



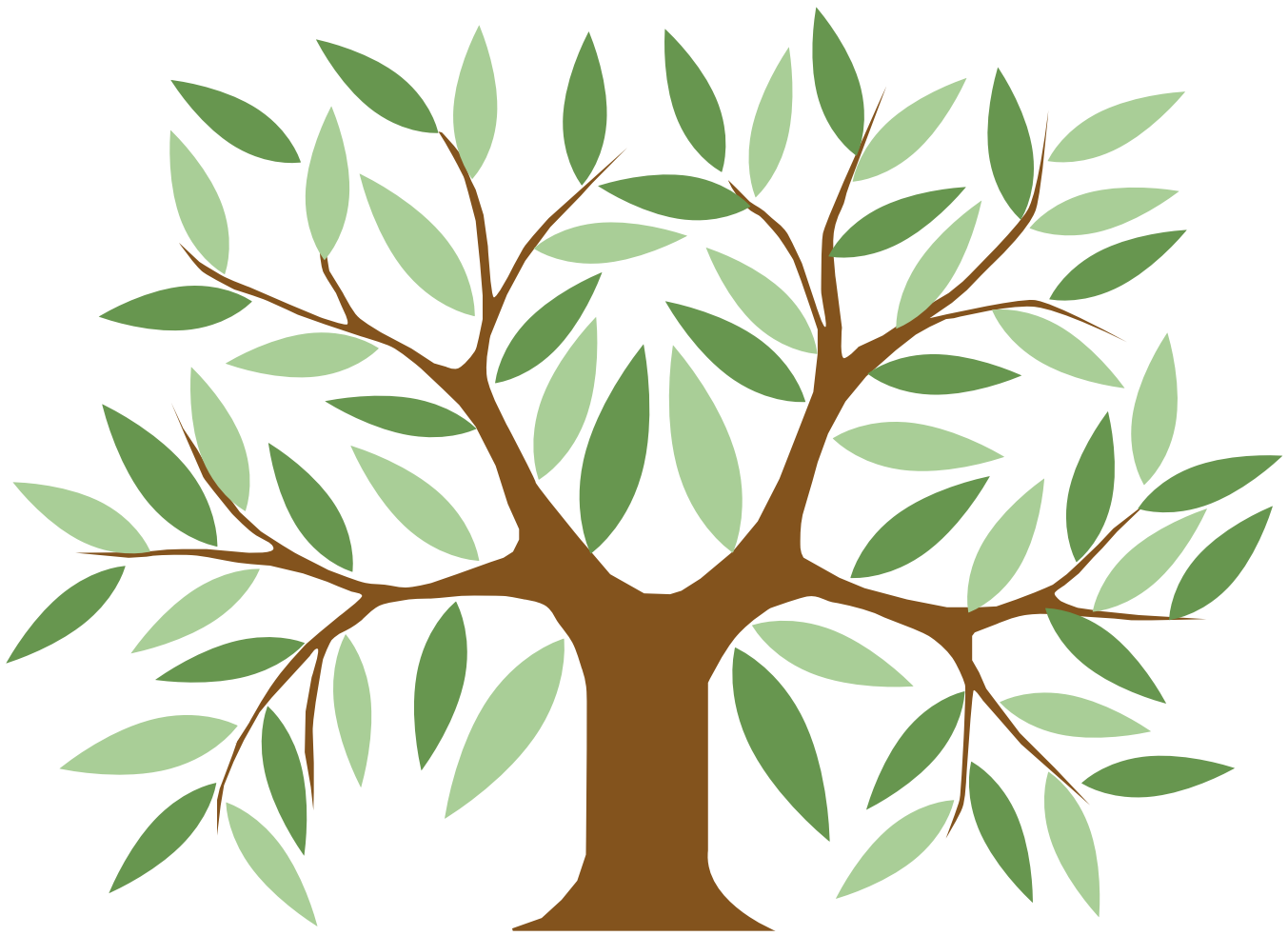
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Discovering Our Roots; the Basics of Genealogy

By Debbie Vallejo

FRISCO HAS A PAST full of remarkable stories and tales of people willing to work hard to make a home and put down roots. Each landmark, road and building has a purpose and a history. Preston Road, for example, began as Shawnee Trail and was used by wagon trains and cattle drives moving north from Austin. The name was changed to Preston Trail, then Preston Road, and has evolved from a trail of dirt into the present day maze of construction, restaurants and retail. The name "Preston" originated from Captain William C. Preston, a veteran of the Texas Revolution.

There's something that drives us to discover our roots, a need to know where we come from and the history that links past to present. The family tree is the ultimate treasure hunt and can bring family members together by creating lots of fun discussions through the act of discovery. Soon after my husband and I

moved to Frisco we discovered that my grandmother lived here when she was a young girl. My great-grandfather sold everything that didn't fit in the family car, packed up everyone, and moved to what was then Frisco City. After a short stay here in Frisco, the family moved on. This little piece of our family history sparked lots of fun conversation, including "Grandma, are you absolutely sure the family doesn't own some land here in Frisco?" No? Bummer.

METHOD TO THE MADNESS

Discovering the roots to the family tree can cause both exhilaration with a new find and frustration at the lack of information handy to trace each branch. The experience can be exhausting and overwhelming, sending the amateur sleuth all over the globe looking for a long lost marriage license or death certificate. There are plenty of valuable tools and

knowledgeable people available to cut down on the frustration factor, if one knows where to look.

