

# Writing a Family History

You have all this family history information. You should share it not only with today's generation, but also with those to come. And while scrapbooking is one creative way to tell a heritage story, you might also consider a written history. You don't have to be a professional writer or an English major either. This month's article will present ideas on how to write your family history story.

First, there is no "formula" for writing a family history. There is no right or wrong way. *There's only your way.* So get the idea out of your head that you can't write it because you don't know how. Second, although researching your family can never end, don't feel like you have to have every scrap of information for ten generations before you start. Think smaller and focus on just a key family line going back a few generations. Lastly, make sure all the information you now have is in your computer genealogy software if you use one, or in your charts and files if you rely on a manual system. The idea is to have easy access to your information before you start to write.

Think of telling your family history like you might any event from today; it's a mixture of facts, stories, and visuals. If you were to tell a friend about your vacation, you would include facts, like how long the drive was or the weather; stories, such as your child's excitement in seeing the ocean for the first time; and visuals like the photos you took. Do the same with your family history. Include:

- **Facts:** birth/marriage/death dates & locations, family group sheets, pedigree charts, and sources of information are all possibilities. These are the "pieces of the puzzle".
- **Stories:** These can be actual stories you've collected about people, such as those your grandpa told about his war time experiences. Or it can be prose that you write using the information you've gathered. An example might be: "Great Grandpa William must have felt a close bond to his younger brother Tom as they together joined the 180<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry on what was most likely a hot summer day of July 27, 1862. Brothers in arms, no doubt." Deductions you have made from your facts can be included, but footnote this somehow so readers do not think it's a fact (see related link below). Your prose can also be enhanced by including both factual and social history information, and how it may have impacted the lives of the people.
- **Visuals:** Although not absolutely necessary, using photos of people can more fully communicate your history. Think of any biography you've read. Don't you always keep flipping to the pictures as you read so you can better "visualize" the story? Visuals don't have to be pictures of people, either. They can be photos of places, like the old homestead; photos of things like a favorite car or an ancestor's tombstone; or copies of documents like grandma's marriage certificate or a relevant newspaper article. Even a picture of grandpa's military medals would be interesting. All of these suggestions can be scanned and inserted into a word processing file.

How you mix the three categories is up to you. As a base case, it can be all facts: family group sheets, pedigree charts, and descendant trees. This can easily be done with any genealogy software program. But if you want to create a special heritage write-up, go beyond the minimum - add stories and visuals. Today's word processing and genealogy software provide many creative ways to do this. Here is a suggestion to get you thinking

# Writing a Family History

and planning. Let's assume you are starting with a great great grandfather and he had six children. You could organize it like this:

- Create a chapter for the patriarch family, i.e., your great great grandpa's family.
- Create a chapter for each of the patriarch's six children, tracing each sibling's descendant lineage as far as you want.
- Each chapter is structured into three basic sections: prose about the family unit and their life, followed by facts (family group sheets and descendant trees), and ending with the visuals grouped together and identified.
- Include a chapter on sources of information and acknowledgments of who helped.

However you write your heritage, be sure to include a chapter on your experiences in researching the family. What emotions did you feel? Were there any discoveries that were startling or unexpected? Did you meet any special people? You get the idea. And perhaps most importantly, include a short bio of yourself as the author (see related link below). People generations from now will want to know who the wonderful person was who made the effort to research and write the family story.

Good luck and have fun!

If you enjoyed this article, please forward it to a friend. Thanks.

Your Family Legacy

"Discover the past, capture the present, preserve for the future."

<http://www.webYFL.com/>