Welcome to the Family Tree Maker Users Group

Family History Book Ideas

November 2015

Tonight’s Agenda:

1. In honor of our veterans today, several military websites for research
2. Why write your family history?
3. Getting started
4. What writing style to use?
5. What items should be included in a typical family history?
7. Publishing costs compared!
8. Several members will show their family histories and why they did.
9. Dora Hildebrand, our special speaker gives a summary of her experiences.
10. Great source books.

1. Why write your family history?

As former President George Bush once said at his annual Congressional address in 1990, “Let me start with my generation, with the grandparents out there. You are our living link to the past. Tell your grandchildren the story of the struggles waged at home and abroad. And tell them your own story as well, because every American has a story to tell!”

Our society includes ‘Stories of a Lifetime’ articles about ancestor stories provided by different members in each newsletter. We felt it would encourage our members to write their ancestor’s family history! It has paid off as the stories are memorable, exciting, and sometimes entertaining!

Different Life Experiences

From these and many other personal experiences, most people have a desire to relate their heritage to many family members. For me, my son never knew what his mother did, but he’ll know more about his family heritage!

Even my grandchildren were shocked about several stories about their dad that I had reprinted for them. They just couldn’t believe he was as a kid too! Plus seeing a photo of their dad, when he was a 12 year old child. He was holding up a four foot Lemon shark, pulled from a local lake. The shark was the same size as him. One of my personal goals was completed in 2007, when I published my family history book for my relatives and grandchildren, so they’ll know who their ancestors are and their stories!
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

From a previous quotation by an African historian, “When a knowledgeable elder dies, a whole library disappears!” This is important to obtain your parent’s family history now. Don’t wait as your loved ones may perish anytime and you’ll be regretful later!

As author Jean Messinger stated in her past lectures, “Cheers and Tears,” No one lives forever, and memories are fragile. You are the best one to collect this data, so do it soon! You can see her past presentation on our website video webpage.

I did a short biography on my grandfather in 1959 in ninth grade, just months before he died. In 1999, I saw the same biography in the family bible that my mother proudly displayed in her living room. I noticed another biography on my grandfather that my second cousin did 10 years later, when he was in the seventh grade. The two biographies were quite different in perspective as he interviewed his dad and our grandmother, whereas my biography came from interviewing my grandfather.

My grandfather never mentioned his father, who disappeared for almost 25 years, whereas my grandmother mentioned it to my cousin. You can understand why after reading my family history book.

That’s what makes a family history book worth writing and reading. I’ve already had many praises for completing the family history book, The Coffin-Pierson Legacy! with the help of 30 cousins. It’s a compilation of over 125 biographies in 15 chapters with over 600 family photos. Each chapter includes short stories of each ancestor done in an easy narrative reading style. Make it simple and don’t be afraid to use quotes from relatives to make your family history book even more personable and memorable.

2. Getting Started

If you’re new to writing, I recommend using one of several popular writing methods called timeline or mind mapping or what I call the “Circle of Life!” Planning is key to writing your family history report or book. Consider just writing about one or several family lines for your first report. Then you can expand and eventually include all your family history into a book.

Start with short stories (vignettes) on closest ancestors and expand from there with more stories on distant ancestors. Some stories may be only one half page for distant relatives, while your closest relatives may contain four or more pages of information. Rely on your cousins to help you with researching your distant ancestors hunting for those great stories.

From our members Gwen & Boyd Johnson’s book, Write Now! Tell Your Family Story, which explains these and several other easy to use writing methods. The timeline method starts with life’s early events and moves through the retirement years. It’s the easiest to use and requires basic facts of your ancestor. Then add short stories for each timeline event for each ancestor. Several life event categories are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary to high school years</td>
<td>Hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and children</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or university years</td>
<td>Vacations/Reunions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if applicable)</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and achievements</td>
<td>Family memories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military duty or career</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

The Circle of Life method as shown above in figure one basically starts with a central circle much like a hub in a wagon wheel, then add several spokes of rich family history stories with a new circle at the end of each spoke, then add your ancestor’s life events in each circle as shown below in the drawing. Each circle can be expanded with new spokes and more circles, thus the Circle of Life. Users create a narrative summary of each life event for each circle.

Regardless of what method used, each ancestor’s family story can be written using one to several pages in length. In essence, each ancestor will have their own short story. But it’s important to get started!

