

## SOMEONE SHOULD WRITE A BOOK

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There are two main styles of family history books – a genealogical book and a family memoir. A genealogical book has only descendant lists, family group sheets, and documentation while a family memoir has only stories and memories about the ancestors. You and I know stories about our parents and grandparents that even our children don't know and I encourage you to start writing down those memories even if you do not plan to create a book. Many family history books are a combination of styles with both documentation and memories. Even a photo album might be prepared with both some documentation and some memories along with the pictures.

I prefer to say that I have compiled a book because my primary purpose for the three books I have done was to gather the basic documentation plus other information that has been found so far into one place. I decided that the known information needed to be written down so other family members would have a starting point if they become interested in genealogy. My books are a combination of the two styles but lean heavily toward the genealogical style. The books I have compiled are not meant to be a formal genealogical report and I know they do not meet the genealogical proof standard. That was not my purpose.

There are as many ways to write a book as there are books to be written – each book is unique. I did the first book before Family Tree Maker had its book publishing option and I don't have publishing software so I created my own format and I have continued to do so. I primarily used Microsoft Word with some forms created in Microsoft Excel, some photos edited with Adobe Photoshop Elements, and some graphics created with a Print Master program. My computer skills are pretty basic so I used the old-fashioned cut-and-paste method to assemble some of the pages and then scanned them because Word can have layout issues in keeping inserted images where you put them. Many of the things I'm going to tell you today would apply whether you were going to create your own format, use a publishing program, or use a book publishing option of genealogy software – you have to get the documents together in order to begin.

Branigan Library does have several books about writing a family history:

- *How To Write Your Personal or Family History* by Katie Funk Wiebe
- *For All Time: A Complete Guide to Writing Your Family History* by Charley Kempthorne
- *Publish Your Family History: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing the Stories of Your Ancestors* by Dina C. Carson.
- *You Can Write Your Family History* by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

The first three books primarily focus on writing a memoir-style book with interview tips and suggested questionnaires. The book by Dina Carson does give some information about formatting, suggested fonts, layout, spacing, etc. that will give a book a more professional appearance. The last book discusses how to make a narrative more interesting rather than just paragraphs giving the basic facts.

There are several things to decide first when planning to compile a book:

- Who is the audience? Will it be strictly for family members or might it be of interest to others, for example local genealogical or historical societies or libraries?
- Is it to be a genealogical book with only names, dates, and documentation listed, or a family memoir with only biographical stories and anecdotes? Or will it be a combination of styles?
- Which lines of the family will be covered and how many generations?
- Is it to be in a pedigree format that starts with an individual and works back to their ancestors? Or is it to be in a descendant format that starts with an ancestor and works forward to the descendants? Whichever format is used, keep it manageable
- Is historical background to be included?

I have always included an introduction that tells the reader why I wrote the book, explains what it covers, acknowledges sources and individuals who have contributed information, and suggests areas for future research.

The order of information might vary with different books. It is important to be consistent with the order if you have sections on different generations.

