M A V E R I C K A I

BUILD YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY TREE WITH CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

AND FIND RELATIVES YOU DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED

You're going to build a real family tree in one chat, in about 30 minutes, with ChatGPT or Claude. It interviews you about everyone you remember, traces the history behind your last name, goes through real records to find relatives you never knew about, and lays the whole thing out as a visual tree you can print and keep.

The interview prompt that maps everyone your family remembers

Trace the origin and history of your last name

Send ChatGPT or Claude into real records to find new relatives

Build a visual tree plus a GEDCOM file you can keep

Brick-wall breakers and a first message to a relative you find

7 copyable prompts

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Start Here: One Chat, Four Prompts

THE PLAN

1. Paste the interview prompt and answer one question at a time.
2. Trace the history behind your last name.
3. Turn on the browser and send it into real records.
4. Build the visual tree and save a GEDCOM file.

Before you start

Your app: ChatGPT or Claude. The interview, the name history and the tree work on any plan. The record search works best with a browser: ChatGPT Work or Claude in Chrome.

Your account: A free FamilySearch account, so the browser can get into the records.

Your people: A parent or grandparent nearby, if you can.

Your first goal: A clean starting tree of everything your family already remembers.

Four prompts, in order, all in the same chat. The first two work from what you already know. The third sends ChatGPT or Claude out to search real records. The fourth turns everything into a tree.

TIP

Keep it all in one chat. The interview feeds the name history, and both feed the record search. Stay in the same conversation from start to finish.

Copy This First: Step 1, The Family Interview

Open ChatGPT or Claude, start a new chat and paste this. Don't try to organize your family yourself. AI is way better at asking the right questions than you are at volunteering the right answers.

In ChatGPT, choose **Work** with the **Chat / Work** switch at the top before you paste, so the same chat can open a browser in Step 3. **In Claude**, any new chat works.

PROMPT 1 | COPY & PASTE

```
I want to build my full family tree. Interview me one question at a time about my full name, where my family is from, and every relative I can actually remember on both sides, with names, approximate years, and birthplaces. Go one branch at a time so I don't get overwhelmed, keep track of what I've told you, and when we're done, lay it all out as a clean starting tree.
```

What happens next: it asks you one thing at a time and quietly builds the structure. Answer whatever you can. "Around 1950" or "before the war" is completely fine. When you're done, you get a clean tree of everything you know.

What to tell it, even if it doesn't ask

- **Full names, including maiden names.** Maiden names are the key to the mother's side.
- **Towns, not just countries.** "Naples" traces further than "Italy."
- **Approximate birth and death years.** Records are searchable by date range.
- **Immigration stories or years.** Ship manifests and naturalization records exist for these.
- **Old jobs, military service, religion.** These show up in census and church records.
- **Every spelling of a name.** "Kowalczyk" on one document can be "Kowalchik" on the next. It needs every version for the record search.

TIP

Do this with a parent or grandparent in the room if you can. The one-question-at-a-time format is perfect for jogging their memory, and they'll remember names and stories you never knew. This step alone is worth it just for that conversation.

Step 2: Trace Your Last Name

Stay in the same chat. Now that it has your surname and where your people came from, have it trace the line itself. This is the part that makes people lean in, because most have never heard the story behind their own name.

PROMPT 2 | COPY & PASTE

```
Based on my last name and where my family came from, tell me the origins of my family line.

Cover:
- The meaning and language roots of the surname
- The region or regions it is most common in
- How far back the name can typically be traced
- Any historical events that moved families with this name (migrations, wars, name changes)
- Whether the name was likely changed or shortened when my family immigrated

Be clear about what is well documented versus what is a general pattern for names like mine.
```

That last line matters. It tells the AI to separate real history from educated guessing, so you know what to trust.

HEADS UP

Treat this as a map, not a birth certificate. ChatGPT and Claude know a lot about the history of names, migrations and regions. They don't know your specific ancestors yet. This is the story of names like yours, and a great map of where to look next.

Push it further

- What did people with this name typically do for work in that region and era?
- What would this surname look like in the original language or alphabet, and what are the common English spellings it became after immigration?
- If I wanted to trace this name back another generation, what specific records should I look for and where are they kept?

Want to go deeper? **What Your Last Name Means** has six more name prompts, and **How Rare Is Your Name?** is a fun follow-up.

