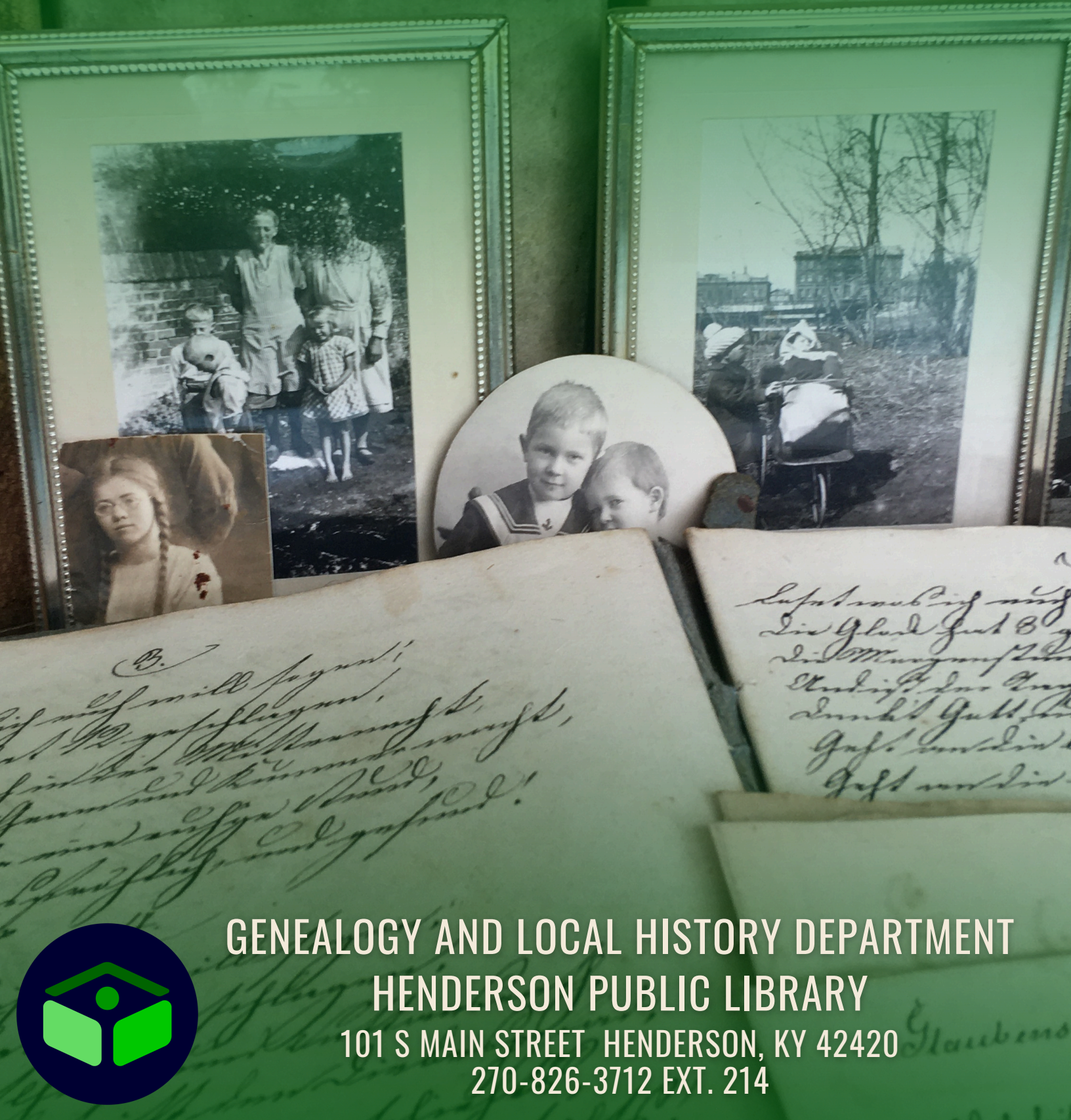


GENEALOGY 201

EXPANDING YOUR TOOLBOX



GENEALOGY AND LOCAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT
HENDERSON PUBLIC LIBRARY

101 S MAIN STREET HENDERSON, KY 42420
270-826-3712 EXT. 214



Before delving into records, researchers need to develop clear research questions.

