

# Genealogy Trips - More Than Just Records

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Genealogy Trips are still needed: Every Record is not on the Internet. You may need to visit the area to get land, probate, and court records. You can then visit Cemeteries, find their properties, possibly see old family homes, and meet relatives and meet people that can help you with your research.

Quick summary of my article **Genealogy Vacation – Myth or Reality** (Heritage Quest, Issue #99 - May/June 2002 page 30) - online version at **Genealogy According to Jeff** ([www.jeffbockman.com/gatj](http://www.jeffbockman.com/gatj))

## TYPES OF GENEALOGY VACATIONS

A “Do all of the research that you possibly can” genealogy vacation is easy

1. Pick the geographic area where you need or want to do research.
2. Get a detailed map of the area
3. Get a map from your home to the area if you are driving.
4. Put Red dots for every **courthouse or research facility** near where you have ancestors.
5. Use Black dots for every **cemetery** where you have ancestors buried.
6. Use Blue dots for any **living known relatives** (down to 4th cousins)
7. Put a Yellow dot on the **tourist attractions** that your family wants to visit.
8. Use Green dots for any **attractions** that you want to see.
9. **Connect all of the dots**

### Research Vacation – (Note: many hints in the handouts will not be covered in the program)

Pick a variety of the items so that everyone will be satisfied. Make decisions based upon:

- Your specific research goals & individual interests
- The time available and the time necessary for the various activities including travel time
- The days and hours that places are open
- The costs & practicality of putting it all together and the possibility of another future visit.

### Walking in your Ancestor's Footsteps

- Visit the family homestead or homeland, meet distant cousins, eat the local food, and drink the local beer, wine, or beverage of choice.
- See where they were born and raised and learned a trade.
- See the culture that influenced their and possibly your life.
- See where they lived or stayed for even a little while.
- Maybe learn why your ancestor left the area.

## PLANNING

“Do your homework at home” - Your trip will be more successful with good planning

### Immigrants - Finding the Hometown

- Family Sources & Local Histories
- Oral History & Stories
- Death Records: Death Certificate, Newspaper Stories & Obituaries, Cemetery Records & tombstone, Probate Records, Funeral Cards, and Church Records
- Children's Birth Certificates
- Immigration & Passenger Lists: both departure & arrival
- Naturalization Papers + those of their parents, spouse, & siblings
- WWI and WWII Draft Registration & Military Records
- SS Application
- Census Records – Country & Language
- Still stuck? Check the records of
  - Siblings, especially the younger ones
  - Witnesses & Neighbors from the same country

### New Location or Country Preparation

- FamilySearch: Research Guides & Online records, Online catalog & order films
- Progenealogists - Guides
- GenWeb
- Websites of Archives, Libraries, Historical & Genealogical Societies
- Online Records
  - See the Everton's NetBest articles
  - FamilySearch, Ancestry, Country specific sites
- Search for : Newspapers, Maps, Images, etc

**Use the Internet to:**

- Locate Cemeteries
- Learn about research facilities & their collection,
  - information and the days and hours they are open
  - online catalog and Unique references and availability
- Print out Current & Historical Maps
- Locate Tourist sites
- Make travel arrangements
- **Establish Contacts!!**

**Establish Contacts before you go**

- Relatives, Researchers, & others with similar interests
- Review and Post Surname or Location Queries
- Contact Research Facilities
- Contact local historical or genealogical societies
- Archive staff - I emailed the Archivist of the Probate Court of Mobile County, AL. She had copies of an entire probate file ready for me to pick up at half the cost of the regular clerk. Two years before we reviewed the actual pages of the file and made some copies.

Helpful Internet sites:

- Jeff's Genealogy & Travel Links see: Locations, GenWeb, Maps, Maps-Historic
- World GenWeb (<http://www.worldgenweb.org/>) for each country, state or county
- Local or Regional Genealogical and Historical Societies
- Telephone Book sites
- Genealogy According to Jeff: see Birth Alternatives – hints of finding hometown

**Good Judgment comes from Experience. Experience comes from Bad Judgment!**

**TRAVEL TIPS**

**Research Facility tips:**

When asking for help at a research facility, be very specific.

- Tell them what you are looking for
- Have FGS, AC, Descendant Charts, etc
- Tell them quickly what you have already checked.
- Ask them "What else do you have that could possibly help me?"
- Thank them for their assistance even if you didn't find what you were hoping for. On the positive side, "You now have one less source that you need to check."
- Hope that the person just before you at the next facility is just as polite.

**Courthouse tips:**

- Act & Look Professional - No Hawaiian shirt and shorts
- Ask how to locate or request specific records
- Don't tell them all about your family
- Remember, they only manage the records under their custody
- Listen or ask for restaurant reviews

**Cemetery Visit tips:** Note: not always helpful in some foreign countries

**Visit the cemetery office to:**

- Help locate the burial site
- Get the plot information. Data will vary with each cemetery but should include the:
  - Plot owner

- Name and burial date of everyone in the plot including those without markers.
- Possibly information about death date, parent's names, and the cause of death.