Step 3: Find New Relatives in Real Records

This is the step everyone wants. With a browser, ChatGPT or Claude goes through public records and genealogy sites and comes back with people and documents you didn't have. Turn the browser on first.

In ChatGPT

Stay in your Work chat. On chatgpt.com, Work opens its own cloud browser when it needs one (paid plans). In the desktop app, you can also type **@Browser** in your message to use the built-in browser. Free and Go get limited Work in the desktop app. When it reaches the FamilySearch sign-in page, sign in yourself. Never type a password into the chat.

In Claude

Claude in Chrome lets Claude work inside your own Chrome, where you're already signed into FamilySearch. It needs a paid plan (Pro, Max, Team or Enterprise) and Chrome on a computer.

- **Install the extension.** In the Chrome Web Store, find **Claude in Chrome**, click **Add to Chrome** and sign in with your Claude account.
- **Switch it on in Claude.** On the left, go to **Customize**, then **Connectors**. Find **Claude in Chrome**, click **Configure** and switch it on.
- **Turn it on in this chat.** Open the **+** menu next to the message box, go to **Connectors** and switch on Claude in Chrome. It's off in every new chat, and this is the step most people miss.
- **Sign into FamilySearch** in Chrome before you send the prompt.

Full walkthrough: my **Claude in Chrome setup guide**.

Then paste this

PROMPT 3 | COPY & PASTE

```
Using everything I've told you, use your browser to search free public records and
genealogy sites for people, documents, and family connections I don't already have. If
a site asks me to sign in, stop and let me sign in myself.

Search these kinds of sources:
- Free genealogy sites (FamilySearch, WikiTree)
- Obituaries and funeral home notices
- Historical census and immigration records that are publicly viewable
- Old newspaper archives
- Cemetery and grave databases (Find a Grave)

For every lead you find, give me:
- The name and how they might connect to my tree
- The source, with a link, collection name and record identifier where available so I
can verify it
- Your confidence: is this likely my family, or just a name match worth checking?

Don't invent people, records, or links. If you can't confirm something, mark it as a
lead to investigate, not a fact.
```

No browser? Change "use your browser to search" to "search the web for." It still finds obituaries and public records on the open web, it just can't get into sites that need a sign-in.

HEADS UP

Treat every result as a lead, not a confirmed relative, until you see the actual record. A shared last name is not proof. The most common genealogy mistake, with or without AI, is grabbing the wrong person because the name lined up.

The free sources worth knowing

- **FamilySearch.org.** Free records with a free account. Try its **Full-Text Search** for names inside old documents.
- **WikiTree.** Community-built shared family trees. Free.
- **Find a Grave.** Headstones, burial dates, family plots. Free.
- **National Archives.** A free catalog and digitized records. Some still need a copy request.
- **Obituaries.** Search the name plus "obituary." Free.

TIP

Obituaries are gold. They almost always list the person's relatives by name: spouse, children, siblings, sometimes grandchildren. One obituary can fill in a whole branch, so ask it to hunt for these specifically.

Step 4: Build the Visual Tree

Pull it all together into something you can actually look at, print and share with family.

PROMPT 4 | COPY & PASTE

```
Now build me a full visual family tree with everyone we have and how we're all
connected. Lay it out by generation, with my parents and grandparents as anchor points.
Show my confirmed relatives, plus a separate section for the unconfirmed leads. Make it
something I can view and screenshot. Then give me a GEDCOM file with source notes and
uncertain dates marked clearly, so I can import it into a genealogy app later.
```

In ChatGPT, the tree shows up right in the chat, with the file to download. **In Claude**, it builds an artifact, a visual tree you can open, click through and share with a link.

Three ways to keep it

- **A visual tree.** Good for a quick look and for the family group chat.
- **A GEDCOM file.** The universal family tree format, so you never lose your work. Import it into any genealogy app. On FamilySearch, use the website (not the app): **Search > Genealogies > Upload Your Individual Tree**. An upload is its own record and doesn't merge into the shared Family Tree, so compare people before you copy anything over, and keep private details of living people out of it.
- **A printable chart.** Ask for a clean version by generation. Perfect for framing, a family reunion, or a grandparent who wants it on paper.

> **TIP**
>
> Got old family photos to go with it? You can **restore them with AI** too.

Bonus Prompts

Pull these out any time, in the same chat.

