



Some ideas for writing family histories: what is all our research for if we don't gather it and pass it on?

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Silicon Valley Computer genealogy Group, Saturday November 10

What is your family history for?

Children, descendants and cousins know about their family history.
Preserve photos, stories and documents.
A history lets the community know about its' families.
Archive history file at public genealogy sites, history museums, ancestry?, Family search?
Writing focuses your mind on people's lives rather than on collecting documents.
You will make connections between events while writing.
Accumulating history can lead to telling a human story.

Make a document.

A readable document communicates better than a box or binder of photos and documents.
Include lots of photos and illustrations in the document.
Save as a word processor file, and both a pdf file and printed document.
Add a date to distinguish different versions.
Include your name and other contributors as the historians.

Software

Use a word processor (ie. Microsoft Word, pages, etc) that includes photos, text, pdfs, etc.
A simple photo editor for cropping and enhancing photos. Also with ability to reduce file size.
A family tree program for making family charts.

Formatting ideas.

Every illustration should have a caption. No "photo album" with unidentified people.
Use the caption to identify the source of the photo, or endnotes if you get fancy.
Put each branch of the family in a separate document.
Documents should be 30-60 pages: larger ones are difficult because photos take room.
Start each document with a prominent ancestor or family.

Use page numbers.
Use sections with headings.
Make a table of contents of the headings.
Count on continually revising each history with newly discovered facts, photos and ideas.
Get free photos and illustrations from the net and Wikipedia pages.

Cover examples

Family heads, first immigrant, important person, significant person.
Mini family tree with the members being discussed.
An ancestor and his place of work.
Photo of an entire family.

Examples of pages to use in a family history

Use photos of major ancestors or family founders.

Short sketches and photos of family members.

City directory and census listings to show residences and jobs.

Photos of children.

Pictures of living descendants.

Use photos of entire families, parents and their children if possible.

Wedding photos of multiple generations.

Use historical photos of workplaces of your ancestor, otherwise use historical or modern photos.

Ancestors who were in a business

Photos of storefront, street views, interior views.

Offices, stores or commercial buildings used by your ancestor.

Business cards, letterheads, price lists, invoices, advertisements, items they made, etc.

City maps, city directory listings, Sanborn fire maps (c.1893), employee photos.

Ancestors who were in the military

Uniforms they wore.

Ships they served on, bases or forts at which they served.

Certificates of service.

Ancestors who were professionals

Degree certificates, books they wrote, schools or universities attended.

More examples of pages to use in a family history: people

Sequence of city directory listings and census entries to trace a person's life.

Descendants and cousins.

Written family histories made by ancestors.

Birth, marriage and death certificates.

Obituaries.

Pictures of monuments and gravestones.

Family box charts to diagram complex family relationships.

More examples of pages to use in a family history: places

House your ancestor lived in.

Church where ancestor was baptized.

Maps of towns where ancestors lived.

Views or drawings of the city where ancestors lived.

More examples of pages to use in a family history: events

The ship your immigrant ancestor arrived in. Pictures of named ships can commonly be found on the internet.

Photos of historical events that directly affected your ancestor.

Important events like accidental death.

More examples of pages to use in a family history: things

Items your ancestor made or used. (Jewelry, writing boxes, name plates, furniture, etc.)

Books or bibles owned by your ancestor.

Questions you may be able to help answer after writing the history:

Why did a family move from one country or city to another?

Identify individuals in group photos. You may later identify mystery faces.

Get clues from objects, clothing, and photo type to date a photo and identify people.