3. What writing style to use?

You should adapt a writing style that you’re comfortable with, but certainly make the family history one that is interesting and memorable as stated above. The best way to develop your own style is to review other family history books at your local library and determine what style appeals to you!

With the latest genealogy, desktop publishing, or word processor software programs available, it’s now very easy to write your own book. These types of software include great editing and spelling features besides adding pictures to help you write an easy to format and write family history.

You don’t have to use any genealogy program to write your book. You can also use Microsoft’s Word or Publisher, Adobe’s Acrobat or PageMaker, or Corel’s Word Perfect or Publisher programs shown above in figure two to write your family history book. It’s recommended to assemble the required information into book form, then tell the software so they can auto number the pages, add a table of contents, and index. It’s not very complex, but requires some learning if you haven’t used these programs previously! No need to purchase more expensive book publishing software such as QuarkXpress unless you going to write professional books!
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

There are over 100 fonts available to publish with, but I would select only Times New Roman or Century Schoolbook, which gives a great look and very easy to read. Professional publishers recommend Century Schoolbook or similar Sans Serif font, such as Times Roman as it’s the standard font used in most professional books. Don’t be too exotic on fonts and never use calligraphy or other decorative fonts. These non-book fonts can be hard on reader’s eyes after several pages and your book may never get read!

Font size recommendations range from size 10 to 12 for easy reading. Most publishers seem to use font size 10, which is considered the norm for 20/20 eyesight. And it depends on page size. If you use 8 ½ x 11 sized paper, then 11 to 13 font size is satisfactory, whereas smaller size paper can use 9 to 11 size fonts.

For chapter headings, you can bold these areas or use a different font such as Sans Serif with larger font sizes. Italicize or underline words or groups of words for clarity and stand out for expression!

Refer to a professional or college grammar style guide or genealogist Patricia Hatcher’s or other similar writing reference books for more helpful hints.

Be sure to have a dictionary, style manual, and grammar guide handy to make your sentences more expressive and clear! However, most of the above word processor software programs include these features, with the exception of the genealogy programs. My college professors always told me to use a style that is simple to read, no complicated words, and easy to understand! Your readers will give you kudos on an easy to read book! Why make it complicated! Remember the KISS principle!

Of course, use spell checkers throughout your book! FTM includes a spell checker as do most popular genealogy programs, word processor and publisher programs.

4. What items should be considered in a typical family history?

Let’s start with the basics: Cover page, Publishing page, Contents, Introduction, Foreword or Preface, Chapters including biographies and picture albums, descendant trees, family group sheets, and an Index.

I’ll offer other suggestions on additional pages to make your book really interesting. More items can be added as you see fit. You don’t need to follow this format, but these are the basics that should be considered.

Family Tree Maker or other similar genealogy software allows you to customize your book, however you want it to look and format as shown in my last month’s presentation.

Cover Page

This page should be an attention grabber, in words, pictures or both! The title should be listed for obvious reasons with your or the author’s name. Adding a subtitle helps the reader understand what the book is really about. Add some spiffy line that gets noticed or add pictures of past relatives or both. One or more pictures are really worth a thousand words! Size might be a constraint, so keep it legible and simple as shown in the example below!

If a single photo is used on the cover, no caption is necessary. If several family photos are use on the cover, then a simple caption for each photo is helpful with the family name or location and a date.
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

Most genealogy publishing programs allow a customized cover page as shown below in figure three. However, most word processor or publisher programs can create a cover page also. If you use soft cover perfect or hard cover binding, then a publishing program is necessary to create the book title on the spine, if required. For spiral, comb, or similar book binding methods, any software program will suffice to create the cover page.

![Figure 3. Book or Report Cover](image)

Inside Publisher Page

If you plan on sending your book to public and private libraries, genealogical societies or offer your book for sale to family members or other organizations, then consider having it registered at the Library of Congress! The International Standard Book Number is administered by the R. R. Bowker Company, 877-310-7333. The ISBN is a numerical identifier intended to assist the international community in identifying and ordering certain publications. Even if you don’t, you should consider having this information on a separate page so readers can contact you for future copies or for genealogy information.

