

Tools for Clan and Family Genealogy

By Sean J. Logan, Genealogist, Clan Logan Society International.

I would like to share my learning journey as I went from an aspiring genealogist to my current role as the Genealogist for the Clan Logan Society International. I have always been interested in history and culture, but it wasn't until I retired that I decided to try my hand at genealogy. Never one to think small, I decided I wanted to write my entire family's history.

Having set my goal, I started by using the amazing work done by four of my family members. This became **tool #1, build off the work done by others**. After reviewing their trees, I realized that I needed to combine them into a single-family tree.

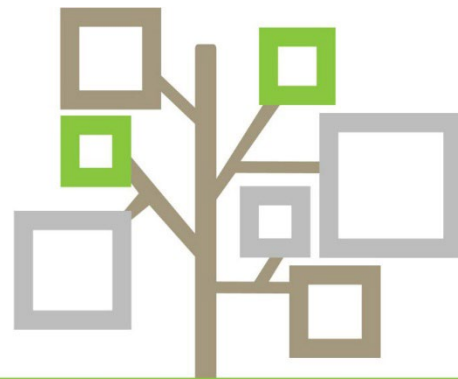
In support of this goal, I searched for what would be **tool #2, my primary family tree software**. Doing a bit of internet research, I realized that there is no one best "tree builder" out there. Some specialize in specific regions, some focus on specific sources of primary data, some promote collaboration, and then there are the hundreds (maybe thousands) of niche sites fulfilling a very specific goal. While I am not here to suggest one software offering over another, I do have some tips for those who may be new to this. First, know that trying before buying is a good way to start, as many offer their most basic functionality for free. Taking this approach allowed me to understand who was strong in the countries where I wanted to focus. I also was able to see what data was offered. Finally, I got a sense of their community and how I would fit into it. After a short time, I chose my tool, signed up for the features I needed and started populating my trees.

 **Top10.com** Reviews by ★ Trustpilot

1	 MyHeritage	Exceptional ★★★★★	 9.9
2	 ancestry	Excellent ★★★★★	9.3
3	 Find my past	Excellent ★★★★★	9.0
4	 Genes Reunited	Very Good ★★★★★	8.5
5	 LegacyTree Genealogists	Very Good ★★★★★	8.5

It was around this time that I learned the value and traps of **tool #3, primary and secondary data**. most family tree software provides access to a tremendous amount of data. My quickest lesson learned was **to treat all secondary data as a hint**. If they cite their sources then that is a bonus, but still double check to make sure their source is both primary data and backs up their conclusion. Primary data is incredibly valuable, but sometimes can lead the researcher astray. The main trap is assuming the data is for the right ancestor, as there are many people with the same name in the same town/village/city around the same time. To prevent mistakes, I always make sure I have multiple points of data proving that this is indeed the person I am researching. Sometimes it is simple, e.g., a census with the entire family in the house. Other times, it may be necessary to stitch together multiple pieces of primary data to tell the story. One example I found was a land deed sold by someone with the right name. To prove it was my ancestor, I needed to review his father's will where he left this individual that specific land. Frankly, this is a relatively simple example. Often more serious detective work is necessary.

Family tree tools offer just the tip of the iceberg of data and tools. When those run dry, I turn to **tool #4, internet archive data**. In the U.S., we are spoiled with how much has been digitized. A researcher can find great information without leaving the desk. This includes the U.S. archives, churches, and other direct sources. A key resource is www.familysearch.org which provides access for digitized records and guidance for how to get data that is not digitized.



FamilySearch.org

However not everything is digitized, so consider **tool #5, archive data not on the internet**. In this case one must either go to the source or pay someone to get the data.

No one can find everything and that is where **tool #6, communities** can be of great value. This tool comes in many flavors. There are sites like Wikitree that create a globally collaborative approach to building trees, citing and arguing about data. Within the tree toolbox, the research may have access to others' trees. It is best to make sure that conclusions are supported by the data. When it appears they are not, ask for more information. Sometimes there are family bibles, pictures from trips, and other personal effects/data. Then there is one's own family, be it direct family or clan societies. This is a small sampling and I encourage researchers to search for communities that can provide proper support. For example, I found one that was focused on specifically helping Logans work on genealogy pre-1800s.



Those who are passionate about this, you can increase their skills and **tool #7, education**, is where to turn. A starting point could be the many books on genealogy, DNA, writing family histories, and much more. Most are available for free via the library, and even as audio books. There are also genealogical societies that offer more formal classes.

Finally, there is **tool #8, DNA testing**. Once a tree is populated, it may make sense to consider taking one or all three of the main DNA tests available. Autosomal DNA (atDNA) is the most common and will help identify contacts who are related. Reviewing their trees can often help break through brick walls. Just remember that this is secondary data, so it needs to be treated as such. atDNA test results also typically provide some high-level information on heritage, e.g. you are x% Scottish. The next test looks at mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) which provides a view of one's heritage along the matrilineal line over tens and hundreds of thousands of years. The yDNA test is the one that is typically used by groups exploring a surname, as it is passed exclusively from father to son.

Below is a summary of tools that can aid researchers:

1. Build off the work completed by others
2. Primary family tree software
3. Primary and secondary data
4. Internet archive data
5. Archive data not on the internet
6. Communities
7. Education
8. DNA

Learn more here:

- **COSCA:** [Clan Campbell Society \(NA\) WikiTree Projects](#) (*members only*)
- **COSCA:** [CASSOC Symposium 2023: Heritage and Genealogy](#) (*members only*)
- **COSCA:** [2022 Clan Society Survey on Genealogists](#) (*members only*)
- [DNAWeekly: 8 Best DNA Test Kits in April 2024](#)
- [Top10.com: Best Family Tree Builders of 2024](#)



Ancestry

- Receive percentages of your ethnicity estimate and regions
- Trace your ancestors' journey throughout time
- Identify other relatives who have also taken Ancestry.com's DNA test
- Build a family tree that covers the map



MyHeritageDNA

- Reveals your genetic heritage across 2000+ regions
- Most popular DNA test in Europe
- Connects you with new relatives around the world
- 30-day free trial of family tree building and AI photo improvement features



23andMe

- Trace your DNA to analyze your lineage
- Get a by-region breakdown of your ancestors
- Get information on your maternal and paternal haplogroups
- Learn how much Neanderthal DNA you've inherited



Living DNA

- Ancestry tests cover up to 15 generations of maternal and paternal ancestry
- Connect with relatives up to 13 degrees removed
- Discover the migration history of your ancestors



Family Tree DNA

- Determine both your patriarchal and matriarchal lineage
- Receive a map of your European descendants
- Directly email any familial matches and connect



SelfDecode

- Testing available for more than 500 lab markers
- Personalized guidance on health improvement
- Curated health blog based on your DNA data



Nebula Genomics

- Access to regularly updated ancestry reports
- Tests both Y-DNA and mtDNA
- Information never shared with third-parties



LetsGetChecked

- Over 30 different package options
- Discuss your results with a certified nurse
- Free medication with some positive test results