

Hiring a Professional Genealogist February 2024

All genealogists encounter research dead ends or roadblocks. Most researchers take a break for a couple of weeks, months, or years in some cases. Others attend local or national seminars given by subject specialists on the topics or geographic regions relevant to their dead end or roadblocks. Once the researcher resumes the search, many are successful by practicing some of the strategies learned during the seminars.

In other cases, the researcher is faced with the reality that they will need help from someone with greater expertise. This raises the question of hiring a professional genealogist. Professionals often locate information that the average researcher would miss. Since they are more familiar with the various record types, they not only have more detailed knowledge of records but can often search them more efficiently. There is one caveat that must be considered. No matter how experienced a professional maybe, their success is dependent on how much information you as the researcher can provide in terms of details and background information. Here is a short list of reasons why some researchers hire a professional genealogist.

1. You have searched everywhere and feel you are out of options.
2. You can't travel to a distant area.
3. You want to join a lineage society that requires a higher level of documentation than what you have been able to locate.
4. You are an adoptee and want to locate your biological parents or siblings.
5. Your research needs require someone with expertise in a foreign language and knowledge of a specific area or region.
6. You need research dealing with medical projects or legal cases.

Cost Factors

Genealogy research is a fascinating and rewarding experience for most people. It can also be overwhelming and time-consuming. While completing your own ancestral history is thrilling with all of the stories you uncover along the way, sometimes it's not always feasible. As you go back in time, your ancestors double in number, making it confusing to know how to navigate your large family tree. Simply underestimating the size of your tree can be a surprise when calculating the cost of completing genealogical research and the required hours. This can be especially true if you encounter roadblocks in your research with no clear way out. In this scenario, the potential option of hiring a genealogist may save you both time and money. If the time comes when you begin considering this option, here are some factors that you should consider

1. **You Are Paying for Their Expertise.**
While a genealogist can definitely give you your anticipated answers quicker, this ease comes with an investment in expertise and value. A well-qualified genealogist has the expertise to accurately sort through countless records, documents, and files to connect the dots with concrete and documents results. Even more, they hold specialties. Many hold specializations in geographic areas, record types, periods, populations, or types like forensic genealogy and DNA analysis.

2. What Do Genealogists Charge By the Hour?

The general range for most common research projects is \$65 to \$100 per hour. 10 to 25 hours is a typical starting point to achieve results for common research projects. Doing an extensive family tree will cost much more, simply because the number of ancestors you have doubles at each generation! Pricing can vary based on skills, experience, demand for the genealogist's time, geographic area, and area of specialization. An extensive family tree will cost much more, simply because the number of ancestors you have doubles at each generation!

3. How Long Will the Project Take?

Since each situation is different, this may depend on many factors.

a. Often, it's almost impossible to determine how challenging a project will be until genealogists start looking at available records. While they conduct exhaustive research to discover your answer, sometimes records take them down a challenging chase through generations.

b. Genealogy projects are rarely quick and easy, especially further back in time. Depending on the case, it can take a great deal of time to locate, analyze, and document each record to capture the genealogical value you deserve.

c. They encounter unplanned surprises that complicate the process. For example, sometimes, genealogists find more than one person with the same name and will need more time to track the right person. It's important for any genealogist you hire to be careful about this—the last thing you want is for them to spend time chasing the wrong line.

d. The amount of time spent on genealogical research also involves sorting through available records. There is a big difference in researching the 1900s vs. before 1850 when records were sparse and more indirect evidence is needed to prove relationships.

e. Some prime examples of this would be the US Census did not exist before 1790, and only the head of the household is listed by name before 1850, making it exceedingly challenging to pinpoint past generations in these periods. Secondly, challenging documents, such as probate, land, and court records are needed to find missing information. But once a genealogist has more specifics, including the region, and time era, a genealogy fee proposal is easier to provide.

4. What Types of Services Can I Expect to Receive From a Professional Genealogist?

High-level professionals provide the following services:

a. Review existing family knowledge

b. Develop research questions and plans

c. Thoroughly research multiple types of records

d. Provide ongoing status reports of progress or issues to client

e. Create supporting documentation for the informational findings

f. Analyze the information, who provided it, when it was created, and for what purpose

g. Provide correlation of facts from multiple sources

At the conclusion of this study guide, I will provide the names or organizations and websites that can be consulted to help you decide if going the professional route serves your goals and objectives. If problems arise, get in contact with the organization that certified the genealogist. Most organizations will mediate disagreements. Here is a short list of what to expect if you decide to hire a professional genealogist.

1. The researcher will receive a complete and well-documented report summarizing the research and include a copy of the research log listing all records the professional searched. Photocopies of all records found would be included in the report.
2. The genealogist will supply an itemized billing document for photocopies, postage, parking, long-distance calls, and loaning fees for books, films, or documents.
3. Professionals generally specialize in specific countries or geographical regionals, ethnic groups, or time periods.
4. Some researchers initially are looking more for advice than having a professional do the research. If this option interests you, most professionals offer the option of having an initial consultation. During this initial visit (in-person or virtual), they will examine the information gathered during your research, and make suggestions on how and where to proceed. You can continue to do your own research. They will meet with you again to evaluate your progress and make suggestions on where to look next.
5. Most professionals charge by the hour. It is important to remember there are no guarantees that a research goal can be met within a specific timeframe or even met at all. You will be paying for the time spent searching, not the amount of information located. At the conclusion of the project, the genealogist will supply you with a financial statement detailing the charges. Payment terms usually fall into one of the following categories: payment in full up front; payment in full at the end of the project; or pay a retainer up front with the remainder due at the end of the project.

The Internet links listed below contain the names or organizations and websites that can be consulted to help you decide if going the professional route serves your goals and objectives.

Ancestry Pro Genealogists – Professional Research is Our Core Product

<https://www.progenealogists.com/the-products>

Ancestry Support – Hiring a Professional Genealogist

https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/Hiring-a-Genealogist?language=en_US

Association of Professional Genealogists – How to Hire a Professional Genealogist

<https://www.apgen.org/cpages/how-to-hire-a-professional-genealogist>

https://www.apgen.org/directory?current_page=1&sort_type=featured&asset_type=company_user&display_type=default

BCG – Board for the Certification of Genealogists

<https://bcgcertification.org/>

https://bcgcertification.org/directory/?wpbdp_view=all_listings

Family Search Wiki – Hiring a Professional Genealogist

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Hiring_a_Professional_Researcher

Heritage Bridge.com – How Much Does It Cost to Hire a Professional Genealogist

<https://www.heritagebridge.com/blog/2022/4/4/your-family-history-how-much-does-it-cost-to-hire-a-professional-genealogist>

International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists

<https://www.icapgen.org/>

<https://www.icapgen.org/professionals/>

Legacy Tree Genealogists – Genealogy Services

<https://www.legacytree.com/about>

<https://www.legacytree.com/services>

<https://www.legacytree.com/blog/6-common-myths-about-hiring-a-professional-genealogist>

Bibliography

Suggested Books, Internet Links and You Tube Webinars for Further Information

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NOTE: This study guide is meant to serve as an overview or outline for patrons using the genealogy collection at Fort Myers Regional Library. The compiler emphasizes that the information contained in this study guide should not serve as a substitute for taking the time to read one of the books or articles cited in the bibliography, or attend lectures given by the subject specialists cited as authors.

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2/1/2024