Foreword or Preface and Introduction Pages

Most Foreword or Preface or Introduction pages include a brief history by a friend or you on why you’re inspired to write a family history book. You should consider adding a brief history of your surname origination, if possible. I included this part to let our ancestors know where they originated from, limited to two pages. My last paragraph is the inspiration that hopefully our grandchildren will continue to preserve the family history for their children and grandchildren to enjoy and preserve. Although not necessary, relatives should know how much work was involved in producing the report or book.

Acknowledgement or Dedication Page

Most of the book probably couldn’t be written without the help of many relatives, friends, or libraries. So please acknowledge them! The family history book will mean more to your relatives with your acknowledgement than without! After all, you want to share the book with all relatives, right?

Standard format should include their names and possibly addresses (towns only are acceptable) and what part(s) they provided in the book.
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

Table of Contents Page

This is automatic with FTM and similar genealogy programs. However, book and word processors need some formatting to set up. Regardless, this is a must to include in your book for a quick reference.

Include chapters for each family:

Family Tree Maker and many word processors include chapters into their publishing section. This is best to consider because you can now add chapter titles and include the family members into each chapter.

Each chapter should include a short story on each family member with a family group sheet or family pedigree chart to make the correlation easily understood on the family line. More on the biographical sketches are noted below.

Family Group Sheets should be included as shown below in figure four, however there are two possible formats to consider. One is the standard family group sheet that can include personal portrait pictures and all the biographical data that you want to include. Another format is the Kinship report, but has limited information.

Family Tree Charts, such as descendant, ancestor, hourglass, fan, or all-in-one family trees, should be used by several generations to show your ancestry in a colorful and interesting chart. Pictures and color can be added to the chart names, if needed for more appeal. Other information besides birth and death dates can be included too! You may want to consider using an exploded family tree chart, then folding the chart as a separate page in the back of the book. Or you can simply insert the chart in an envelope on the inside back cover.
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

Outline descendant charts shown above in figure five should be considered, as this is a simple way of displaying all your ancestors by numbered generations. Depending on how many generations you want to display, this is a short report of your ancestors, compared to displaying a family tree chart. This is standard in Family Tree Maker and most other genealogy programs.

Biographical Content

This will be the major content of your family history book. Any family history book should include biographies of your past and maybe current relatives. Their normal biographical data of their school years, their job experiences, home experiences, volunteering, awards received, and their feelings about their family should be included in a short story! Each ancestor story should include three interesting or entertaining stories about their life relating to some life learning experience or humorous events. Obtaining a personable quote from your relatives makes the story more realistic and personable!

There are normally two formats for biographies used. The older books used the Ahnentafel Report (AR), which combines all the family group sheet information and the biographical information into a very long summary of all relatives. This is not preferred and usually very boring to read, because it’s not personable.

Family history books since the 1970s era use a narrative format, which can include pictures and graphics that the Ahnentafel Report doesn’t use. It’s recommended you use the narrative report, unless you’re not a good writer, then the AR might be a better biography report to use.

Family Tree Maker 2011/2012 started using a new family history story wizard called Smart Stories™ to create a family history, however users need to add all the fun and important facts about the ancestor. The more facts entered for each ancestor, Smart Stories™ provides a simple and quick family history of your ancestor. Users can add to this method with more information as needed.

Definitely include as many portraits or family pictures in your biographies as possible without over dominating the biography. Some humorous pictures that relatives can relate to in the biography would be ideal. Usually two to four pictures per page are enough, depending on the size of the pages. Any more would be distracting from the biography.
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

Many professional authors including Patricia Hatcher can relate to this, but it’s extremely important that you interview all the friends and relatives to obtain these enriching life stories, otherwise your book may not tell the real story about your relatives!

Index Page

This is important to include for reference reasons. It lists all the pages that each individual is listed. This is a standard feature of FTM and all word processing and publishing programs. One problem with FTM on their Index page is it doesn’t follow the biographies, but follows the family charts instead. An alternative is to create your own index page for each biography, but this method takes longer since this is a manual process. The Table of Contents can do the same thing.

Map or ancestor Migration Page

A suggestion to make your relative understand where your ancestors came from is to use maps in your family book. Family Tree Maker creates migration maps on each ancestor to show where your ancestors migrated from as shown below in figure six. Or you can create a map as shown below on multiple family lines. The FTM migration map page also shows all the relatives under each town, born or died, as required. Users can also consider copying maps from the Internet or scan maps from an atlas, but you must give the atlas map company any copied or scanned map credit to prevent copyright issues.

