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REBEL ROOTS

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This is the first in a series of articles about how to locate your Southern ancestors. If you are reading our SCV newsletter you have probably already located at least one ancestor who was a Southern patriot and soldier. Now is the time to start discovering your other ancestors.

The first thing you should do is to talk to your oldest relatives and get any oral or written history they can provide. While it is true that memories fade with time, your older family members are often the best source of information you can get. The most important thing is to ask questions now and do not put it off. My grandparents have been deceased for many years and there is not a day that goes by that I do not regret not having spent more time with them asking about my family history. It is also advisable to record your sessions with relatives if they do not mind. This serves two purposes. One, it helps you to go back and catch things you might have missed when you were listening and trying to write down everything they said. It also serves another historical purpose. I had many opportunities to record my parents and grandparents and never did it. Think about how special it would be to be able to hear your parents and grandparents voices long after they are gone. It does not matter what they are saying. In the future your kids and grandkids will be able to hear voices from the past and have a real tangible connection to their past.

Your next stop is to look for old family bibles or other family documents that have relative information. Often when family members pass away the surviving family members keep the couch, the TV, the good china and other “valuables” and throw away any papers or photos they find when cleaning out a house. To a genealogist these old papers and photos are often worth their weight in gold. NEVER throw away anything from a relative’s house until you have gone through it. Old dirty and musty boxes in the attic and garage are often a treasure trove of family history. Keep original documents when you can and if you find something fragile and likely to be destroyed with repeated handling make a copy with a flatbed scanner and save it to your computer for future reference. In a future article we will talk about the proper way to archive old documents and photos.

Once you have collected some family history you have to get it organized in some manner. When I first started in the 70’s I kept all my notes in a three-ringed binder with one page for each ancestor. This a good starting point even now, but in the age of computers it is very easy to buy a genealogy program and

keep all your data on your desktop or laptop computer. If you have a laptop you can carry all your info with you when you go to courthouses, libraries, churches and cemeteries to “dig up old ancestors”. The program I use is “Family Tree Maker Version 16 Deluxe”, but you can use any program you are comfortable with. The main thing is to get started now and begin to discover your own personal Southern history. Hopefully this will inspire you to start your own research into your past.