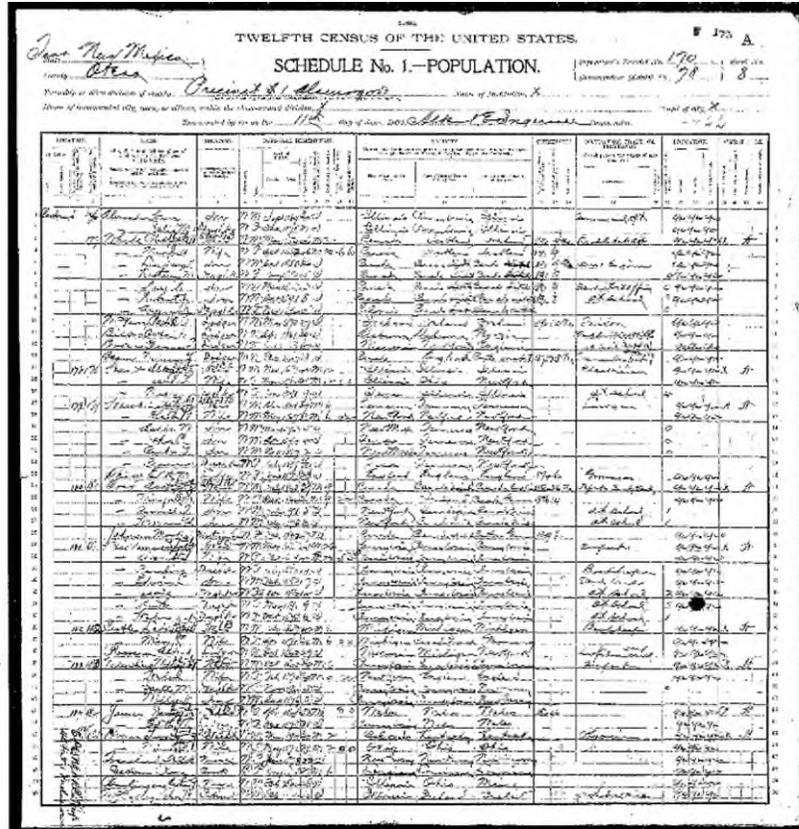
There are many different items that can document a person's life and I am only using a few to illustrate how they might be included in a book. I write a narrative that explains the documentation. This tells in more-or-less chronological order the story of the family – when and where each individual was born, where they lived, who they married, etc. The Smart Stories option in Family Tree Maker creates a story using the basic facts entered, but it is rather stilted and based on just one individual but you can edit it. As with all genealogical research, be careful not to make assumptions about an ancestor's motivation for doing something unless you have documentation, such as a letter or a diary giving their reasons.

I created my own timeline form for the family using Microsoft Excel with a column for the date, the event, and a brief source for the information. Family Tree Maker does have a timeline tab that could be used but again it is only based on one individual whereas the ones I created are based on the couple and their children. The timeline in Family Tree Maker can also be set to include major historical events if you like.

Even though my books are not primarily photo albums, if I have them, I like to include pictures of the ancestors at the front of their section and perhaps a few others throughout the book, such as pictures of the children when young or homes where the family lived. Also, if I have them, I like to include pictures of the children as adults. Obviously, it is important to give the names and to include dates of the photos if known.

We often start our research with census reports and vital records. In Figure 1 on the next page, I drew a small arrow in the left margin near the bottom to highlight the name as sometimes the forms can be difficult to read. It is not really an issue with census images because none of us have original copies of those, but if you do have an original copy of something, such as a newspaper article or a marriage certificate, do not make any marks on that original. Make a copy of the original and then draw the arrow or underline the words on the copy. While we are

looking at this page, let me say a little about orientation. Many of the pages of the book are printed in portrait orientation, but there are plenty of pages that are landscape orientation, such as this census report and the accompanying transcription. Be consistent in the way the landscape pages are turned to be bound – either left or right – so the reader only has to turn the book one way when reading.



**Figure 1 - US Federal Census for 1900**

I placed a small label in the upper corner of the page briefly citing the source for the document.

In the introduction I said that most of the documents were found online at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) or [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) with some of those Family Search images only accessed through the local Family History Center. I also noted that the originals of items listed as from the personal papers of my father are now in the possession of my sister.

Because the census images can be hard to read, I included a transcription. You might use the blank forms available at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) for example and fill in the information by hand as seen in Figure 2 below. I prefer to use a program [censustools.com](http://censustools.com) with which I can type the