DEVELOPING A CLEAR RESEARCH QUESTION

Take your research skills to the next level by developing clear research questions. To do this, review your research log.

What is Known?

- Review the information in the research log to identify a specific person, family, era, or location.
- What is known about this person, family, era, or location?

What is Unknown?

- Are there any details that are missing or unclear?
- Examples:
 - Is there an unknown parent or spouse?
 - Is there an unverified birth, marriage, or death date?
 - Are there migration or immigration patterns that are unclear?

Be specific in creating a clear research question

- Avoid generic questions like “What is my family history?”
- A good resource question will be specific and defined.
- Always ask a question!
- A clear research question may ask: “Who were the parents of Sarah Miller, born in Ohio around 1855, who married John Thompson in 1876?”

This includes specific information on:

- Who: Subject (Sarah Miller’s parents)
- What: Relationship (parentage)
- When: Approximate date (1855 birth)
- Where: Location (Ohio)
- “Census records for Sarah Miller” obviously would not be helpful for future research.

What resources are available to answer the research question?

- Based on the clear research question above, census and vital records will be a great starting point to find more on Sarah Miller.
- Other Examples of Clear Research Questions:
 - “Was John Franklin listed in the 1900 census for Marshall County, Kentucky?”
 - “What were the birth and death dates of Lydia Harris, wife of Charles Harris of Franklin County, Vermont?”
 - “What military service did William J. Carter, born in 1842 in Georgia, perform during the Civil War?”

EVALUATING EVIDENCE

The Board for Certification of Genealogists developed a research process called Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) “to measure the credibility of conclusions about ancestral identities, relationships, and life events.”¹

To reach a sound conclusion, all five interdependent components of the GPS process need to be met:

1. Reasonably exhaustive research.
2. Complete and accurate source citations.
3. Thorough analysis and correlation.
4. Resolution of conflicting evidence.
5. Soundly written conclusion based on the strongest evidence.²

Using GPS will help researchers gain confidence in their research and reach credible conclusions for each ancestor.

Identify the type of source

- Sources are categorized based on their origin:
 - Original source: The first recording of an event (e.g., a birth certificate).
 - Derivative source: A copy or transcription of an original (e.g., a typed family history).
 - Authored work: An analysis or narrative based on multiple sources (e.g., a genealogy book).
- Prefer original sources when possible but evaluate each source's accuracy regardless of type.

Assess the information

- Information within a source can be:
 - Primary information: Provided by someone with firsthand knowledge of the event (e.g., a parent reporting a child's birth).
 - Secondary information: Provided by someone who did not witness the event and relies on memory or secondhand accounts.
 - Undetermined: When it's unclear whether the informant had firsthand knowledge.
- Primary information is usually more reliable, especially if recorded close to the time of the event.

Evaluate the evidence

- Evidence supports or contradicts a research question or hypothesis:
 - Direct evidence: Explicitly answers the question (e.g., a marriage record showing the date and place).
 - Indirect evidence: Requires correlation with other sources to answer the question.
 - Negative evidence: The absence of a record or information where one would be expected.
- Strong genealogical conclusions often require correlating multiple types of evidence.
- Remember that negative evidence is evidence!

Analyze reliability and consistency

- Ask:
 - Who created the source, and why?
 - Was the informant in a position to know the facts?
 - Is the information consistent with other known facts?
 - Are there any contradictions between sources?
- Use other tools like timelines and family group sheets to spot inconsistencies.

Cite and document sources

- Always provide full source citations to:
 - Track where the information came from.
 - Allow others (and your future self) to verify or reevaluate the data.
- Uphold genealogical standards.

Apply the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS)

- To ensure a sound conclusion:
 - Reasonably exhaustive research.
 - Complete source citations.
 - Analysis and correlation of the collected evidence.
 - Resolution of conflicting evidence.
 - Sound written conclusion.

