Article written and copyrighted by Dick Eastman Online; 10/16/2002 - Archive http://www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=6490

Ahnentafel Explained

Ahnentafel is a word commonly used in genealogy although it probably confuses most newcomers. Ahnentafel is a German word that literally translates as "ancestor table". It is a list of all known ancestors of an individual and includes the full name of each ancestor as well as dates and places of birth, marriage, and death whenever possible. It also has a strict numbering scheme.

Once the reader is accustomed to ahnentafels, it becomes very easy to read these lists, to move up and down from parent to child and back again, and to understand the relationships of the listed people. Ahnentafels are very good at presenting a lot of information in a compact format. However, the numbering system is the key to understanding ahnentafels.

To visualize the numbers, first consider this typical pedigree chart:

```
                                8. great-grandfather
                        4. paternal grandfather-I
                        I               9. great-grandmother
                2. Father--I
                I       I               10. great-grandfather
                I       5. paternal grandmother-I
                I                       11. great-grandmother
                I
1. Person-I
                I
                I                       12. great-grandfather
                I       6. maternal grandfather-I
                I       I               13. great-grandmother
                3. Mother--I
                        I               14. great-grandfather
                        7. maternal grandmother-I
                                        15. great-grandfather
```

Carefully observe the numbers in the above chart. You will notice that every person listed has a number and that there is a mathematical relationship between parents and children. The number of a father is always double that of his child's. The number of the mother is always double that of her child's plus one. The number of a child is always one-half that of a parent (ignoring any remainder).

In the above example, the father of person #6 is #12 (the father is double the child's number). The mother of #6 is #13 (the mother is double plus one of the child's). The child of #12 and #13 is #6 (the child is always one-half the parent's number, ignoring remainders).

Now, let's take the above chart and write it in ahnentafel format:

1. person
2. father
3. mother
4. paternal grandfather
5. paternal grandmother
6. maternal grandfather
7. maternal grandmother
8. great-grandfather
9. great-grandmother
10. great-grandfather
11. great-grandmother
12. great-grandfather

13. great-grandmother
14. great-grandfather
15. great-grandmother
Notice that the numbers are exactly the same as in the pedigree chart.The rules of father=2 times child, mother=2 times child+1, child=one-half of parent, etc., remain the same. This is an ahnentafel chart.

For a more detailed example of an ahnentafel, here's an excerpt from the ahnentafel of one well-known American:

1. George Walker Bush, b. New Haven, Conn., 6 July 1946, m. 5 Nov. 1977, Laura Lane Welch
2. George Herbert Walker Bush, b. Milton, Mass., 12 June 1924, m. Rye, N.Y., 6 Jan. 1945
3. Barbara Pierce
4. Prescott Sheldon Bush, b. Columbus, Ohio, 15 May 1895, m. Kennebunkport, Maine, 6 Aug. 1921, d. New York, N.Y., 8 Oct. 1972
5. Dorothy Walker, b. near Walker's Point, York Co., Me., 1 July 1901, d. Greenwich, Conn., 19 Nov. 1992
6. Marvin Pierce, b. Sharpsville, Pa., 17 June 1893, m. Aug. 1918, d. Rye, N.Y., 17 July 1969
7. Pauline Robinson, b. Ohio, April 1896, d. Rye, N.Y., 23 Sept. 1949
8. Samuel Prescott Bush, b. Brick Church, N.J., 4 Oct. 1863, m. Columbus, Ohio, 20 June 1894, d. Columbus, Ohio, 8 Feb. 1948
9. Flora Sheldon, b. Franklin Co., Ohio, 17 Mar. 1872, d. "Watch Hill", R.I., 4 Sept. 1920
10. George Herbert Walker, b. St. Louis, Mo., 11 June 1875, m. St. Louis, Mo., 17 Jan. 1899, d. New York, N.Y., 24 June 1953
11. Lucretia [Loulie] Wear, b. St. Louis, Mo., 17 Sept. 1874, d. Biddeford, Me., 28 Aug. 1961
12. Scott Pierce, b. Sparkville, Pa., 18 Jan. [or June?] 1866, m. 26 Nov. 1891
13. Mabel Marvin, b. Cincinnati, Ohio, 4 June 1869
14. James Edgar Robinson, b. near Marysville, Oh., 15 Aug. 1868, m. Marion Co., Ohio, 31 March 1895, d. 1931
15. Lula Dell Flickinger, b. Byhalia, Ohio, March 1875
The above examples show information about 15 individuals, but ahnentafels typically contain information about many more people than this. You can often find ahnentafels that list hundreds or even thousands of individuals, all ancestors of person #1 in the list. For instance, a much longer ahnentafel for President Bush may be found at: http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~addams/presidential/bush.html

Notice that the mathematical rules about relationships shown in the pedigree chart still apply in the ahnentafel chart. Also, the true ahnentafel lists the person's full name, along with dates and places of birth, marriage, and death, if known.

All modern genealogy programs can produce ahnentafel charts. Of course, you could also create an ahnentafel chart by hand or by using a word processor. Whatever method you choose, an ahnentafel is an easy method of presenting a lot of ancestral data in a compact format.

To discuss this story further on the message board for newsletter readers, go to www.RootsForum.com and click on "Message Board."

If you wish your chart to include siblings there are several options. You can give the person the father's number plus . and a number for example (you would still have to give father a number if he was unknown)

Father no 6
Eldest child 6.1
Second child 6.2

The problem of course is you may not know how many children so the numbering may end out of sequence.

Alternately you could give the children letters.

Father 6
Child. 6.a
Child 6.b

With the second method you could then change the letters to numbers when you know the total number in the family, without causing to much confusion.