1900 Census																								
State:		New Mexico Territory																						
County:		Otero																						
Township:		Precinct #1 Alamogordo																						
ED:		78																						
												Enumeration Date:				June 1, 1900 (Census taken June 11, 1900)				Sheet:		8		
Street Address	House number	Family number	Name	Relationship	Personal Description						Nativity			Citizenship	Occupation	Education			Home ownership					
					Color or race	Sex	Date of birth	Age at last birthday	Marital status	Number of years married	Mother of how many children	Number of children living	Place of birth of this person			Place of birth of the father	Place of birth of the mother	Year of immigration	Number of years in the U.S.	Naturalization	Months not employed	Attended school (in months)	Can read	Can write
	183	183	Valentine, William	Head	W	M	Oct 1865	34	M	6			Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania		Carpenter			Yes	Yes	Yes	R	H
			Helen	Wife	W	F	Feb 1870	30	M	6	2	2	New Jersey	England	England			0		Yes	Yes	Yes		
			Isabelle M.	Daughter	W	F	Nov 1894	5	S				Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	New Jersey									
			Willie H.	Son	W	M	Aug 1896	3	S				Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	New Jersey									

**Figure 2 - Selected information from Figure 1 transcribed onto a blank 1900 US Federal Census form**

information into a fillable template and then print the form. When I did the first book the program could be downloaded for free, then later a donation was requested, and now it costs \$11.95. That program has templates for all the United States Federal census reports, some of the special census reports (such as agricultural, slave, and mortality schedules), some state census reports, plus spreadsheets for Canada, England, Ireland, and Scotland. At the time I was working on this book I did not realize that the English census report forms were available through the program so I developed a similar form using an Excel spreadsheet. When the 1940 census became available, I was able to download it for free and I assume it will be the same with the 1950 census report. There may be other software programs available that will do the same thing.

Vital records can sometimes be difficult to find. I have sometimes found birth and death records listed in an index but the actual digital image is not available at the present time. In that case I have included a copy of the search results. Figure 3 shows the search results for the death records of Joseph Marsh.

<b>Joseph Marsh</b> England and Wales Death Registration Index 1837-2007		From FindMyPast through familysearch.org	
		<b>Derbyshire Registrars Death Index Transcription</b>	
Name:	Joseph Marsh	<b>First name(s)</b>	JOSEPH
Event Type:	Death	<b>Last name</b>	MARSH
Registration Quarter:	Oct-Nov-Dec	<b>Birth year</b>	1799
Registration Year:	1862	<b>Death year</b>	1862
Registration District:	Derby	<b>Age</b>	63
County:	Derbyshire	<b>Place</b>	Derby St.Aikmund
Event Place:	Derby, Derbyshire, England	<b>County</b>	Derbyshire
Volume:	7B	<b>Country</b>	England
Page:	220	<b>Register entry</b>	SAD/20/028
Line Number:	27	<b>Register office</b>	South Derbyshire (Derby)
		<b>Record set</b>	Derbyshire Registrars Death Index
		<b>Category</b>	Birth, Marriage & Death (Parish Registers)
		<b>Subcategory</b>	Deaths & burials
		<b>Collections from</b>	England, United Kingdom
			Derbyshire Family History Society
			Transcriptions © Derbyshire Family History Society
<p>No image available</p>			
<p>Record Collection:          England and Wales Death Registration Index 1837-2007</p>			
<p><b>Document Information:</b></p>			
<p><b>Citing this Record</b></p>			
<p>"England and Wales Death Registration Index 1837-2007," database, <i>FamilySearch</i> (<a href="https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2N2H-9YD">https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2N2H-9YD</a> : 31 December 2014), Joseph Marsh, 1862; from "England &amp; Wales Deaths, 1837-2006," database, <i>findmypast</i> (<a href="http://www.findmypast.com">http://www.findmypast.com</a> : 2012); citing Death, Derby, Derbyshire, England, General Register Office, Southport, England.</p>			

**Figure 3 - Search results for death records of Joseph Marsh**

In September, 2019, at the Genealogy Fair, I took Larry Taylor's class on researching British ancestors and learned that I might be able to order the death record for my great great grandfather from Her Majesty's General Register Office. I ordered it as a PDF file by e-mail for £7 (\$8.62 plus a \$.25 international transaction fee – a hardcopy would cost more). English death records do not list the parents' names. Using this date of death and the date the 1861 census was taken I can narrow down a more approximate range for his date of birth. Figure 4 below shows the actual death record for Joseph Marsh who died on October 24, 1862.