CITING SOURCES

Properly citing genealogy sources is essential for:

- accuracy
- transparency
- enabling others to verify your research

The standard reference for citing genealogical sources is *Evidence Explained* by Elizabeth Shown Mills.

Within the over 800 pages, *Evidence Explained* details formats for nearly every type of historical and genealogical record.

Here's a simplified version of her basic citation structure format:

- Source Type: Author/creator, Title (Place of publication: Publisher, year), page/record number, repository or URL.

Other examples include:

- Vital Record (e.g., Birth Certificate)
Ohio Department of Health, Certificate of Birth for John Smith, born 15 May 1900; Ohio Vital Records Office, Columbus.
- Census Record (U.S. 1900 Census)
1900 U.S. census, Franklin County, Ohio, population schedule, Columbus Ward 3, enumeration district (ED) 78, sheet 5B, dwelling 112, family 134, John Smith; digital image, Ancestry.com (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 27 May 2025); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 1276.

- Book

Robert Charles Anderson, *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620–1633*, 3 vols. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1995), 1:123.

- Gravestone

John Smith (1840–1910) gravestone, Oak Grove Cemetery, Springfield, Clark County, Ohio; personally read and photographed by [Your Name], 22 Aug 2023.

- Online Family Tree

"Smith Family Tree," user-contributed tree, Ancestry.com (<https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/12345678> : accessed 27 May 2025); supplied by user "JaneDoe42."

- Helpful tips for citing sources:

- Always include who created the record, what it is, where it's found, and for online sources document the date it was accessed.
- Often the citation can be exported into computer software like Family Tree Maker or RootsMagic.
- Be as specific as possible. Include repository names, archive call numbers, URLs, and access dates.

COURT RECORDS

Court records can help genealogists fill in the gaps between vital records. Using these records, genealogists can discover relationships, dates, locations, property owned, and other family connections.

In Kentucky, court records can be found in the County Court Clerk's office and the County Circuit Court office.

What can court records reveal?

- The County Court Clerk's office will house (\$ - cost):
 - Corporate Records
 - Deeds
 - Liens

- Marriage and Licenses
- Mortgages
- Releases
- Wills
- The County Circuit Court office will house (\$):
 - Civil Cases
 - Contract disputes
 - Family law (including divorce, child custody, child support, and adoption)
 - Personal injury
 - Probate
 - Property disputes
 - Criminal Cases

Researchers may contact these repositories for court records:

- Henderson County Clerk's Office (\$)
20 North Main Street
Suite 206
Henderson, Kentucky 42419-0374
(270) 826-3906
- Henderson County Judicial Center (\$)
5 North Main Street
Henderson, Kentucky 42419-0675
(270) 826-2405
- Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (\$)
300 Coffee Tree Road
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
(502) 564-8300
- Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics (\$)
275 East Main Street #1EA
Frankfort, Kentucky 40621
(502) 564-4212

- Henderson County Public Library (microfilm only)
101 South Main Street
Henderson, Kentucky 42420
(270) 826-3712 ext. 214

Websites where court records are accessible include:

- Free websites:
 - FamilySearch.org
 - National Archives
 - Ancestry.com Henderson County Public Library (In House)
 - Heritage Quest (access from home through your HCPL library card)
- Subscription-Based (\$):
 - Ancestry.com
 - MyHeritage

Helpful tips for researching court records:

- Understand legal terminology: It helps you interpret old cases.
- Take detailed notes: Record citation details for every document.
- Create timelines: Match court events to life events.
- Document names: How are witnesses, neighbors, and others listed in records associated with family members.

LAND RECORDS

Researching land records for genealogy can uncover valuable information:

- Where did ancestors live?
- When did they move?
- What other family members were living on the land?

What are land records?

