



Go on a Treasure Hunt

Let's say you've taken a few minutes to jot down what you know about your family – maybe some names, dates and places pertaining to you and your parents, and even a couple of your grandparents. What next?

Now's a good time to rediscover your own home. Most of us are clueless about all the treasures and tidbits lurking in our closets, drawers, basements and attics. Many a genealogist has been chagrined to finally determine an elusive ancestor's name after a year of research, only to find this same information in a suitcase of papers tucked into the corner of their own cellar. One of the best possible hauls? A stash of old letters – bonus points if they still have their envelopes with precious names and addresses! Other items to keep your eyes open for include:

- Birth, marriage and death certificates
- Newspaper clippings, including obituaries and wedding and anniversary announcements
- Naturalization and citizenship papers, including passports and visas
- Religious records (e.g., baptismal, Bar Mitzvah, etc.)
- Family Bible
- Letters (and addressed envelopes)
- Diaries and journals
- Photo albums (especially photos with the name of the photography studio imprinted or details written on back)
- Heirlooms such as engraved items, samplers and quilts
- Any other documents pertaining to your ancestors (e.g., military, school, occupational, business, land, legal, etc.)

After you're done poking through your own hiding places, you might want to see if Mom is willing to let you have a look at hers (hint: When scavenging for pieces of your family's past, play the odds by starting with the women; we tend to be the hoarders or protectors, depending on your perspective.). She could refuse, but it's more likely that she'll be happy to hear of your sudden interest and let you explore a few trunks or boxes in the attic.

The above is excerpted and adapted from [Who Do You Think You Are](#), companion book to the television series of the same name, by [Megan Smolenyak](#)