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## Keeping Family History Alive

*When William Zartman's grandchildren, Matthew and Grace, were baptized in 2009 and 2015 in a Pennsylvania Dutch church his family helped to build in 1806, two of Grace's cousins served as godmothers. The family might not have known of the church—or the cousins—without the research carried out by Zartman, professor emeritus at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and an active member of the Zartman Association of America.*

If Ancestry.com's subscriber base is any sign, a lot of people take an interest in their family histories and the challenge of researching their family trees. The online resource has more than two million paid members and maintains more than 70 million family trees, although some of them overlap, according to Jennifer Utley, the company's senior manager of research. Motives vary. "People want to know who they are and where they came from," says Utley. People often start when there is some sort of family touch point. It could be a retirement, losing a family member, or something as simple as struggling to fill out a family tree in a baby book, as happened to Utley's mentor.

Zartman says, "I'm part of my family's history and a social scientist, so I wanted to learn more." He continued a history of family research that started with earlier generations. "I wanted to find out where my roots were and how far back they go."

A desire to leave a legacy for their descendants motivates some genealogy researchers. Mike Blair, a senior vice president and financial advisor at CAPTRUST, says that many of his clients "fear that if they leave their children a lot of money, they won't be good stewards of it." He suggests that a family history might give them a hook to inspire their children. "In my family, we may have had horse thieves and drunks, but you want to highlight the positives for grandchildren," he says. He's impressed by the stories of his hard-working, humble ancestors who farmed in North Carolina following their receipt of a land grant in the 1760s. "They could have sold the land and lived better

themselves, but they didn't." The family farm lasted for some 200 years before it was sold off.

Nonfinancial values could also be a driver, as Utley found doing research for *Who Do You Think You Are*, a genealogy show on the TLC television network. For example, actress Zooey Deschanel learned about her Quaker ancestors' participation in the Underground Railroad when she appeared on the show. The program has shown Utley how stories of heartache and tragedy touch people and how their ancestors persevered and moved on. Such stories may help to make your family more resilient.



How can you research your family history? Start with what you know and have at hand. Blair's research began when, after his father's passing, he found a wooden box with pictures, deeds, and receipts, some of which were 250 years old. He then did research at this local public library, picked up books, and did online research.

Zartman had a head start on his research. One of his ancestors, Rufus Zartman, had published a family history covering the years 1692 to 1942. But there was still more work for family members to do. Zartman's father used to call other Zartmans he found in phone books when he traveled. Today, as long ago, it's still important to collect information from family members as part of your research.

Utley recommends that you start with yourself and work backwards, rather than leaping back to try to prove your family legends. Create a family tree with the information you have. Then call mom, dad, or another relative who acts as the family historian to fill in the holes, she says.

Once you exhaust your family resources, there are plenty of resources online. "Family history is like a treasure hunt. You never know what you'll find. But today it's faster, easier, and cheaper than ever before," says Utley. For example, Ancestry has 16 billion digitized records. Other resources include national and local genealogy organizations, some of which focus on specific ethnic groups requiring different research techniques.

Utley also recommends doing research to uncover family stories—not just a family tree. "People respond better to a story about a grandmother who had eight children and outlived six of them" than to a list of names and dates, says Utley. Newspapers, census,

tax, and court records in the area where your ancestors lived may provide more detail and yield such stories.

A more recent innovation is the use of the genetic information in DNA to research genealogy. The DNA test offered by Ancestry will give you an ethnicity estimate, showing your likely regional origins in a pie chart. It also provides a list of cousin matches from its database and identifies other family trees that may include your relatives—all based upon a DNA test. “Most of our respondents have at least a fourth cousin match or better,” says Utley.

Connecting with other family members can help uncover new information and create new relationships. “Nowadays, a website is essential,” says Zartman. “People write in to it all the time asking ‘How can I find my ancestors?’”

Family reunions can bring a family tree to life and build face-to-face relationships. The Zartman Association of America holds an annual two-day reunion in Brickerville, PA. Saturday features tours of local highlights to familiarize participants with their Pennsylvania Dutch roots. On Sunday, everyone goes to church, and then they picnic on the church grounds. There are smaller, less frequent Zartman reunions elsewhere around the country.

Over the years, his family’s paths in the United States have inspired Zartman, including

## Useful Resources

### Start with the Vitals

Until the twentieth century, most vital documents, like registers, birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, and adoption records were recorded at the state or county level by local churches and religious organizations. With the popularity of the Internet, a lot of emphasis has been placed on publishing many of these records online, through resources like those that follow.

### National Archives

[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

In the National Archives, even novice genealogical researchers can find records on their families through:

- Census records
- Military records
- Immigration records (ship passenger lists)
- Naturalization records
- Land records
- Court records

### ProQuest

[www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)

ProQuest’s subscription-based content collection encompasses 90,000 authoritative sources, 6 billion digital pages, and spans 6 centuries. Many local libraries have ProQuest subscriptions that you can access with a library membership.

### Ancestry.com™

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

Ancestry.com is a subscription-based online database that helps people researching their family histories, or as they put it “discovering who and what led to you.” The company also owns other resources including:

- AncestryDNA
- AncestryProGenealogists
- Family Tree Maker
- Fold3 (military records)
- Newspapers.com  
(newspaper articles and clippings)

the story of a Zartman in the White House, as a lawyer to a president. The diversity of their roles shows him that a Zartman can be anything. "It's a challenge to ambition, creativity, and making a good life," he says.

### **About the Author**



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