Break through a brick wall

PROMPT 5 | COPY & PASTE

```
I'm stuck on [NAME], born around [YEAR] in [PLACE]. Walk me through exactly what
records might exist for this person, which archive or website holds each one, and the
precise search terms and spelling variations I should try.
```

Check its work

PROMPT 6 | COPY & PASTE

```
Did you actually find each of these people in a source, or did you fill any in? List
every name you gave me and mark each one CONFIRMED with a source link, or UNVERIFIED.
Remove anything you can't back up.
```

Reach out to a relative you found

PROMPT 7 | COPY & PASTE

```
Draft a short, warm message to a possible relative I found. I'm [NAME], and I think we
connect through [SHARED ANCESTOR / SURNAME]. Keep it friendly and low-pressure,
introduce myself, and ask one simple question to see if we match. No walls of text.
```

People get spooked by a stranger who knows too much, so send a short, human note, never the whole AI report.

What AI Can and Can't Do Here

ChatGPT and Claude aren't genealogy databases, and they don't have a secret file on your family. What they're great at is turning a pile of half-remembered names into a real starting point in minutes, then going and finding the threads.

Great at	Will get wrong
Organizing what you know into a tree	Inventing ancestors it can't confirm
Explaining surname and migration history	Exact dates for your relatives without a record
Searching free public records and sites you sign into	Records behind paywalls you haven't opened
Reading and summarizing an obituary you paste	Deciding a name match is really your family
Pointing you to the right archive	DNA, biology, or legal proof for citizenship or inheritance

The golden rule

Use AI to find leads. Use real records to confirm them. The census page, the obituary, the headstone: those are the truth. ChatGPT and Claude just help you find them faster.

A quick word on privacy

You're sharing real information about real people, some of them living. Don't paste Social Security numbers, full birthdates of living people, or anything you wouldn't want stored. Set your privacy settings how you want them before you start (in ChatGPT, that's **Settings > Data controls**). My **ChatGPT privacy lockdown** walks through it.

Common Mistakes and Quick Fixes

If this happens	Try this
It made up a relative or a record	Run the "Check its work" prompt. Anything without a source comes off the tree.
The record search came back empty	Give it more: a maiden name, a town instead of a country, an approximate year, an immigration date.
ChatGPT described the search instead of doing it	Chat has no browser. Use a Work chat. In the desktop app, type @Browser in your message.
Claude wrote an answer instead of opening Chrome	Open the + menu, go to Connectors and switch on Claude in Chrome. Still nothing? Click the extension icon in Chrome and check you're signed in.
It hit a paywall	It can't unlock paid data. Sign in to the site yourself in the browser, then tell it to keep going.
You're stuck on one ancestor	Run the brick-wall prompt. Genealogists hit these all the time.
The names are in another language	Ask what the name looked like in the original language and every English spelling it became.
The chat gets slow or forgetful	Ask for a summary of the tree and every lead so far, start a new chat and paste it in.
The GEDCOM file won't import	Ask for the GEDCOM version your genealogy app accepts.
Claude can't make the file	Check **Settings > Capabilities > Code execution and file creation** is on.

Quick Reference: The Four Steps

Step	What to paste or do
1. Interview me	Interview me one question at a time to build my family tree: my name, where my family is from, and every relative I remember, with years and places. Then lay it out as a clean tree.
2. Trace my name	Based on my last name and where my family came from, trace the origin of my family line and how far back it goes. Separate documented history from general patterns.
Turn on the browser	ChatGPT: run it all in a Work chat (@Browser in the desktop app). Claude: Claude in Chrome on in Connectors and in the chat's + menu. Sign into FamilySearch.
3. Find relatives	Use your browser to search public records, free genealogy sites and obituaries for relatives I don't have. Give a source link and a confidence level for each. Mark anything unconfirmed as a lead.
4. Build the tree	Build a full visual tree by generation, with a separate leads section, plus a GEDCOM file.

DO THIS TODAY

Sit down with a parent or grandparent tonight and paste the interview prompt. Trace your name in the same chat. Then turn on the browser, run the record search, and check the exciting finds against the real record before you tell the whole family.

Want More AI Tips Like This?

I post daily AI content, tool breakdowns, and prompts that actually help you get more done. Follow me for the latest.

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AI finds the threads. You pull them. That's how you find your people.