

## SHOP TALK

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# Researching Genealogy On The Cheap

**L**ike millions of Americans, I'm hooked on the NBC television series "Who Do You Think You Are?" The show, which follows celebrities as they trace their family trees, got me thinking about my own lineage.

I'm Italian on my dad's side; French Canadian on my mother's — and I know very little about either family beyond a generation or two back.

I decided to do some detective work. The first thing I discovered is that genealogy is not just a national

pastime, it's big business. Experts estimate that amateur ancestor hunters spend close to a billion dollars annually on books, software, online data bases, travel, archive and scrapbooking supplies and other materials. My thrifty genes stopped me from shelling out too much on my search, which meant a trip to Italy to explore my father's roots was out.

A visit to the French Canadian Genealogical Society in Tolland ([www.fcgsc.org](http://www.fcgsc.org)), and a \$5 fee to use the society's library resource materials to research my mother's

family fit the budget better. Located in the Old County Courthouse on the town green, the Society collects historical information about Quebec and Acadia settlers and their descendants. People like me visit to trace family histories back to the founders of New France and Acadia.

I arrived with my maternal grandparents' marriage certificate and plenty of questions. Genealogist Estelle Gothberg took a look and zeroed in on my grandmother's

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## Family

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maiden name, "Tremblay." The name, she noted, is one of the most common in Quebec.

"The Tremblay family has been very well documented in Canada," says Gothberg, who has been doing genealogical research for close to 40 years.

Gothberg started me with the Drouin Collection of French-Canadian and Quebec historical records, then directed me to the Tanguay Collection, a genealogical dictionary of French-Canadian families. Within a few hours, I'd traced my French-Canadian lineage directly to my eight-times great-grandfather, Pierre Tremblay, one of Quebec's earliest settlers, who left France in 1647. My eight-times great-grandmother, Ozanne Achon, was one of the "Filles du Roi" (King's Daughters), a group of young women who immigrated to New France under the sponsorship of Louis XIV.

Almost all of the Tremblays in North America are direct

descendants of Pierre, which means I have thousands of relatives. The information astonished me. Gothberg cautioned that few ancestral searches go quite as smoothly or quickly.

"Often you'll go back a few generations and hit a brick wall. Then you have to keep digging," says Gothberg. "But Connecticut has great resources, many of which are free, for people who are beginning genealogical research."

Like the Connecticut State Library, the Connecticut Historical Society library and the Godfrey Memorial Library of Genealogy, History and Biography in Middletown and Mormon Family History Centers. (There are 10 Family History Centers in Connecticut. Check [FamilySearch.com](http://FamilySearch.com).) At most of these, you'll pay fees for copying documents but not for using materials. A number of local libraries have Ancestry.com and other data base subscriptions, which can save genealogists-on-a-budget big bucks in annual fees.

Be warned. Genealogy can be an addicting hobby. Ashford resident Marybeth Dean tried a free

two-week trial at Ancestry.com to research Irish relatives and was so intrigued she signed up for a year's subscription.

"The search makes dusty papers and ancestors who are just names on a piece of paper come alive," says Dean. "It's thrilling."

If you're inspired to start a family search, Gothberg offers the following advice:

- ▶ Gather family papers and photos.
- ▶ Talk to older relatives and record as much information as you can.
- ▶ Download a family tree chart and fill it in, starting with yourself. Use pencil, because there will be changes and mistakes, and always note where you found your information.
- ▶ Be careful with what you find on the Internet and verify facts as many ways as you can. When you visit a research facility, bring the name of an ancestor you're researching and as much information as you have.

"It's like solving a puzzle, but you never find all the pieces," says Dean. "Once you get started on the journey though, you get hooked."