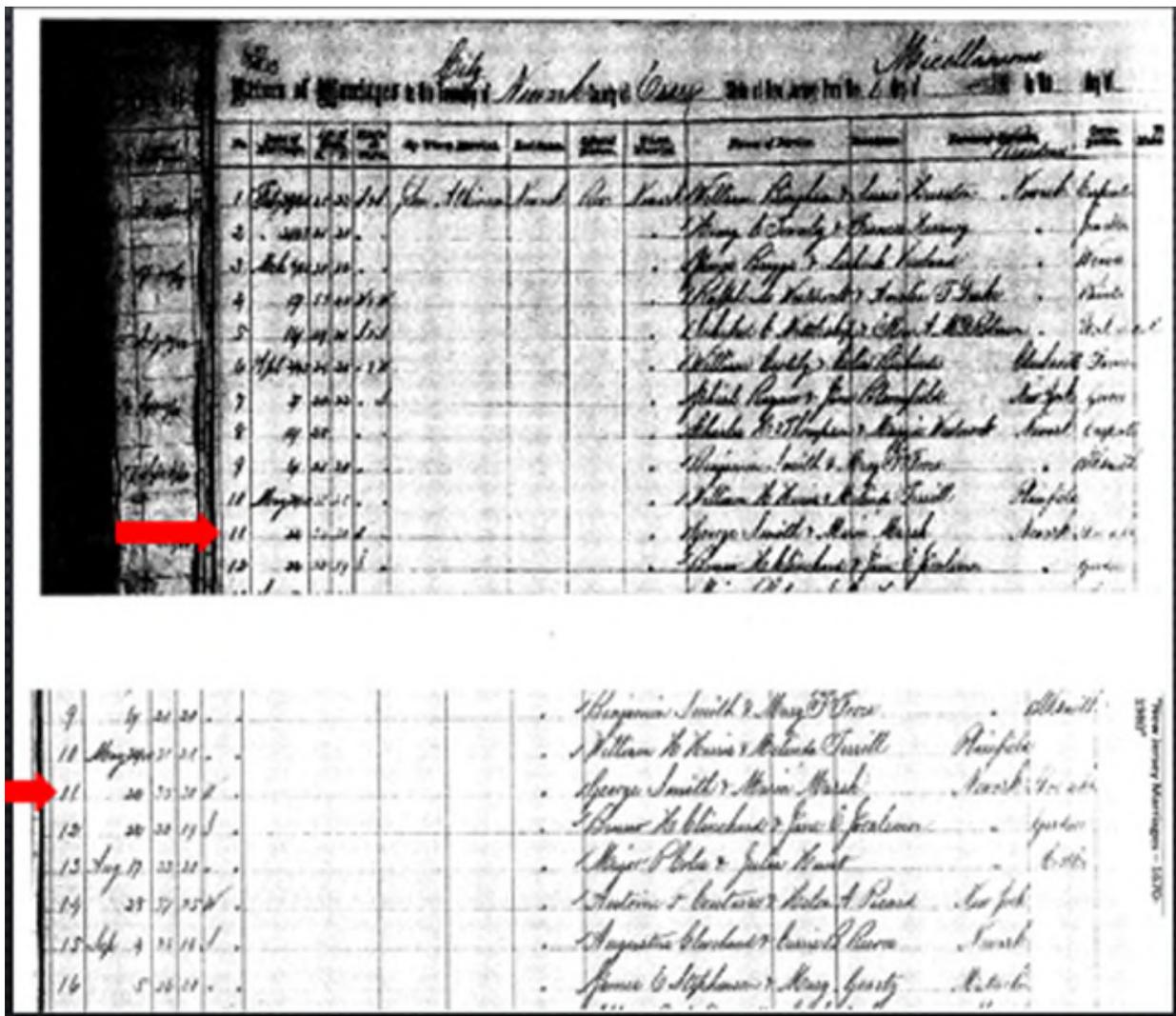
Superintendent Registrar's District <i>Derby</i>									
Registrar's District <i>Saint Albans</i>									
18 <i>62</i> DEATHS in the District of <i>Saint Albans Derby</i> in the County of <i>Derby</i>									
No.	When Died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Rank or Profession	Cause of Death	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant	When Registered	Signature of Registrar
<i>137</i>	<i>20th Street October 1862</i>	<i>Joseph Marsh</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>63 Years</i>	<i>Filter</i>	<i>natural Caused Certified</i>	<i>Maria Marsh present at death 20th Street Derby</i>	<i>twenty fourth October 1862</i>	<i>John Oliver Registrar</i>