Leora Kemp is a librarian and genealogist at the University of North Texas library system and assists individuals in researching their family lineage. Ms. Kemp has a few pointers when beginning the search for ancestors and personal history. First, it's important to have a name, date and a place to start. As the research continues, work from the starting point backwards in time, putting together the tree branch by branch, person by person. Begin with already known facts. Get out a piece of paper and write down any family information that comes to mind. "I recommend getting a box and putting it someplace where you'll run into it all the time. Put in any pieces of family history that you find like marriage and birth certificates, baby books, scrapbooks and photo albums," says Ms. Kemp. "Each piece of information will give you something else to research."

Next, interview and gather information from other family members. Use these "home sources" to collect data like

family Bibles, land records, scrapbooks, obituaries, diaries, letters, newspaper clippings, birth and death certificates and pictures. Look in garages, attics, storage facilities, vacation homes and other possible hideaways. Many people have no idea of the family treasures that are lying around their house. Keep in mind that personal and even official records may be incorrect and will need to be verified.

Ms. Kemp has personal knowledge of the fallibility of official documents. Her birth certificate states that she was born in Kemp, Texas when she was actually born in Alabama. The error in her birthplace was a conscious decision made by her father. He wanted her place of birth to match their last name. Ironically, the same document that contains an outright fallacy also holds an accurate piece of information that changed Ms. Kemp's life. After seeing her birth certificate for the first time when her mother passed away, Ms. Kemp discovered that she is not the first child born to her mother as she thought, but the second. Her mother had a child at sixteen and gave the baby up for adoption and told no one, not even her children. After extensive research Ms. Kemp found her half-sister, Ruth, living on a ranch in Colorado.

After interviewing family members and searching personal records, utilize the Internet and workshops to locate important information. "There's something about hearing someone condense all the info in a way that allows a person to ask questions and get meaningful answers," explains Ms. Kemp. "The Dallas Genealogy Society will often provide contact information on individuals willing to give seminars."

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT OF SOURCES

Internet resources are a convenient place to find information. Websites like www.syndislist.com provide a very user-friendly database of other websites and resources for ancestry research. The website www.ancestry.com provides census information and www.USgenweb.com allows individuals from around the country to help each other with local searches. RootsWeb.com is a database created by both professional and amateur researchers and is full of family files and information compiled to help individuals connect the dots.

When the Internet fails and the family trail leads to various locations, local cemeteries, courthouses or libraries may provide the only means for finding necessary records. "There is a limit to what the Internet will provide because of privacy issues," says Ms. Kemp. "The U.S. census information, for example, will not have records online more recent than the 1930s, and the Texas birth and death indexes were taken off the web because the information can be used by identity thieves." Using local genealogy societies is a way to help with research needs in other locales. People will often trade off footwork and research.

The Records Department also holds "loose marriage licenses." These are marriage licenses that were never picked up by the parties involved.

The Collin County Clerk office and Records Department is responsible for preserving information belonging to Collin County citizens. Margaret Anderson is the records manager for Collin County Records. When in search of local records, her advice is to head to the Collin County Clerk first. "The County Clerk manages death, birth and marriage certificates," explains Ms. Anderson. "Original deed records are here, but you need to know the index for the deed first, which is available at the County Clerk's office."

The Records Department also holds "loose marriage licenses." These are marriage licenses that were never picked up by the parties involved. "Our earliest loose marriage license is from 1884 and we have over 8,000 of them," says Ms. Anderson. The licenses are available for pick up by family members. Divorce records for the county are housed at the District Clerk Office, which is housed in the same building as the County Clerk, but not the Records Department. Confused yet? Ms. Anderson suggests emailing the

information you need to her office and then she will provide a jumping off point or will look up the records herself. The Collin County website holds all the email addresses and contact information for the various departments.

The Frisco Public Library currently has a small section dedicated to genealogical studies. A full subscription to ancestry.com allows patrons to search more substantial databases for access to records not otherwise available locally. Shelley Holley is the genealogy specialist for the Frisco Public Library system. "It takes time to build genealogical collections," explains Holley. "In the new building we will have more resources available, as well as subscriptions to online sources such as ancestry.com." Holley will also provide instruction for the genealogy classes, the first one in November.

The Dallas Public Library has one of the largest genealogy departments in the state. There are over 100,000 volumes in the department, the bulk of them records. Lloyd Bockstruck is the administrator of the Genealogy Department at the Dallas Library. "We have information from all fifty states, and a separate section specifically designated for Texas," says Mr. Bockstruck. "Our library is 106 years old, so we've had a lot of time to collect records and information."

The type of records the library holds includes city directories, death records, marriage certificates, birth records and land purchases. Mr. Bockstruck tells the story of how one gentleman came in to the library to authenticate a piece of china his grandmother left him when she died. "He was researching to see if the piece was from the Titanic," explains Mr. Bockstruck. "The end result was that the china was from the Titanic and our library helped him find the information he needed."

Whether researching the family tree, a piece of china, or looking for long lost relatives, there are plenty of places to dig for information. Having a starting point and the tenacity to stick it out through lots of research can prove exceptionally rewarding in the long run. Just remember, half the fun of researching the family tree is the journey of discovery. Enjoy the ride.

Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer living in Frisco.