Figure 6. Migration Map

Bibliography Page

This is standard in FTM, but takes lots of space that is mostly repeated giving all the listed sources for documenting purposes for each individual. FTM does this automatically also. It’s recommended to include this section, which shows your sources. You can include the Bibliography page at the end of the book or have a separate page after each chapter. Regardless, get in the habit of listing your sources.

Family History Pictures

A brief one or two page picture section for each family line could be included since the biographies couldn’t accommodate all pictures. This will definitely bring back many memories for all family members.
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

to enjoy! Use only jpeg pictures with an 80% compressed format, otherwise your file size will be extremely large. Really, you can’t tell the difference between 80 and 100%, which is little compression! Some color pictures with less than 50% compression start looking grainy. For scanned pictures, use a minimum of 300dpi for color or black & white photos. Anything less will look grainy.

Family Agreements

If you’re considering using current living relative’s biographies like I did, you should consider the legal aspects regarding privacy issues and personal emotions and feelings. I had each current relative sign an agreement that they approved their biographies. There are several cautions or caveats here: Only published books for all living relatives should go to living relatives ONLY! If you don’t publish any living relatives, then not to worry! Otherwise, no book will be sent to a library until 2030 for privacy reasons.

Be careful here on what you expose and make sure all living relatives have read and approved their family histories, including their ancestors.

Copyright Issues

This is a new area not discussed before, but you should be aware of the implications of copying other people’s ideas or text. You can safely copy limited paragraphs or sentences without worry of legal action per copyright attorneys. When you use a professional photo, an idea or lots of text from a published book without permission, then legal issues will likely occur. An idea would be any patented products or concept without giving the inventor or author reasonable acknowledgement. Most attorneys agree you can use limited text “for fair use” as that text may come from many sources. There is a 2009 copyright reference book, by popular national genealogist Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, “Carmack’s Guide to Copyright & Contracts” that provides lots of information on copyright issues.

5. My personal experiences in creating a family history book.

First, it was thoroughly fun traveling to meet old and new relatives to get their personal histories!

Second, I never knew how much I really didn’t know about relatives and publishing!

Third, I knew I had to make this book interesting for all relatives to enjoy, so plan on obtaining lots of interesting and entertaining stories!

Fourth, edit, edit, and more editing is required for longer reports or books. If you need to, hire an outside editor or family member for a final edit as they can locate grammar and spelling mistakes you may not find!

Fifth, create a RFQ spec and obtain quotes from multiple publishers or printers to make a reliable comparison.

And last, allow enough time to publish your book as other participants (relatives) will unintentionally delay the process!
Writing and Publishing Your Family History

6. Publishing costs compared!

There are three methods for publishing your family history: do-it-yourself, use a local printer, or using a commercial publisher. The local printer will publish smaller quantities (1-100) of books with soft or hard bound covers. The commercial publisher probably won’t touch any book less than 100 copies. The lease expensive method to publish is do-it-yourself! With this method, you have total control of the project and can make any last minute changes. With using 200 sheets (400 pages) of heavy weight 65 pound paper, heavy 110 pound stock cover with laminate cover using coil binding for 25 copies would cost about $20 to $25 each depending on the paper type.

The next expensive method is using a local printer, but has some limitations and lesser control. One limitation is once you tell the printer to print, no last minute changes can be made. Slightly less control using the printer, but you should have your book ready when you send the printer your PDF digital file on a CD or DVD. Using the same materials as self printing, the local printer will use Perfect binding (glued backing) with a laminated color cover and B/W photos on natural color paper, the cost for 25 copies can range from $30 to $50 depending on the paper quality.

The more expensive method is using a commercial publisher, but shop around. I didn’t obtain any prices, but I see in the genealogy magazines, commercial book companies are competing for your business. Ancestry.com is now getting into the publishing business, but be aware! Local printers have taken some revenue away, so shop around and obtain multiple quotes. Ask friends or others about their credentials.

7. Recommended source books

“Producing a Quality Family History” 1996 by Patricia Law Hatcher, Cost: $20.00

“Carmack’s Guide to Copyright & Contracts” 2009 by Sharon Carmack, Cost: $20.00


“Professional Genealogy: A manual for researchers, writers, editors, lecturers, and librarians” 2001 by Elizabeth Shown Mills and various authors, Cost: $60.00

Have fun writing your family history report or book!

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