

13 Step-by-Step
Genealogy
Projects

FIND RELATIVES IN THE 1940 CENSUS

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52 WAYS TO DISCOVER YOUR ROOTS

6 Steps to ORGANIZE Your Ancestor Search

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Treasure HUNT



Unlock genealogy clues all year long. Each week, look for one of these 52 key family history sources that can turn up in the most surprising spots.

BY LISA A. ALZO



SKILL
LEVEL

INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED

🐾 **WE SEEM TO** have an obsession with stuff—our own and other people's. You've probably tuned in to *Antiques Roadshow* and marveled at the value of that painting someone scored at a garage sale for \$5. Perhaps you've switched on an episode of *Hoarders* and thought "At least my house isn't *that* bad," or enjoyed *Pawn Stars*, *Storage Wars* or *Barter Kings*.

These shows are entertaining, but the reality for genealogists is that the line between "keep" and "toss" is often blurred. My own mother was the proverbial pack rat. After she and dad passed away, I had to clean out 40 years' worth of accumulated items from their house. It was hard work, but

truthfully, I'm glad she kept so much. Among the assorted dishes, collectibles and decades-old receipts were some genealogy gems—my grandparents' passports, Mom's school report cards, Dad's US Navy induction notice and discharge papers, and other treasures.

Similar clues to your own family history might be hiding right in front of you—in that basement, garage, storage locker or even in cyberspace. The 52 items we've listed here are worth hunting for. Break your search down and look for one per week this year, or keep an eye out for all these treasures at once if you're feeling especially ambitious.

52-Week Genealogy Plan

1 PHOTOGRAPHS

Who doesn't have a box of old pictures in an attic or closet? If you're lucky, they'll have names and dates on the back. But many of us inherit mystery photographs without any labels at all. Get advice about identifying your images from *Family Tree Magazine's* Photo Detective, Maureen A. Taylor, who solves photo mysteries at <blog.familytreemagazine.com/photodetectiveblog> and in her just-released book *Family Photo Detective* <shopfamilytree.com/family-photo-detective-v9824>. And try uploading your unidentified photos to sites where others might recognize them, such as DeadFred <www.deadfred.com> or Ancient Faces <www.ancientfaces.com>.

2 CERTIFICATES

When I started doing genealogy more than 22 years ago, I didn't have the luxury of online birth, death and other records. But my mother had saved my Slovak grandparents' baptismal certificates, which gave me their birth dates, parents' names, religion and villages—all crucial facts I used to obtain additional records. Ask your relatives whether they inherited any of these documents.

3 WORK PAPERS

Documents associated with a relative's job may describe his or her appearance, health, next of kin, and work history. I have my grandfather's 1900s worker passbook (a document issued to tradesmen in Austria-Hungary). It's in Hungarian and I had to pay to have it translated, but it details his work in Austria-Hungary (now Slovakia), his date and place of birth, his religion, and his physical appearance. I also have his apprenticeship certificate showing his occupation as a "Cartwright/assistant/helper." This document helped prove a family story that my grandfather's ability to fix wheels saved his life during World War I. You can read more about finding and using occupational records in the December 2011 *Family Tree Magazine* <shopfamilytree.com/family-tree-magazine-december-2011-fm1211>.

4 PINS, MEDALS AND KEYCHAINS

Look carefully at trinkets like these in family collections. An inscription may be a date clue to an important life event. The Union Railroad gave my dad a keychain showing the year he retired—a detail that helped me pursue Railroad Retirement Board records (see <familytreemagazine.com/article/workin-on-the-railroad> for more on these). A medal of my grandfather's commemorates his 40 years with US Steel. Jewelry also might bear the insignia of a fraternal organization such as the Freemasons or Odd Fellows.



COURTESY OF LISA A. ALZO

Keep an eye out for photos tucked away among other papers in your home and the homes of relatives.

5 YEARBOOKS

Grade school, high school and college books are great sources of ancestor photos. You also may learn whether your relative was into sports or voted homecoming queen or most likely to succeed. Subscription sites Ancestry.com <ancestry.com> and World Vital Records <www.worldvitalrecords.com> have digitized yearbooks. Also scour libraries where the school is located, and if it's still open, contact school personnel about arranging a visit.

6 MILITARY MEMORABILIA

I learned about my father's Naval service from his induction and discharge papers, dog tags and especially his Navy diary. In this small brown notebook, he jotted down details such as the day he entered service, Aug. 16, 1943, and the position of his ship in the Pacific when the Japanese surrendered in 1945. Military insignia, uniforms, awards, letters and other documents offer similar clues. Follow up by searching for service records and pension papers—start with the websites listed at <familytreemagazine.com/article/best-websites-for-genealogy-research-in-military-records-2012>.

7 AUTOGRAPH BOOKS

These keepsakes, which were especially popular for gathering friends' sentiments and signatures in the 19th and early 20th centuries, reveal names of an ancestor's friends and acquaintances—great for doing cluster genealogy (see <familytreemagazine.com/article/group-thinking-1> for more on this strategy). The shared writings also will give you insight into your ancestor's personality and interests. If you find such a book, check the first page for the original owner's name and address.

COURTESY OF LISA A. ALZO

8 SCRIP

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9 FUN

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