right now, if you want to become a professional genealogist there's little to hold you back. We wrote this book with people just like you in mind. If you're ready, then, the past, and your future, awaits.

1.1 A Career in Genealogy

1.1.1 What a Genealogist Is

A genealogist is many things, because a genealogist typically wears many hats. Detective, writer, story teller, history researcher, and business person are just a few of the jobs you'll undertake as a professional genealogist. Being a professional genealogist will make every day seem more interesting and filled with variety than the last.

Professional genealogists provide a wide variety of services for their clients. These tasks might include:

- Researching a full family history
- Searching for information on behalf of someone working on a family history
- Providing guidance for people researching their family history
- Searching for missing heirs and other "long-lost" living relatives
- Analyzing family history already gathered by the client
- Putting together reports for clients, such as family tree charts, pedigree charts, and narrative histories

Typical clients of professional genealogists include:

- Individuals

- Corporate and institutional clients (e.g., film and television production houses, lawyers, the military, etc.)
- Genealogical societies and associations
- Historical societies and associations

Professional genealogists also find other ways to bring their knowledge and skills to the public's attention. For example, many also offer workshops that help people to learn more about how to research their own family histories. Participants learn about how to research effectively, what sources they have available to them, and how to analyze the information once they've collected it. Professional genealogists also earn money by speaking to groups, such as the societies and associations mentioned above.

1.1.2 Reasons People Hire Genealogists

Just as there is any number of potential clients who might hire genealogists, there are many reasons why people hire a professional. Probably one of the most common reasons why people hire professional genealogists is that they have a deeply felt desire to know where they came from. This is almost a basic human need; most of us would like to know more about our roots.

Find Connections to Famous or Notable People

Other clients might want to prove that they are somehow related to a famous historical figure, nobility, or even royalty. Some of your clients might have a notion, perhaps passed down to them as part of their own family lore, that they were descended from some notable person. They might even believe they're related to some famous person who is still alive. Your job will be to help them prove or disprove these links.

Help Clients Finish Their Research

Many of your clients will likely be people who have already begun their own family histories. They may have reached a brick wall in their research and don't know where to look next. They'll then contact you and you will use your skills and knowledge to help them find the missing information they're looking for.

Analyze a Client's Existing Research

In addition to helping clients complete their research they may hire you to analyze what they've already found. Often, although a client may have done a huge amount of research and found dozens or even hundreds of people with the correct surnames, they don't know how, or even if, it all fits together. You will help them sort through all the data and "connect the dots" for them. You might also point out gaps in their research and suggest some additional research for them.

Help Clients with DNA Research

Sometimes, when the paper trail goes cold, people look to DNA to help prove where they came from. Other clients might simply want to discover what the DNA can tell them about where their remote ancestors originated. There are many notable people, including Oprah Winfrey, Stephen Colbert, and Ozzy Osborne, who have used DNA evidence in this way.

While you may not be the person who does the actual genetic research for your client, you will be well versed in its applications to genealogy. With that knowledge, you can help clients choose a testing laboratory and with follow up guidance about interpreting the results and where they might be able to pick up the paper trail again. DNA testing is also often used by corporate clients; for example, those looking to prove absolute biological relationships among heirs to family estates you might have uncovered in your research for them.

1.2 The Genealogical Research Industry

Family History on the Internet

The study of family history has certainly come into its own over the past decade, at least if the Internet is any guide. The well known Cyndi's List website claims nearly 300,000 genealogy links, for example. The website WeFollow.com lists almost 500 Twitter users, i.e. those using Twitter for genealogy purposes, some of whom have followers numbering in the tens of thousands. According to the genealogy website, FamilyLink.com, its "We're Related" Facebook application is accessed by nearly 5 million users monthly. Ancestry.com, a popular site for amateur gene-

alogists, has more than one million subscribers worldwide, according to their website.

