

How I Added 10,000 People to My Family Tree

Because I love jigsaw puzzles and crossword puzzles so much, I tend to look at complex problems as being nothing more than a big puzzle. High school algebra? It's just a puzzle. Computer programming? It's just a puzzle. So when I began putting together my family tree years ago, I saw it as a big puzzle with lots and lots of names.

After years of research, I had nearly 3,000 people in my family tree. If I were to put all of the names together like a jigsaw puzzle, I'd probably need to clear off my dining room table. But suddenly my tree has grown so much that I would need the entire dining room floor - and then some - to fit all of my relatives together. That's because I've added more than 10,000 people to my existing family tree!

How I Found Them

One of my grandfathers was a complete mystery to me. I'd never met any of his relatives, and all I'd ever heard was the name of his hometown in Italy, the names of his brother and sister, and the names of his parents - one of which turned out to be wrong. So I decided to find out everything I possibly could about this grandfather's ancestors.

FamilySearch.org is a giant in the field of genealogy, having microfilmed and stored millions of vital records from towns around the world. Efforts are underway to digitize their collections and make them available for free online. If the documents you need are not online, their [Family History Centers](#) allow you to rent these reels of microfilm and search for your ancestors. When I started viewing the vital records from the town of Baselice, Italy, I knew nothing beyond the names of his immediate family. Now I can trace him back eight generations.

I began combing through Baselice's birth, marriage and death records spanning the years 1809-1860, paying attention to the two last names I knew were mine: Leone and Iammucci. As soon as I found documents for my grandfather's parents I learned the maiden names of their mothers: Piscioti and Bozza. So now I had to go back and search the film indexes for those names, too.

I filled a couple of small notebooks with scribbled facts - names, birth dates, marriage dates, etc. - until I noticed someone at the microfilm viewer next to me typing his findings on a laptop computer. Suddenly it seemed possible to take down information about everyone in the town and figure out how many of them might be related to me.

To work efficiently, I typed the facts into a simple text file on my laptop using several abbreviations that made sense to me. Then when I got home, I copied the facts into my [Family Tree Maker](#) software and began to see the connections. (Any family tree program will do.) "Oh, this baby born in 1811 has the same parents as that baby born in 1813." Suddenly I had a little family established.

It's important to realize that each birth, marriage or death record can yield many names for you. When someone is born you learn their parents' names and their mother's maiden name. When someone dies and one of their parents is also dead, you may discover the name of the dead parent's father. Depending on the timeframe and country of origin of the vital records, a marriage record may even provide you with the names of the bride or groom's dead grandfather's parents!

All of the names I collected into my neatly typed lists were practically meaningless until Family Tree Maker made the connections easy to see. With a few more years of vital records left to document, my Baselice, Italy family tree already contains more than 13,800 people with birth years ranging from the 1690s to 1860.

Using a feature of Family Tree Maker called the Kinship Report, I was staggered to learn that about 10,600 people, people whose names were so recently unknown to me, were my relatives through blood or marriage!

So my Grandpa Leone, the mystery man who only spoke to his grandchildren in Italian that we didn't even understand, has suddenly connected me to - potentially - a million distant cousins.

What You Need to Know

- **Town.** Before you can dive into a project like this, you must find out which town your ancestor came from. If you know the town, start with a simple internet search to find out its exact location. If you don't know the exact town and your ancestor came to America from another country, try to find their migration record such as a ship manifest (a list of all the passengers on board a ship). The manifest may include your ancestor's home town and the name of a close relative or two.
- **Names.** Ask your family members to help you put together at least some of your family names so that you can be sure you are following the right path and documenting the right family.
- **Language.** If you will be viewing vital records from a non English-speaking country, you'll need to learn certain foreign words that will appear on the documents. FamilySearch.org provides you with these important keywords in many languages such as [Italian](#).

How To Get Started

- Armed with your ancestor's hometown and a few names and rough dates, go to the [Historical Record Collections](#) page on FamilySearch.org. Use the Place, Date and Collections sections in the left column to narrow down your search and find out if the information you need is online. If it is not, then search for a [Place Name](#) by entering the town name. If microfilm is available to order, you will see complete details and instructions for ordering.
- As you begin to gather information, keep track of everything you do. If you find an ancestor's vital record, take down all the information, including exactly where the document came from, and save the image if you can.
- Once you've gathered a good amount of information, enter it into your family tree software. Take advantage of your software's capability to show each person's exact relationship to you or to the ancestor on whom you're basing your research. You may be able to see the relationships in a graphical tree format or through a built-in report function, such as the Kinship Report function of Family Tree Maker.
- Finally, don't forget to share. Let other potential relatives benefit from your hard work by sharing your tree online. You may share your tree through websites such as [Ancestry.com](#) (subscription-based) or [FamilySearch.org](#) (free).