BERKS HISTORY CENTER

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM • HENRY JANSSEN LIBRARY

Family Historian Project for Junior Historians

Now more than ever, we want to connect with our friends and family members, especially those who are older. A historian is a person who studies and writes about the past. They collect information, check it for accuracy, and record it for future generations.

You can become your own family historian by having conversations with family members, asking questions, and taking some time to document what you learn.

Get started by contacting your oldest relative and begin to document their stories!

Collect Basic Information

- Full Name
- Date of Birth
- Location of Birth
- Mother's Full Name
- Mother's Date of Birth
- Mother's Location of Birth (if known)
- Father's Full Name
- Father's Date of Birth
- Father's Location of Birth (if known)
- Grandparents' Names
- Grandparents' Date of Birth (if known)
- Great-Grandparents' Names
- Siblings' Names
- Siblings' Date(s) of Birth

Ask Questions

- What is a memory from your childhood that you remember fondly?
- What do you remember, in terms of what you were feeling and experiencing in your daily life, about living through a major historical event? (Examples could be World War II, Vietnam War, Korean War, 2008 Recession, Free Love Movement, Presidential elections, anything that comes to mind when you prompt them)?
- Is there an object that you wish you had preserved, from your childhood or throughout your life, that you do not have today? A toy or a photograph? Something given to you from your parents?

- Is there an object that you wish you had preserved, from your childhood or throughout your life, that you do not have today? A toy or a photograph? Something given to you from your parents?
- What's your earliest memory?
- Who's the oldest relative you remember (and what do you remember about him or her)?
- What were your grandparents like? Do you remember them describing their lives? What did they say?
- Did you have any of the common childhood diseases?
- How did your parents meet?
- Tell me about your childhood home. Do you remember the address and location?
- What is a memory you have from my parent's childhood that you remember? Something they did that makes you laugh? Stories of being a parent during that decade? (1950s, 1960s, 1970s).
- How did your family celebrate holidays when you were a child?
- What did you wear on a daily basis? Did you have a favorite outfit?
- Are there any fads you remember vividly?
- What was the name of your first pet? Do you have a favorite memory of them?
- Did you have a particular toy or game that you liked to play with as a child?
- Did you have a treasured object(s) growing up?
- What was your favorite meal growing up? Least favorite?
- What were some of your chores like?
- Where did you go to school for Elementary, Middle, and High School?
- How did you get to school every day?
- What were the names of some of your favorite teachers?
- What was your favorite/best school subject?
- Did you play any sports?
- Did you belong to any school clubs/organizations?
- Did you learn to play any musical instruments?
- Describe your first job.
- What did you do with your first paycheck?
- What was your favorite job and why?
- Who are some of your heroes?
- How did you meet your spouse?
- Tell me about your wedding day.
- Tell me about the day your first child was born.
- What was your scariest moment as a parent?
- What is your best memory as a parent?
- What do you feel are your greatest accomplishments?

Remember to ask for specific information as well as memories and stories. Write down addresses, locations, full names of people that your family member talks about, and how they are related. The more detail the better!

Document the Information

There are many options for recording your conversations and the information you uncover. Technology provides an efficient way to capture these treasured stories but a simple pen and paper will do.

- Record conversation with video
- Record audio on your smartphone
- Write it down in a special notebook
- Ask your loved one to share photos or scrapbook items related to the stories they tell.

Preserve and Share Your Family History

Ok, so you've collected some information from your family members, and have a lot of memories written down. Now what do you do? You can start can start to create a family tree or make a "Shoebox Archive" but you can also get creative:

- Make an artistic representation of what you learned
- Make a collage of photos and words
- Write a poem or historical fiction (a legend!) based on your family's history
- Draw a coat of arms that represents the values and qualities that your family exemplifies
- Write a song about your family history and share it at your next family gathering
- Start a family newsletter or blog to keep your family up to date on what you discovered
- Talk to more family members to cross-check information and fill in any gaps in the stories you may have