**At the grave:**

- Take photos but also **WRITE EVERYTHING DOWN!**
- Record all of the information on the stones and the nearby plots as well. These can often be in-laws or married siblings. Look around for everyone with known names.
- If there is not a diagram of who is buried on the plot then draw one yourself
- Take photos of the stones and the overall area. Photos do not replace taking notes since the photos may not come out or you might not be able to read them
- If a stone cannot be read, then try to find an old book of transcriptions

**Historical tourist sites** such as Mystic Seaport, CT and Old Deerfield, MA

- Let you experience a little bit of what life was like when your ancestors were there.
- Have a shared experiences with the non-researchers in your family
- They often have a very good historical library hidden away

### **Walking in your Ancestor's Footsteps**

Visiting the country, the town, or possibly even the house where an ancestor was born, lived or just spent time is an experience that cannot be done online. Learning about their culture, sampling the food, and enjoying the local beverages of choice can help you connect with your ancestors and maybe even living cousins. Finding a local family member or even an interested contact can make it a very special experience.

Here are a few examples of my travels to family sites that were enhanced by local contacts:

**Colorado:** Hiram DeMary, a Great-Great Grandfather helped Colorado become a state and he spent much of his life there. The person that owned the Demary Placer, his former property near Leadville showed us the road that Hiram helped to get built and the log cabin where he spent his first winter.

**Slovenia:** In 1999 Eva, a relative from Slovenia replied to a query that I had posted. In 2000 my wife and I went to Slovenia and met Eva and her parents in Ljubljana. They translated for us when we met 19 cousins in the village where my father's mother was born and grew up. We really enjoyed meeting them, the food, and their homemade wine and slivovitz (plum brandy).

**Goal:** Visit the town of Prelesje, Austria (Yugoslavia, Slovenia) where my grandmother was born.

- March 1999 - Posted a query at Rootsweb (now Ancestry) about my great-grandparents
- Heard from a gentleman who had helped a lady film the church records
- Contacted her and received photos and copies of family/house records
- Also heard from Eva, the daughter of a man who's father was killed in WWII and his mother had married my father's first cousin.
- Summer of 1999 went to SLC to view films – overexposed
- Became pen pals with Eva and she agreed to translate for us if we came over
- Summer of 2000 visited Slovenia. Met Eva and her parents in Ljubljana, then drove to Prelesje and met 3 of my father's first cousins and 2 spouses; Four of my second cousins and three of their spouses, and 7 of their children.
- The Priest in Kocevje, where the family may have come, from said that everyone looks for their family until the run into gypsies.
- Visited the State archives in Ljubljana to view the Kocevje church records – nothing found.
- 2003 – Eva came to visit in Chicago and in 2011 we visited Eva in Brussels

See my “Cousin to Cousin” article at GATJ

### **France: Two trips following in my Grandfather's WWI footsteps**

My grandfather John G. Stevenson died on 1 Feb 1924 when my mother was only three years old. She has only a few memories of him. The letters that he sent home while he was stationed in France during

World War One are the one thing that has given my mother and me a little insight into him as a person, his interests, and his activities. They also provide information about the places that he was stationed.

**Camp Williams & Is-sur-Tille** - "This is a dandy place & the little village near us is very quaint – it reminds me of Venice – as there is a river dashing through it & the houses are built right in the water – so that the women do their washing right from their backdoor – quite a stunt – they have a wooden paddle & beat the wadding out of whatever they are washing on a stone slab."

He was probably describing the lavoirs and homes on Rue Gambetta. During our visit we learned that the bourgeoisie homes had their own private lavoirs. Unlike many current stars and politicians they did not want their dirty laundry on display.

I learned a little about his sense of humor in his 13 April letter.

"The rain has stopped and it looks very much as if we would have a nice Sunday for a change; the average is about five rainy days each week and the mud is a fright; our quarters are about two miles from here and nothing but deep slimy, gooey mud to walk on; Don't be surprised if I come home with web feet!"

On the 17th of April he wrote

"This part of France is more beautiful than anything I have ever seen in America – hills in every direction – streams of clear, cold water running all around filled with trout, the hills covered with pine."

In planning for the trip I started with:

- The town of Is-sur-Tille's website
- The Society Histoire Tille/Ignon -
- Searched and found historic maps and photos of the town and the camp
- Emailed the author of the SHTI's book about the camp: 90 ans apres (90 years after)
- I emailed transcribed copies of his letters

They gave us a two day tour of the town and various sites, introduced us to the mayor and many other people, they took us to a variety of homes, and arranged an interview with the local newspaper.

See my website for a variety of Announcements and articles at GATJ.

In 2012 we returned and took part in the 8 Mai Victory Day Parade & Celebration.

Planning the vacation or trip and then reliving it with pictures, memories, and research results will let you enjoy it far more than the one or two weeks of the actual trip. **Keys to a successful genealogy trip**

- Set Realistic Goals
- Pre-Trip Research & Planning
- Establish Contacts
- Enjoy the Trip
- Travel can change you or at least make you think differently
- Relive it with:
  - Pictures
  - Memories
  - Research Results
- Follow-up & Share Information
- Shared Experiences, Good or Bad are what makes a family a family

**Bon Voyage** - Now it's your turn to load up your family, just like the Griswalds and head to the Family Research Megacenters. Just make sure that it will be open when you get there.