

Putting Flesh on the Bones handout

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What stories can we tell about our ancestors?

When we do more than gather names and dates, we find a connection to those who came before us. We can learn about where they lived, what occupations they developed, what influences caused them to immigrate or migrate, or who their neighbors were. With experience, we learn the records available during a specific time and place that can round out our ancestors' lives. We show pride in our ancestors by acknowledging their hardships and losses and their "never give up" attitude.

To Forget One's Ancestors Is To Be A Brook Without A Source, A Tree Without A Root - Chinese Proverb

When we start with a new line or a new ancestor, sometimes we don't know what we already have or what additional information we need. It helps to organize all the pieces in whatever form works for us. I like to create spreadsheets to help put events in people's lives in chronological order.

Is your family more Ozzie and Harriet or Ozzie Ozborn? We can start by interviewing our family and their neighbors and friends. We can collect data (to be described below) and letters, diaries, and photos. Distant cousins may have the family Bible or photos you have never seen.

We need to learn about the surnames and given names of each of our ancestors, such as: know the naming patterns for each ethnic or religious group; nicknames; spelling variations; Anglicized names; name changes (and it didn't happen at Ellis Island); misunderstood names; deleted prefixes and suffixes; silent letters; transposed letters; different vowels; or, transcription errors. Remember to say the name out loud to help you figure out what its original form may be. (For more details, read Kimberly Powell of About.com, in her article, "Top 10 Tips for Finding Alternate Surname Spellings & Variations.")

"Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family." ~Anthony Brandt

Study the time and place to gain insight into his life. You want to prove the link between your ancestors and the time and place they lived. For example, your family may not have been impacted by the 1918 flu epidemic, but mine was. When my father was born in Oct, his four older sisters and his father lived with neighbors for 6 weeks to give my father a chance to survive. Obviously, he did. Writer's Digest books that might help you include:

- **The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Colonial America from 1607-1783**, by Dale Taylor.
- **The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in the 1800s**, by Marc McCutcheon.
- **Everyday Life Among the American Indians**, by Candy Vyvey Moulton.
- **The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in the Wild West from 1840 to 1900**, by Candy Vyvey Moulton.

- **Everyday Life During the Civil War**, by Michael J. Varhola.
- **The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life from Prohibition through World War II**, by Marc McCutcheon.

Other books I find useful include: **The Timelines of History**, Bernard Grun, based upon Werner Stein's *Kulturfahrplan* and **Bringing Your Family History to Life Through Social History**, by Katherine Scott Sturdevant.

On the web, consider: **Timelines of history** <http://timelines.ws/>
List of Timelines http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_timelines
History Timelines <http://www.history-timelines.org.uk/>
Historical Timelines <http://www.historicaltimeline.com/>

"We all grow up with the weight of history on us. Our ancestors dwell in the attics of our brains as they do in the spiraling chains of knowledge hidden in every cell of our bodies." ~Shirley Abbott

Place our ancestors in history require that we make sure the event is pertinent to the person. Using the census places our ancestors at a specific time in a specific place.

The following lists of some of these records:

- A. **Church records** may include: birth; christening, baptism; confirmation; communion; marriage; admissions and removals; financial records; Sunday School lists; church censuses; newsletters; registry of the poor; and, burials
- B. **Land, homestead, or home purchases**: Did one relative buy from another? Did one person buy multiple pieces of property? Are other documents buried in land records?
- C. **Local histories** written at the time of or after your ancestor lived in the area
- D. **Legal papers and court records** (legal decrees, testimony, new laws, adoption, and much more)
- E. **Immigration and emigration** where did they depart from? What ship did they travel on? Were they part of the crew or a stowaway? Did they leave records in the country they left that told where they planned to immigrate?
- F. **Migration**: create a map to visualize their journey. Remember that in early years, transportation was primarily by waterways.
- G. **City directories and business archives**
- H. **Military records**: local militia; federal service; reserves
- I. **Newspapers** provide obituaries, news articles, advertisements, and photos

Take trips to visit churches, cemeteries, libraries, court houses, and places common to your family. If you cannot physically travel to these locations, see if information shows up through internet searches. (Some sites are included below.) Also, join local historical and genealogical societies where your family lived.

Check for online family trees.

How Old Would You Be If You Didn't Know How Old You Were? - Sachel Paige

When it comes to the census, age is relative. How many of you have found an ancestor who only ages 5-7 years every decade?

- Now pick up the census page, highlight your name, then in another color highlight what may be collateral kin.
- Look at the next ten year census and are the names the same and still near your names? do the same as above
- Do this again with the next census. If lucky you can use a state census also. (not all states did them.