Of course, the number of web links, site members, or web page hits doesn't really prove how many people are actually interested in genealogy as a hobby or as a profession. However, it is an interesting reflection of how the study of genealogy has moved out of dusty libraries and into the modern age. This development has meant that family history research has become more accessible than ever before.

Twenty years ago you would have been hard pressed to find a genealogy web site let alone a family tree on the Internet; the worldwide web was still in its infancy. Today, new genealogical resources continue to come online all the time, indicating that there is a demand for this type of information. Along with that comes the need for the services of professional genealogists.

These days, Internet researchers are lured to the many family histories and other resources so readily available online. However, much of this research is not up to professional quality. There is certainly plenty of room in the industry for more professional genealogists to help sort out all the family histories online or to teach interested hobbyists how to sort it all out. As genealogist and author, Megan Smolenyak, suggests, "I think there will be a lot of demand for more 'how-to' genealogists. The basics have gotten a lot easier, obviously, but the cool thing is that it frees us up then to dig up all the hidden gems; that does take a little bit of knowledge." That's where you come in as a professional genealogist.

Popularity of Genealogy

Although there aren't many recent studies to prove just how popular genealogy is in North America, the percentage of people in the U.S. who have some interest in learning more about their family histories may be as high as 60%. According to often quoted figures from a study done in May, 2000, by Maritz Marketing Research (www.maritz.com), 60% of people surveyed were at least "somewhat interested" in genealogy. In a similar survey from 1996, the same company had found that 45% of respondents were "somewhat involved" in genealogy. Given the fairly high interest in genealogy a decade ago and given the proliferation of Internet websites devoted to the subject, it's probably safe to say that genealogy is at least as popular today as it was in 2000.

A survey of 4,109 respondents done in 2000 by Fullerton University psychology masters student, Pamela Drake (available at <http://psych.fullerton.edu/genealogy>), discovered some interesting characteristics among people interested in genealogy. Her study found that 70% of respondents were female, and the average age of respondents was 40 years. On average, participants had been involved in genealogy for 14 years, although some had been involved for less than one year. Statistics like these can be useful for you when determining to whom you should market your services.

Of course, providing services to genealogy hobbyists is just one area of the industry. Your services might also be needed by institutional, corporate, and government clients. These clients have a more serious need for your professional services, often trying to prove identities of various individuals for legal reasons. We'll look at how to approach these types of clients later on in this guide.

DNA Genealogy

One sector in the genealogy industry that has been rising quickly in recent years is DNA genealogy. This is largely because of recent advances in genetics and an increase in the numbers of laboratories able to carry out genetic testing. As a result of the increased availability of DNA testing and also of the testing becoming less expensive, this option is more readily available to the average person wanting to take advantage of it in their own genealogical research.

Genealogists are becoming more and more involved in the application of DNA testing in genealogical research. For example, the Association of Professional Genealogists lists nearly 50 member genealogists who offer services in "Genetics". Dr. Colleen Fitzpatrick, a forensic genealogist and author, notes that, in her experience, "DNA has become so popular, that if you want to advance as a genealogist, you have to know how to use it."

The public is probably at least as aware of DNA as a genealogical tool as it is of genealogy itself, making this a popular area of public involvement. The website of the International Society of Genetic Genealogy (www.isogg.org), for example, showcases a number of known DNA strands of famous people, a popular media subject. However, the media often makes wild claims about the DNA heritage of famous people.

As an example of this, CNN recently reported that Ozzy Osbourne had Neanderthal DNA in his genetic background. Actually, if you go back far enough, we all share some common ancestry at some level. Or perhaps you've read the story that 8% of men in an area of Asia from the Pacific Ocean to the Caspian Sea shared a common ancestor in Genghis Khan. These types of stories are often exaggerated in the media creating unfounded hopes in amateur genealogists, but you can help your clients to better understand the role of DNA in the search for their own genetic roots. We'll tell you more about that in the next chapter of this guide.