**Figure 4 - Actual death record for Joseph March**

As you know, genealogy is never finished, and now I have a revision to make for the book. If I was going to print more copies of the book, I would change the dates for my great great grandfather on the charts and in the narrative. However, at the moment I don't plan to print any more books, so I printed copies of the death record and wrote a short paragraph to be inserted into the printed books and sent them to the people who got the books and also added that information to the online version.

Older civil and church records are often hand written and can be difficult to read. I enhanced several pages using Photoshop Elements in order to darken the writing. In the image seen in Figure 5 on the next page, the header at the top shows the location of the record but the list of names is a little difficult to read. I zoomed in and took another screen shot and placed that at the bottom of the page so the names can be read more easily.

Newspapers can sometimes be a good source of information about an individual to help you write their story. Chronicling America on the Library of Congress website has many newspapers and many of them have been indexed and are searchable by name. I found many articles about my family which helped me learn about them as persons. As I found an article, I used the snipping tool, which is an accessory in Windows, to "cut" out the article and then pasted it in folders I created in My Pictures. I had to decide which ones to actually use in the book to show the variety of activities in which the family participated. Many of the images on Chronicling America are not very clear and again I had to enhance those using Photoshop Elements. I underlined the names in the articles to highlight them. Because of the formatting issues with Word this is where my cut-and-paste skills came in handy as I printed the chosen articles, then cut them out, pasted them on paper, added labels, and scanned the page in order to get the articles placed where I wanted them.



**Figure 5 - George Smith and Maria Marsh Marriage Record**

Many city directories are now online and I was able to find many listings in them for my family. I copied all the pages into my file and included all the city directory listings in the timeline at the front of the section. However, I only used selected images in the book, primarily to show the family’s moves around the city or changes in occupation or family situation.

I like to track down family properties. Soon after we started genealogy my sister made connections with a cousin in New Jersey who had found some deeds for my great great grandfather in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The deed books for Luzerne County can be accessed online at Family Search, but those deed books are not indexed so I had to search the images for them using the deed book and page numbers from our cousin.

Old deeds are often written in “boilerplate” style, a standardized form with text that can be copied into legal documents with little change from one deed to another – like a fill-in-the-blank

printed form. The first section is boilerplate with the details of the transaction inserted into the standard text and then followed by the legal description and concluding with more boilerplate text. Old deeds that were hand written can be very hard to read so I included a copy of the actual deed plus a partial transcription. It is important to transcribe all the pertinent details of the contract such as the names of the sellers and the buyers, the price, the legal description of the property, the date the contract was signed, the witnesses, etc.

I have not found a satisfactory way to print a page directly from [Find-a-Grave](https://www.findagrave.com) without all the unnecessary information and advertisements that you see on the website, so I adapted the page with the pertinent information. As you can see in Figure 6 below, I have listed the website with the memorial identification number, the name of the woman who created the page, and the name of the photographer. For a couple I put both names on the same page.

**From Find-a-Grave**  
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/148638600/abner-jackson>



Photo added by Gail James

**Abner Jackson**  
BIRTH: unknown [calculated as August 1780]  
DEATH: 14 Mar 1858 West Auburn,  
Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania  
BURIAL: West Auburn Cemetery, Susquehanna  
County, Pennsylvania  
MEMORIAL ID: 148638600



Photo added by Gail James

**INSCRIPTION**  
Abner Jackson died Mar. 14, 1858  
Aged 77 Yr's & 7 Mo's.

Thou art gone from us dear father  
Thy voice no more we hear  
Thou hast left our kindred circle  
A brighter home to cheer

Created by: Carol Brotzman  
Added: July 4, 2015

**Figure 6 - Find A Grave information for Abner Jackson**

Once I had prepared a draft copy of all the documents I wanted to include in the book, I needed to proofread carefully to catch spelling and typographical errors, as well as check sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, consistency in formatting, etc. Especially important was to double check dates. I asked my sister to also proofread the book to check for errors and see if everything made sense to her.

