

Topic Page: [Genealogy](#)

Definition: **genealogy** from *Collins English Dictionary*

n pl -gies

- 1 the direct descent of an individual or group from an ancestor
- 2 the study of the evolutionary development of animals and plants from earlier forms
- 3 a chart showing the relationships and descent of an individual, group, genes, etc

[C13: from Old French *genealogie*, from Late Latin *geneālogia*, from Greek, from *genea* race]

> genealogical (,dʒi:nɪə'lədʒɪkəl) or ,genea'logic *adj*

> ,genea'logically *adv*

> ,gene'alogist *n*

Summary Article: **genealogy**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(jē'nēŏl'əjē, -ăl-, jě-), the study of family lineage. Genealogies have existed since ancient times. Family lineage was originally transmitted through oral tradition and later, with the invention of writing, was passed on through written records. The genealogies in the Bible probably originated in oral tradition. Ancient Greeks and Romans traced their ancestry to gods and heroes, and traditional tribes often claim descent from animals. Genealogies flourished in the Middle Ages because the development of feudalism made status and the transference of possessions dependent upon the tracing of family lines. To a lesser degree, this condition continues in some countries, as England, to the present day. Examples of English genealogies are the books of Burke, Collins, and others on the peerage.

In the United States, pedigree *per se* has not been crucial in determining status or in transferring property, but race formerly served as a great social divider (e.g., blacks were formerly enslaved in the South and were later denied their civil rights and prohibited from marrying whites in many states). In more limited situations, genealogy has had a degree of importance in the United States: Some societies limit membership to descendants of a particular group of ancestors; the Mormons collect genealogical information for religious purposes and have established a large Family History Library; and some families keep careful genealogical records and stage periodic reunions.

Since the 18th cent. genealogy has developed into a subsidiary academic discipline, serving sociology, history, medicine, and law. Libraries often have departments of genealogy, where volumes used in genealogical research are kept (e.g., passenger ship lists, immigration records, family genealogies, etc.); many historical societies also have such libraries. Many genealogical materials, such as those compiled by the Mormons, are now available for research on the World Wide Web.

See Jacobus, D. L. , *Genealogy as Pastime and Profession* (2d ed. 1968);

Bestermann, T. , *Family History* (1971);

Greenwood, V. D. , *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* (1974);

G. H. Doane; J. B. Bell, *Searching for Your Ancestors* (6th ed. 1992).

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