

Use A Family Tree Document Tracker For More Efficiency

Have you ever been hot on the trail of a marriage certificate or census form for a particular relative only to discover that you already found it some time ago? If your family tree is big, you probably can't remember exactly what you've found and what you're still seeking. Don't waste any more time. Set up a document tracker.

How to create your document tracker

Your document tracker is nothing more than a table with rows and columns created in your preferred spreadsheet software. If you use Microsoft Office, you may already have Excel on your computer. If not, you can use OpenOffice.org Calc for free. OpenOffice.org provides a free word processor, spreadsheet, database, presentation software and more.

The great thing about a spreadsheet is you can always edit it. Add a new column for a new type of document you want – like a city directory or a passport application. Add a new row each time you find a document for a new relative. The basic steps are:

- **Enter your column titles.** In the top row of the spreadsheet, save the first column for the relative's name. Then add a column title for each type of document you want to find: birth, immigration, marriage, naturalization, census, death, etc.
- **Enter your relatives.** In the first column enter one relative per row. If you enter them Last Name First, First Name Last, your spreadsheet can be alphabetized automatically. If two relatives have the same name, include a fact to help you tell them apart: their birth year, father's name, or just "grandpa".
- **Fill in the boxes.** Whenever you add a new document to your collection, put something in the corresponding box on your document tracker. For a one-time document (e.g., a birth or death record) put an X in the box. For census or immigration records enter the year(s). For draft registration cards specify WW1 or WW2. Everything is there at a glance.

How to use your document tracker for greater efficiency

You can customize your document tracker to help you keep track of what you have done and what you want to do. For instance:

- **Add a To-Do column.** To make sure I attached all of my document images to the proper people in my [Family Tree Maker](#) software, I added a column called "All in FTM". Then I entered "yes" once all of a person's documents were attached.
- **Add a What's Next column.** You can add a column that includes a list of each person's missing documents. Let's say you're busy going through the recently released 1940 census records. If your document tracker contains a "To find" column, you can easily see which people you should be searching for in 1940. If some of your relatives lived close to one another, then you may as well keep turning the page until you've found not just your great grandfather but your great grand uncle's family, too.

Genealogists enjoy the hunt for new information, but who wants to waste time retracing their steps? Let your document tracker keep you on a course for maximum efficiency.