- Land records document the ownership, transfer, and rights to land. They may include:
 - Deeds (sales, grants, or gifts)
 - Land patents (original claims from government)
 - Mortgages and liens
 - Plat maps and surveys
 - Homestead records

What information does land records provide:

- Names of buyers and sellers (grantors and grantees)
- Relationships (often between family members)
- Dates and locations of residence
- Property descriptions
- Witnesses (can be relatives or neighbors)

Helpful tips for researching land records:

- Know what county or town an ancestor lived
- When visiting the County Clerk's Office, look at the deed books or land records indexes. The indexes will show the grantor (seller) and the grantee (buyer) along with the book and page number of the records.
- When analyzing the deed books or land records, information that can be gathered include:
 - Full names of parties involved
 - Description of the land (metes and bounds, or township and range)
 - Date of the transaction
 - Names of witnesses or neighbors
 - Consideration (price or value)
- Document deeds in your timeline in order to tract movement, inheritances, or other patterns.

Land records available through the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (\$):

- Henderson County, Kentucky Deed Records – 1797-2014
- Henderson County, Kentucky Land Grant Records – 1799-1807
- Henderson County, Kentucky Plat Records – 1875, 1889, 1911
- Henderson County, Kentucky Survey Records – 1799-1987
 - Originals – 1799-1902, 1910, 1919, 1959-1963

PROBATE RECORDS

Probate records can provide detailed information on:

- Ancestors
- Family relationships
- Property
- Locations

What are probate records?

- Probate records are legal documents that deal with the distribution of a deceased person's estate that may include:
 - Wills
 - Letters of administration (for those who died without a will)
 - Inventories of the estate
 - Bonds
 - Court proceedings

Probate records can be found in the following collections:

- Records available through Henderson County Clerk's Office (\$):
 - Probate Records
- Microfilm records available through the Henderson County Public Library:
 - Henderson County, Kentucky Executor and Administrator Bonds – 1871-1977
 - Henderson County, Kentucky Will Books – 1806-1966
- Records available through the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (\$):
 - Henderson County, Kentucky Will Books - 1799-2003
 - Order Probate Record (\$).
- Free Websites:
 - Ancestry.com Henderson County Public Library (In House)
 - Heritage Quest (access from home through your HCPL library card)
 - FamilySearch.org
- Subscription based websites (\$):
 - Ancestry.com
 - FindMyPast
 - MyHeritage

How to Search Probate Records

- Know the person's full name and location
 - Determine where they died and the likely county of probate.
 - Consider spelling variations and nicknames.
- Estimate the death date
 - Probate usually occurs within a year or two of death.
 - Probates have taken up to twenty years before finalized.
- Search the right time period
 - Records are often filed under the date of probate, not the date of death.
- Start with indexes
 - Many archives and websites offer probate indexes to help locate the full record.
- Look at associated records
 - Even if there's no will, letters of administration and estate inventories can be revealing.

Researching probates may provide the following information:

- Names of heirs and relationships
- Names of executors and witnesses
- Land and property owned
- Debts owed and paid
- Migration clues (land in other counties/states)
- Family structure and wealth

Helpful tips when researching probate records:

- Search surrounding counties if records aren't found where expected.
- Look at the whole probate packet, not just the will. Inventories and petitions can be a wealth of information.
- Use estate records to trace other relatives mentioned.
- Check for guardianship records if there were minor children.

MIGRATION

Analyzing migration patterns can help uncover:

- where ancestors came from
- where they moved
- why they moved

Examine what is already known:

- Birth, marriage, and death records
- Census records
- Land deeds and property records

Create a chronological timeline for each ancestor or family group

- Note significant events and their locations
- Highlight any moves or location changes

Plot ancestral locations on a map:

- Use tools like Google My Maps, [Historic Map Works](#), or a genealogy mapping software
- Look for clusters or repeated routes across generations

What would cause ancestors to move?