What kind of records should you collect? If you have been searching for any length of time, you know that ALL kinds of records will help you understand your ancestors. I used church records in this slide to show the many varied types of records you might find in one source. (*Be sure to read through each record type completely.*)

Why neighbors are important: They may be relatives with different surnames. They may have come from the same place as your family. Do they worship in the same church? Do they share the same love of ethnic foods? What was the terrain between these families (flat, hilly, steep, rocky, little or no trees/ many trees, and what was the water supply?)

Look for local histories. Even if your family isn't mentioned, you will learn about the area in which they chose to live.

Don't forget the women. You may have quilts, samplers, cookbooks, diaries and other items created by women to reflect who they were.

The following Genealogist's Evening Prayer has an unknown author, but certainly represents the common thread of thought that we have all had at one time or another.

Genealogist Evening Prayer

Every evening, as I'm laying here in bed,
This tiny little prayer, Keeps running through my head,

God bless my mom and dad, And bless my little pup,
And look out for my brother, When things aren't looking up.

And God, there's one more thing, I wish that you could do,
Hope you don't mind me asking, But please bless my computer too?

Now I know that's not normal, To bless a mother board,
But just listen a second, While I explain to you 'My Lord'.

You see, that little metal box, Holds more to me than odds and ends,
Inside those small compartments, Rest a hundred of my 'Best Friends'.

Some it's true I've never seen, And most I've never met,
We've never exchanged hugs, Or shared a meal as yet...

I know for sure they like me, By the kindness that they give,
And this little scrap of metal, Is how I travel to where they live.

By faith is how I know them, much the same as You,
I share in what life brings them, from that our friendship grew.

Please! Take an extra minute, from your duties up above,
To bless this scrap of metal, That's filled with so much love!

With love and caring—and realism—we tell the story of our ancestors. We write each fact of their existence and, by remembering them, we recognize they are us and we are them.

A few online resources to remember:

One of the best general indexes: (Cyndislist) www.cyndislist.com

Genealogy resources: (RootsWeb) www.rootsweb.ancestry.com

(USGenWeb) www.usgenweb.com

(WorldGenWeb) <http://www.worldgenweb.org/>

Maps:

(Old maps) www.oldmapsonline.org

(Historic Old Maps) <http://www.historicmapworks.com/>

(David Rumsey) <http://www.davidrumsey.com/>

(Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection)

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/map_sites/hist_sites.html

Libraries:

(Allen County Public Library) www.genealogycenter.org

(Center for Jewish History) www.cjh.org

(Midwest Genealogy Center) www.mymcpl.org/genealogy

(Family Search) www.familysearch.org

(Family Search books) <http://books.familysearch.org>

(Library and Archives Canada) www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/genealogy/index-e.html

(World Digital Library) www.wdl.org/en

(Texas State Library and Archives) www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/genfirst.html

(Internet Archive/Wayback Machine) www.archive.org

(Newberry Library) www.newberry.org

(New York Public Library) www.nypl.org

Government: (American Memory) <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index/html>

(Chronicling America) <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

(The National Archives) www.archives.gov

(Library of Congress) www.loc.gov/index.html

(Bureau of Land Management) <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/>

(British Free BMD) www.freebmd.org.uk

(National Archives UK) www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

(Genealogy Canada) www.genealogycanada.com
(Scottish records explained) www.nbancestry.co.uk/flesh.htm

Commercial sites: (Ancestors at Rest) www.ancestorsatrest.com
(My Heritage) www.myheritage.com
(Google Book Project) <http://books.google.com>
(Find a Grave) www.findagrave.com
(Ancestry.com) www.ancestry.com
(The Overland Trail) www.over-land.com
(History Pin) www.historypin.com
(Newspaper Abstracts) www.newspaperabstracts.com
(Fold3) www.fold3.org
(Click Americana) <http://clickamericana.com>
(Retronaut) www.retronaut.co
(Genealogy Bank) www.genealogybank.com
(Heritage Quest) <http://www.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/index>
(Archives.com) <http://www.archives.com/>
(Footnote.com) <http://www.footnote.com/>
(World Vital Records) <http://www.worldvitalrecords.com/>
(American Ancestors) <http://www.americanancestors.org/home.html>
(Ellis Island) <http://www.ellisland.org/>

Specific country records (most are paid sites):

England: <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> and <http://www.origins.net/>

(British Newspaper Archive) www.Britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

Scotland: www.nbancestry.co.uk/flesh.htm and <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>

Canada: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/022/index-e.html> and
<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/101-best-websites-2011-canadian-cousins>

Denmark: http://ddd.dda.dk/ddd_en.htm

Norway: <http://arkivverket.no/Digitalarkivet>

The Federation of East European Family History Societies: <http://feefhs.org/>

Netherlands (Dutch): <http://www.genlias.nl/en/page0.jsp>

Polish: <http://www.polishroots.org/>

You can add personal information by reading blogs such as:

<http://foodfamilyephemera.blogspot.com> or

Dick Eastman's Newsletter <http://blog.eogn.com/>