Writing your Genealogy Book

What to do with your family history/genealogy material after you are gone? Well, one way is to write a book – an autobiography or the biography of one or more members of your family.

Autobiography

1. <u>Organization of your Files.</u> At this point you must have accumulated considerable material. Is it organized so that you can locate what is needed in the minimum of time? Each person needs to arrange their files so that it is convenient and logical for them. For me, I arranged my file by surname by generation and labeled each folder with the name of the person and their year of birth. I found many ancestors whose children and grandchildren had the same given name, so the date became mandatory to place the data in the correct folder. In that folder went all information relating to that ancestor. These folders were only for direct line ancestors. I did maintain a folder for miscellaneous information, e.g. not sure of relationship.

<u>Collecting your data.</u> Early on, I made the round of relatives, collecting information and enter it into my laptop computer, all of which added to the material I documented from my memory and personal data. When my family was young, I was always taking pictures. I located the slides and scanned them into my computer and label them all. I was further fortunate, in that my cousin in 2002 made a trip to Florida and dropped off several large boxes of material that he had received from his mother after she died. Most of it, she collected from her mother. There were her mother's schoolbooks, photo albums, loose pictures and other records that I spent the rest of the summer and

fall scanning into my computer. I obtained a copy of a letter from My Grand Uncle Jesse Foltz that he had written to his niece, Dorothy Foltz Paterson, about the families move from St. Parris, Champaaign County, Ohio to Swayzee, Grant County, Indeiana in 1884. My paternal grandmother, was always commenting about her early days and her relatives in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan. I was   careful to note these relationships. Of course, she documented them too.

Trials, Tribulations, Frustration and False starts. It's your life! Here you will have to determine how you want your life to be portrayed. In school I was taught to begin with an outline and then rough in the topic material. This didn't work for me. I tried to write my autobiography chronologically and I got all mixed up. I finally decided to break the book into segments of my life and each of the segments chronologically. This can be seen on page four (4) of the autobiography - this seemed to work. During the development of the initial edition, I provided a preliminary copy to my two daughters who noted areas that I had not covered or needed expansion.

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2. 0rganization of the Book. Is it going to be single column with text wrapped around pictures, maps and charts? Or are you going use double column with smaller pictures? Or are you going to use a combination? What event goes where- chronologically? Or are there other methods? My autobiography was arranged by segment of my life and within those, it was chronological. Further, what program are you going to use to create your autobiography? Bear in mind that as you precede, you will be revising, deleting, added or changing the location of your material. Microsoft Publisher initially seemed a good Idea, but because it uses text blocks, the revision and expansion of text became awkward and cumbersome. I settled on Microsoft Word and found that I could move data around, insert pictures where I wanted them, choose the margins, and column width for each page. Some people use Family Tree Maker due to the flexibility of the program. However all the narrative is in the notes and the book is built around an ahnentafel or generational structure.

3. Development of the Book. The key here is to write, write, write. Get your thoughts recorded, and get your point across. You will easily lose your train of thought if you worry about punctuation, grammar and other grammatical necessities. Later, you can edit for continuity, context, grammar, punctuation and spelling. The spell-check feature in on your software program can help, but it is not infallible. If the word is correct, it may be accepted in spell-check, but if it is out of context, or the incorrect word for intended usage, spell-check may not pick it up.

4. Pictures, Maps, Charts, Graphs. What size picture are you going to use? They can be expanded or contracted after you insert them on the page. Are you going to insert the pictures in the text next to the material, at the end of the chapter or end of the book? Don't forget to use Family Group Sheets, Pedigree Charts or Ancestor Charts. By Use of the any of the available software programs, this becomes easy. In Word, you would have to print the charts, maps, etc then scan them into the computer. Then they can be picked up and insert into Microsoft Word where ever you wish to place them.

5. Newpaper Clippings; Certificate of Birth, Marriage, Death; Obits; Census Records. These can be inserted wherever appropriate to amplify the text. Of course they will have to be scanned into the computer, and inserted into the text wherever needed. If you find the information online, it is easy to copy & paste.

6. Create a Personal Timeline. A timeline helps to put a lot of information into perspective chronologically. In Family Tree Maker, you can develop a generic timeline for everything happening in the world in the timeframe you choose or you can personalize it with your information or use a combination. In my case I created a table and typed in my personal information and added only significant world event such as beginning of WW II, beginning of depression in 1929, etc. This can be seen in my Autobiography as chapter XXI.
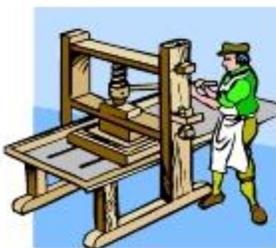
7. Publishing. Who will be receiving copies? Will it be bound or loose leaf? If loose leaf, will it be spiral bound or punched for a 3-ring binder? If bound, will it be soft cover or hard cover? How is it going to be bound- there are several methods available? Will there

be an illustration on the cover? Will you be publishing it yourself or having it done professionally? How is the published book going to be distributed? These questions have to be answered, as there is significant cost in each step, especially if there are several copies to be produced. In my case, I produced only five copies. My initial version was 166 pages and was printed on both sides of 20 pound paper. I used 30 pound paper for the covers without Illustration. It was bound with a compression fastener. Office Depot did the work at minimal expense and I mailed the four copies as media mail. The revision I am working on now is up to 259 pages. I recently added a new chapter with the resulting page addition.

