



# Hiring a Professional Genealogist

The Association of Professional Genealogists  
Web: [www.apgen.org/index.html](http://www.apgen.org/index.html)

The following guidelines can help you find and employ a competent genealogist.

## Services Provided by Professional Genealogists

**Tracing Ancestry.** A professional genealogist can help you trace your ancestors. For example, a genealogist may be able to discover who your immigrant ancestors were and where they came from.

**Researching Descendants.** A professional genealogist may help identify people who descended from a particular individual such as the ancestors of George Washington.

**Searching Records.** To save time and avoid travel costs, you can employ a record searcher to find and review the records for you.

### Other Services.

- Consulting and counseling on how to solve a research problem.
- Deciphering handwriting on old records.
- Translating foreign records.
- Computerizing genealogical information.
- Finding missing people.

## Genealogical Credentials

Genealogists are generally not required by law to be licensed or certified. However, many receive credentials from organizations that ensure that the genealogists are competent. Contact these organizations for lists of certified genealogists:

Board for Certification of Genealogists®  
Web: <http://www.bcgcertification.org>

## How Genealogists Are Paid

**Fee Structures.** Rates and fee structures can vary among genealogists. Some genealogists simply bill as they work. Others charge a daily rate or a flat fee per project. Most genealogists charge an hourly rate plus expenses. Genealogists generally bill for the expenses they incur.

**Hourly Rates.** Most genealogists base their hourly rate on their education, training, skill, experience, credentials, and what the market will bear.

The average rate charged by most competent genealogists ranges from \$25.00 to \$50.00 per hour. Record searchers often charge between \$15.00 and \$25.00 per hour. Genealogists may justifiably charge higher rates if they are experienced, have unique skills and knowledge, or have credentials and formal training.

**Payment.** Methods of payment vary. Many genealogists ask for a retainer before work begins. The genealogist then works and bills against the retainer until it is spent. Then another retainer is paid, and work continues.

You can do the following to control your costs:

- Gather together as much information about your family as you reasonably can.
- Break a large project into smaller tasks, and pay periodically.
- Request frequent reports and detailed billings to keep you informed.
- Clearly specify when and how the genealogist can bill for additional services (cost overruns).
- Have other family members help pay costs.

(Continued on the next page.)

# The Hiring Process

## Step 1: Determine Your Research Needs.

Before hiring a professional genealogist, clarify your research problem and determine what you want the genealogist to do. Do not start with a general or vague idea.

## Step 2: Obtain a List of Genealogists.

Obtain a list of potential genealogists.

## Step 3: Contact Candidates.

Contact several genealogists. Discuss the following in a telephone call or letter:

- Your research problem, materials you have, and goals.
- The genealogist's availability.
- The research strategies the genealogist might use.
- The genealogist's access to records required for your project.
- The reporting procedure. (You may even want to see a sample report.)
- The genealogist's areas of specialty and credentials, including language skills if needed.
- Rates and billing procedures.

## Step 4: Determine Whom to Hire.

Consider the following questions:

- Do you feel that the genealogist has a good understanding of your research problem and knows how to solve it?
- Do you feel that the genealogist has the required background and skills?
- Do the genealogist's fees seem appropriate?

## Step 5: Make an Agreement

Before any work begins, be sure to make an agreement. Verbal agreements may be of little benefit in

the event of a dispute. A written agreement can be as simple as a letter stating your expectations and authorizing the genealogist to proceed, or it can be a formal written contract.

A contract should include at least the following:

- The research goal and scope of the project.
- Frequency of reports and bills.
- Content of the reports.
- What constitutes fees and expenses.
- Payment and limitations of fees.
- How cost overruns should be handled.
- What happens if one or both parties do not or cannot fulfill their part of the agreement.
- Publication rights to the research findings.
- What forms the genealogist will prepare.

## Step 6: Pay Fees and Provide Information to Start.

Send whatever retainer or fees are required for the genealogist to begin working.

Important: You can avoid needless, costly duplication by informing your genealogist of the records you have already found and the research that has been done to date.

Send good photocopies of your materials. Never send original documents or other materials for which you have no other copies.

## Step 7: Stay in Contact.

As you work with your genealogist, be sure to communicate often. Most problems can be avoided through good communication.

If problems do arise that you cannot solve together, get in touch with the organization that credentialed the genealogist. Many organizations will mediate or arbitrate disagreements between the genealogists and their clients.