1.3 Benefits of Being a Genealogist

There are many benefits to starting your own genealogy business. As a professional genealogist you will be doing the work you love and helping others at the same time. Like other people working in this exciting career, you will be meeting new people all the time and deriving much satisfaction from your job. Some additional benefits of being a genealogist are listed below.

Excitement and Personal Satisfaction

Most genealogists take their work very seriously and work tirelessly trying to uncover the past. As a professional genealogist, you will be a sort of family history detective sleuthing out family connections and ancestors your clients never knew existed. Your clients will be very grateful for this, making you feel very good about the job you've done for them.

Uncovering historical facts hidden for decades or centuries is very exciting and rewarding to genealogists. Imagine taking on a family history research project for a client, then stumbling on some historical records that indicate your client is descended from a famous person. Or perhaps you'll discover that your client's ancestors had a role in some famous historical event. Being able to shed more light on historical events and solving age-old mysteries are two of the most exciting and rewarding parts of being a professional genealogist.

Start Right Now

One of the major benefits of becoming a professional genealogist is that you can start right now. A genealogical research consulting business is

one of the easiest and cheapest businesses to start. You can open your genealogy business needing little start-up money. You can also get your business going right in your own home. All you need are the skills and knowledge and a few office supplies (having a computer helps), and you're ready to start finding clients, right now, today.

Be Self-Employed

As a professional genealogist, you'll also be self-employed. Imagine the freedom of being able to come and go as you please, never punching a time clock, never having a boss leaning over your shoulder telling you what to do. You can work in your pajamas until noon if you feel like it. Being self-employed also means you can work as much, or as little, as you choose. Set your own hours and schedule, taking on as many clients as you like.

Prestige

There is a certain prestige that comes with being a professional genealogist. You'll find that many people are actually in awe of your uncanny ability to track down clues that never even occur to others. You can become a well-known researcher, and then be asked to participate in a variety of genealogy related events, such as conferences and seminars. Local historical and genealogical societies might seek you out to speak before their members, all eagerly taking in your words. You might also find fame by becoming a sought after expert for participation in documentaries, TV shows, etc., just as some of the experts we interviewed have done.

Financial Rewards

Professional genealogists can earn \$35 to \$100 or more per hour. Many factors go into determining fees, including your experience, geographic location, specialization, and type of client. For example, institutional or corporate clients looking for certain types of historical proofs that a genealogist can uncover typically pay more than individual researchers looking for their own roots. In many cases, however, the annual income for a professional genealogist is limited only by the individual genealogist's initiative and drive.

1.4 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Genealogist* is arranged to take you in a step-by-step manner through getting started and succeeding as a genealogist. These steps, and the chapters they appear in, are as follows:

Chapter 2, *What a Genealogist Does*, explains how to do a family history research project. You'll learn about the many resources available to genealogists, where to find them, and how to use them. We'll guide you through the entire process, from your initial meeting with your client to gather information, through researching and putting together your analysis and reports for clients. We'll also highlight some of the many services that you can offer to clients as a professional genealogist.

Once you know what the job involves, Chapter 3 will give you helpful information on *Developing Your Skills* so you can succeed in this career. You will find resources for enhancing your interpersonal skills, business skills, and genealogical skills and knowledge. This chapter also covers the best resources for gaining the skills and knowledge required in this career, and explains how to get experience as you're getting ready to start your business.

When you're ready to *Start Your Own Business*, you will find good advice in Chapter 4. Here you will find practical information about the best resources for setting up your business. This includes important information about start-up financial planning, putting together your business plan, and legal matters you should be aware of. You will also learn vital information such as how to set your fees, and work with support staff as your business grows.

In the last chapter, *Getting Clients*, we'll show you how to market your services and attract clients, as well as how to do a client consultation. We'll walk you through meeting with clients. You'll also learn about creating contracts to insure your research projects go smoothly.

When you're finished with this guide you will know what step to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be where you want to be... in an exciting career as a professional genealogist!