

# Genealogist offers “how-to” steps for the family researcher

By Alex Lear, Staff Reporter

Synchronous with the holiday season is the planning of family reunions all over the world. It's a kind of communion, particularly with parents or grandparents, that can stir a desire to know more about your family's roots and embark on the intriguing journey that is genealogy. While it can be an often tiring pursuit, it can also be a rewarding one, teaching you more about yourself and the individuals from whom you descend.

“We wouldn't be here if all those people hadn't procreated,” laughed Dr. Carol McCoy of Falmouth, who has helped numerous people track down their forebears. “The combination of their genes, their values and interests, and their careers and lives through each generation pass on and contribute to who you are.”

She added that “Going back far is just a part of it. It's also finding out about funny stories, bringing your ancestors to life and meeting new people. It's really about connecting and having a broader understanding of yourself.”

For example, she mentioned ancestors involved in writing and the arts can pass those genes down to their descendants. A person with analytical tendencies may have a lawyer or engineer in the family to thank for it.

McCoy also mentioned that one's parents often spend their lives trying to solve problems relevant to their childhood. Her own father grew up during the Depression and retained the awareness throughout his life that money can suddenly disappear.

“Really understanding what was going on can give you an insight into what each generation was trying to do and a huge appreciation for history.”

Also running a consulting business called McCoy Training & Development Resources, through which she guides individuals on varied subjects such as dealing with change, communication skills and self-improvement, McCoy said her goal is to transfer the bulk of her work to genealogy.

Her work in this field is geared toward conducting research on the history of clients' families and related properties and houses, as well as creating family scrapbooks that include photos, clippings, maps and memorabilia, and coaching individuals to improve their skills in

order to conduct their own research.

McCoy has developed a list of steps one can follow in pursuing this research, all of which are listed below and will later be on her Web site, [www.find-your-roots.com](http://www.find-your-roots.com).

**1. Start with yourself and write down what you know.** You should work backwards to the unknown, recording discoveries in a genealogy journal or diary. “It helps you keep track of what led you to believe something else,” McCoy said.

**2. Obtain primary documents.** These include vital records of birth, marriage and death, as well as probate records. They should be retrieved from living people who know this information from fact, and can also be accessed from town and city halls. McCoy remarked that death records should be a primary source of death, not birth, since in some cases a person might knowingly or unknowingly give a false birth date, such as to conceal a birth out of wedlock.

**3. Collect and read all obituaries of ancestors, their siblings and other relatives:** Obituaries can usually be obtained from area newspapers in local libraries. Be sure to record dates and titles of exact sources.

**4. Talk to relatives to see what they know and have:** Those relatives who actually care about family history may have already done some legwork and may possess some key historical documents. “Some people will just have amazing stuff,” McCoy zzzsaid.

**5. Collect clues around the house:** Obituaries, deeds, diaries, letters, yearbooks, resumes, photos, certificates, articles, and so on are essential sources that can be found in your home, as well as those of your parents and



**LOOKING BACK** Dr. Carol McCoy holds up a book containing the birth certificate of great-grandfather John Utz and points to his photograph. Tim Greenway photo

grandparents.

**6. Obtain copies of photos and record names and dates:** This should be accomplished while the people and dates can still be identified.

**7. Organize documents:** File folders should be created on each ancestor to house the growing number of documents you may obtain. Fragile original material should be protected with archival sheet protectors.

**8. Keep track of all evidence:** Primary sources should be documented specifically so that you'll know what and where you have already researched and won't duplicate your efforts.

**9. Create family group sheets and ancestor charts:** This should be done in pencil in case information needs to be changed, and should include dates and locations of birth,

*see researcher on next page*