Because these books have a limited audience, the vast majority of family history books will be self-published rather than published by a commercial publisher. If you use a book publishing option of genealogy software like Family Tree Maker there will be instructions about publishing the book. The book *You Can Write Your Family History* by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack has a good chapter on publishing and marketing a family history book. There are several options for self-publishing – by an offset printer, by a print-on-demand printer, or by a copy shop. Offset printing is the traditional form of printing with ink applied to plates of type and then pressed onto the paper whereas print-on-demand is printed digitally. Generally, print-on-demand is less expensive for a family history book.

I have, for the most part, had my books printed and bound at the local copy shop, which is probably more expensive. I have a printed master copy for each book that the copy shop used to print the appropriate number of copies of the first two books as needed.

The most recent book I did a little differently. As an experiment I started printing two copies of one section on our home printer. As I worked on it, printing only on one side of the paper I realized that if I continued in that way, the book would be very thick and hard to handle. I had been so focused on each section and I hadn't considered the whole book. So, I went back and printed on the back side of each page which meant I ended up with four final copies. I really would not recommend printing books at home and I probably should have stopped when I decided I needed to print on both sides. From this experiment I did learn that the books would need to be printed on both sides of the page.

As I was working on the book, in addition to the printed draft version I saved each page into a Word file, inserting charts and scanned documents where they fit. I was then able to put that completed file on a flash drive and take the flash drive to the copy shop for them to use to print more copies.

My uncle's granddaughters have expressed a little interest in family genealogy but I didn't want to print any more books. Using the Word file, I created a Google drive account and sent the link to them by e-mail. That way, they can access the book and download it to their computers and print it themselves if they like. They can also send the link to others in their immediate family or I can send it to others who might be interested. There are several other websites that could be used beside Google.

I have not done the books as a money-making venture, only to pass along family information. I have only asked for reimbursement of the cost of printing, binding, and postage; however, several people have been very generous with their reimbursements. I have no way of determining the cost of the four copies of the book that I printed on our computer. I gave those copies to my sister, my cousin, and our son as gifts and the other is my personal copy.

Now that you have been researching your family history for a while and made lots of interesting and wonderful discoveries you might like to share them with others in your family. Should you decide to write a family history book, of course it will be different from the ones I have compiled, with a different purpose and focus, a different audience, a different style and format, and of course different content. I hope this afternoon I have given you some ideas on how to write a family history, items to include, and tips on preparation of the work in case you find that you are the “someone” who will write your family history.

## **Helpful Tools**

### **Web sites**

<b>Ancestry</b>	<a href="https://ancestry.com">https://ancestry.com</a>
<b>Family Search</b>	<a href="https://familysearch.org">https://familysearch.org</a>
<b>Census Tools</b>	<a href="https://censustools.com">https://censustools.com</a>
<b>Chronicling America</b>	<a href="https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov">https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov</a>
<b>Find A Grave</b>	<a href="https://findagrave.com">https://findagrave.com</a>
<b>Google Drive</b>	<a href="https://google.com/drive">https://google.com/drive</a>

### **Programs included with Windows 10**

#### **Snip & Sketch**

### **Programs which must be purchased**

<b>Family Tree Maker®</b>	<a href="https://mackiev.com">https://mackiev.com</a>
<b>Microsoft® Word®</b>	<a href="https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/word">https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/word</a>
<b>Microsoft® Excel®</b>	<a href="https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/excel">https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/excel</a>
<b>Adobe® Photoshop Elements®</b>	<a href="https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-elements.html">https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-elements.html</a>