- Wars
- Famines
- Economic depressions
- Land grants
- Religious persecution

Explore these records to establish migration patterns:

- Census and Tax Records
 - Look for changes in state, county, or town between decades
 - Track neighbors—families often migrated in groups or with extended relatives
- Check Land and Probate Records
 - Land grants or sales often show movement westward or to new countries
 - Probate records may list heirs in different locations
- Investigate Transportation & Travel Routes
 - Research railroads, rivers, stagecoach routes, and sea voyages of the time
 - Learn how people moved—this gives insight into possible destinations

Study common migration routes used in different eras:

- United States
 - Great Wagon Road
 - Oregon Trail

- Erie Canal migration
- Appalachian migration paths
- Europe to the United States Migration
 - Ports of departure (e.g., Hamburg, Liverpool)
 - Ports of arrival (e.g., New York, Boston, Philadelphia)

Online resources:

- [American Migration Patterns](#)
- [Atlas of Historical County Boundaries](#)
- [FamilySearch Research Wiki](#)
- [History of County Formations in Kentucky](#)
- [Map of US](#)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Researchers will have a better appreciation for ancestors when studying historical context. Historical context provides insight into ancestors:

- movements
- occupations
- choices

Developing a timeline:

- Build a timeline for each ancestor or family line:
 - Birth, marriage, death dates
 - Migration events (city, country)
 - Occupations
 - Military service
- Match these with key historical events:
 - Wars
 - Economic downturns (e.g., the Great Depression)
 - Immigration waves
 - Religious or political upheaval
- Tools:
 - [OurTimelines.com](#)
 - Family Tree Maker timeline tools
 - Google Sheets or Excel

Investigate regional history

- Learn about the places your ancestors lived.
 - What were the local customs and laws?
 - Were there natural disasters, wars, or famine?
 - What languages, religions, or ethnic tensions existed?

Use historical maps

- Maps help you visualize old borders, migration routes, and property boundaries:
 - Look for changing county borders and country borders
 - Use Sanborn fire maps or plat maps for United States city detail
- Online resources:
 - David Rumsey Historical Map Collection
 - Library of Congress Map Collection
 - OldMapsOnline.org

Learn from social histories

- Social history adds human detail to an ancestor's story:
 - What did they eat?
 - How did they dress?
 - What was schooling like?
- Focus on time period + location + occupation (e.g., "life of a coal miner in Wales, 1880s")
 - Diaries
 - Letters
 - Newspaper articles
- Where to find social history information:
 - Free digital books
 - Archive.org
 - Google Books
 - HathiTrust
 - Newspapers (Please determine which newspaper website carries newspapers related to your ancestors before subscribing.)
 - GenealogyBank (\$)
 - Newspaper Archives (\$)
 - Newspapers.com (access from home through your HCPL library card)
 - Newspapers.com (\$)
 - Old News (\$)

Explore immigration & military background

- Immigration
 - Why did ancestors emigrate?
 - ethnic cleansing
 - potato famine
 - What were the naturalization processes and laws when ancestors immigrated?
 - What was the port of entry?
 - Baltimore
 - Boston
 - Galveston
 - New Orleans
 - New York City (Castle Garden, Ellis Island)
 - Philadelphia
 - San Francisco
 - Other?
 - Did ancestors arrive during an immigration wave?
- Military
 - What paperwork was found?
 - Draft card
 - Military records
 - Pension
 - How did the wars and conflict effect the ancestor's family?

Always ask, "What was happening in the ancestor's time?"

ONLINE RESOURCES

Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives Research Guides

[Kentucky County Court Records Handout](#)

[Kentucky County \(Local\) Records](#)

[Kentucky County Records Inventory](#)

[Kentucky Court Records Research Guide](#)

[Kentucky Circuit Court Records Guide](#)

[Kentucky Circuit Court Records Inventory](#)

[Kentucky Deed Records](#)

[Kentucky Land Records Guide \(Land Patents, Grants, Deeds, Tax Lists, and Wills\)](#)

[Kentucky Land Records Inventory](#)

[Kentucky Probate Records](#)

LIBRARY RESOURCES

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CITATIONS

¹ Genealogists, Board for Certification. Genealogy Standards. Second, Ancestry.com, 2019, p. 1.

² Genealogists, Board for Certification. Genealogy Standards. Second, Ancestry.com, 2019, pp. 1–3.