

Planning Your Genealogy Research Trip by Laurie McCoy, October 2016

Most genealogy information is not available on the internet. Should one travel to research family history? Because the internet does not allow one the chance to meet relatives or find privately held hidden family treasures . . .

Travel allows one to visit places where ancestors lived - cemeteries, 'cousins,' possible troves of privately held family collections of photographs, Bibles, or other documents, and maybe the house where they lived. Local libraries, genealogical societies, and archives have collections which can place your family in the events of their time and may include items specific to your ancestor(s).

After you decide to take a research trip, make a travel plan. Inform your travel partner(s). Contact people you hope to visit to check their availability. Consider seasonal and weather limitations as well as regional holidays and facility hours of operation. Determine dates for travel. Set research goals. Develop a genealogy research plan. Make a packing list.

How do you plan to get there? Air v. road trip? Several locations or only one? A road trip with multiple stops requires more coordination. A focused visit offers a chance for intensive search of an area. Possible coordination with a family event or genealogical conference. Consider your budget. Safety first and always.

Develop a research plan: Determine necessary documents for travel. Write down your objectives working backwards from what you know to what you hope to find. Use the 4W Rule of Who, Where, When and What to find gaps in your ancestor's timeline. Focus on one family at a time and review local history for the time frame in which the individual lived. Refer to maps and be aware that area names may have changed placing records in a county other than the current location. Familiarize yourself with the geography, topography and plot maps.

Ask yourself where the documents or information might be kept. Make contacts with the community and regional resources for information about their holdings, hours, and availability plus costs. Make appointments as needed. Document your research plan (electronic &/or written) and resource contact information.

The wealth of materials in Libraries, Archives, Courthouses, Genealogical and Historical Societies, Museums, Universities, Churches and the actual physical Cemeteries can be overwhelming. Family and Friends may have Photographs, Memorabilia, Family Documents, News Clippings, Bibles, as well as Shared Memories and Family Stories.

What to pack:

Genealogy Tools - Contact information, Research plan, Electronics with chargers, Paper products, Writing utensils, Lock for laptop, Camera, Scanner, Maps, Change, Flash drive, Fanny pack, Phone/charger, Flashlight, and a Cemetery "Tool Bag" if driving.

Personal Items - Comfortable, season appropriate clothing, Comfortable shoes, Toiletries, Photo ID, Medical Insurance Cards, Cash, Credit cards, Current medications and list of medications, Primary MD contact information, Travel or Conference documents.

More Personal Items - Hat, Coat/cover, Umbrella, Insect repellent, Sun screen, Ear plugs or ear phones, Glasses - sun and prescription.

Before You Go: Copy itinerary and share with others. Review travel budget. Contact credit card company. Double check travel documents and reservations. Review contact list. Double check genealogy research plan. Confirm sites are open on dates of planned visit. Recheck packing list.

Finally - Have Fun!!! Be Flexible!!! Be Safe!!! Happy Hunting!!! And as always, carefully document the sources of what you find, as well as where and when. Copy anything of use as you may never be able to return.