

# Genealogical Proverbs and Quotations

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Years ago, when I first took up this fascinating obsession called genealogy, I came across the following proverb and found it quite appealing. Part of its appeal, I suspect, was that it seemed to connect to my new hobby.

*There are only two lasting bequests we can give our children - one is roots, the other, wings.* Anonymous

Since then, other genealogically-related proverbs and quotations have found their way into my files and my heart. I would like to share this collection with other genealogists and hope these wide and varied thoughts on our hobby will intrigue them as they have me.

No collection of quotes relating to genealogical research would be complete without an offering from this first author.

*In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage - to know who we are and where we came from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness.*

Alex Haley

*When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition can always be found. They forgot where they came from.*

Carl Sandburg

*The ascendant hand is what I feel most strongly; I am bound in and in with my forbears . . . We are all nobly born; fortunate those who know it; blessed those who remember.*

Robert Louis Stevenson

This next selection of quotations has a certain similarity; thus, they are grouped together.

*If a man cares not for his roots, how then can he care for his branches.*

Doyle M. Davis

*People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.* Edmund Burke

*People who grow up without a sense of how yesterday has affected today are unlikely to have a strong sense of how today affects tomorrow.*

Lynne V. Cheney

*The farther backward you look, the farther ahead you can see.*

Winston Churchill

Some proverbs or quotations could become the credo for the dedicated family genealogist. See if you agree.

*What is research but a blind date with knowledge?* Will Henry

*Good men must die, but death, cannot kill their names.* Proverb

*To live in hearts we leave behind, Is not to die.*

Thomas Campbell

*We shape our lives not by what we carry with us, but by what we leave behind.* Anonymous

*The only thing wrong with immortality is that it tends to go on forever.* Herb Caen

A good quote is the one that really makes you think. Of course, we all know the best genealogists are the deep thinkers (I think).

*Every man is his own ancestor, and every man his own heir. He devises his own future, and he inherits his own past.* H. F. Hedge

*Ancestral glory is, as it were, a lamp to posterity.* Sallust

*It is a desirable thing to be well-descended, but the glory belongs to our ancestors.* Plutarch

*No genealogy is complete without a reference to one's family tree. And we're not talking horticulture here.*

*If you want a place in the sun, you must leave the shade of the family tree.* Osage saying

*As leaves on the trees is the life of man.* Homer

*Never destroy any aspect of personality, for what you think is the wild branch may be the heart of the tree.*

Mrs. Henry George

Humor in our genealogical research is a rare but welcome change of pace. Plus, it keeps we genealogists from becoming just a tad too serious.

*The law of heredity is that all undesirable traits come from the other parent.* Anonymous

*Why pay money to have your family tree traced? Go into politics and your opponents will do it for you.*

Mark Twain

*Everyone has something ancestral, even if it is nothing more than a disease.*

Ed Howe

*If a man's character is to be abused, there's nobody like a relative to do the business.*

William Makepeace Thackeray

*Nothing is so soothing to our self-esteem as to find our bad traits in our forebears. It seems to absolve us.*

Van Wyck Brooks

*None but a mule denies his family.* Anonymous

Every genealogist has found at least one black sheep in the family during the course of his or her research. You haven't? Read on.

*He that has no fools, knaves, or beggars in his family, was begot by a flash of lightning.*

English Proverb

*We are all omnibuses in which our ancestors ride, and every now and then one of them sticks his head out and embarrasses us.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes

*If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.* George Bernard Shaw

*There is something about a closet that makes a skeleton terribly restless.*

John Barrymore

And so I close my presentation of genealogical-ana. I hope you have found some enjoyment, inspiration, and a chuckle or two. I will leave you with a favorite maxim, one which can be loosely applied to genealogy and all it can encompass.

*Always remember that you are absolutely unique . . . just like everyone else.* Anonymous