Biography

1.   The same guidelines apply to a biography as for an autobiography. Here you will be using a lot of research beyond your memory and family contacts. I am fortunate, because my surname goes back 7 generations to 1786 in this country. Internet contacts with people that have already done some research on your family member could be helpful. You have to be careful, because you do not know if the information is valid. If name and date match, it is as pretty good indication that it is OK, but only that far. Research for original material in court houses, and state Bureau of vital statistics will be acceptable sources. Church records too.

2. Family relationships need to be maintained or you will wind up in a twisted mess. There are several ways to keep the generations and families in perspective. Some people use a decimal system to keep track of the family members and the several generations. Or other methods that are suitable to the author – whatever works. The easiest, of course, is to use a software program such as Family Tree Maker (FTM), Personal Ancestral File (PAF), Legacy or any of the several others available. With these programs, you can create Family Group Sheets, Pedigree charts, Ancestor and Descendant charts with ease. You can print blank forms and completed form can be printed after your data has been entered into the program.
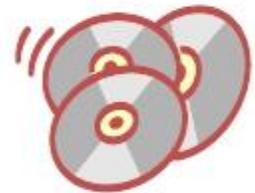
3.   Original Research at the Court house or the state Bureau of Vital Statistics for research of Birth, Marriage and Death records is time consuming and expensive. Search of Churches Records for Baptismal or Christening information has proven

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successful for some. Often, one can find a site on the internet that will provide these records at a nominal fee. Cemetery and Grave registration is found on several sites on the internet. USGenWeb.com has proven to be an excellent source.

4. Book Organization is another matter. Some start with their surname and goes backward to the oldest generation identifiable. The maternal line from each of generations can be followed in alphabetical order or at random. In any case, there should be a table of content up front that will identify the page on which that surname begins. At least, this is what I did, and even I have to refer to the Table of Contents which is on page 3 of my Family Biographies. Currently, I am adding and revising material and each time the page number keep changing. As in the autobiography, you can format the pages in single or multiple columns. Do you want to create a border or go without one – it's your choice. It depends on how you want to present the material.
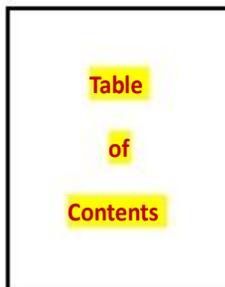
5. A Pedigree Chart is helpful to keep the relationship between families & generations visible while working on the biography. I included my 6-generation chart immediately following the Table of Contents. It is on page 4 of my family biographies. Others place their pedigree chart either before or following each surname used.

5. Ancestor Chart was used in my case to pictorially reflect the direct line ancestors for that surname. This was produced from my "PAF Companion" software. Similar charts can be produced by other genealogy programs. It too can be placed where most effective in the family history.

6. Table of Content is going to be necessary to determine where each family surname starts. Assuming, of course, that there is more than one family name in the book. In my case, I am working on 29 different family names. I chose to list their name (First and Last), the years they lived, their relationship to me and the page where their biography started.

Table

of

Contents

7. <u>Contents</u> of the biography is important because it adds meat on The bones of the skeleton of Family Group Sheets and Pedigree Charts. Some information you will have obtained from family members, family bibles and other records. Quite often, I have found biographical data by use of Google.   Not just current information, but often information back into the 1700's and earlier. You just have to be persistent and keep looking. Don't forget to keep in touch with other people researching the same family member. I had an occasion where my contact was researching the brother of my ancestor and she furnished pictures that I was able to add to my book. There are many internet sites that can be used to assist in your research – such as "Cyndi's List" and a myriad of others. – just keep looking

8. <u>Pictures, Graphs, Maps</u> are a nice addition to portray your ancestor. The custom of the clothing at the time, where they lived, how they lived or even their occupation make the life come to life. Pictures really help to dress up the biography.

9. <u>Newspaper clippings, Obits, Census Records, Immigration Records, Passenger Ship Lists, and Gravestone</u> can add meat to the bones and p round out your ancestors' life to make it more meaningful. These items, provide facts that can be added to your timeline. small town news-papers usually are quite literal in their reporting.

10. <u>Timelines</u> as with autobiographies are also useful here. It will often show the merger of one family into another through marriage, which may not be immediately apparent elsewhere. It also shows what local national events occurred during their lifetime.
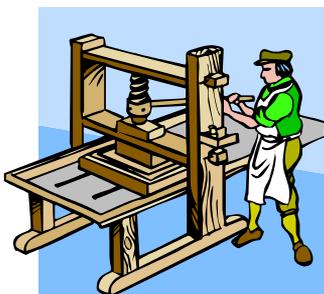
11. Publishing here is no different than with an autobiography. The same considerations apply. My biography is currently at 227 pages and I still have a lot of work to do.