How the Three Eras of Genealogy Impact Your Research Today

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As researchers in the digital era of genealogy
we ignore previous generations of family tree tracers
at our peril.

Four Eras:
- ❖ **Pen & Pencil**
- ❖ **Typewriter**
- ❖ **Computer**
- ❖ **Digital**

Three Aspects of Each Era:
- ❖ **How they searched**
- ❖ **How they recorded**
- ❖ **How it was preserved**

PART I: The Pen & Pencil Era

In the old days (up through the 1980s) you typically researched for twenty years or more, took two years to type your findings in a family history book format, then spent an additional six weeks indexing your opus on three by five cards. If you wanted longevity for your work, you spent thousands of dollars to do an offset printing of five hundred copies; then sold perhaps a hundred of them to family members at a significant loss. No one made money writing family history books in this era. Because family histories were labor and cost intensive fewer were written back then. But there are other types of records (like family bibles) that were commonly kept by family members in the " Pen & Pencil Era" of genealogy.

A. How They Searched

Relatives & Researchers created:

- ❖ Hand written letters, postcards, diaries, etc.
- ❖ Telegraph messages
- ❖ Family Bibles

Took trips to visit:

- ❖ Relatives
- ❖ Churches
- ❖ Cemeteries
- ❖ Courthouses
- ❖ Archives, Libraries, Historical & Antiquarian Societies

B. How They Recorded

Example: Family Bibles

C. How Findings Were Preserved

 (See "Success with Manuscript Sources" handout attached at end of this document.)

Example: Family Bibles

Go to the FamilySearch Wiki (*www.familysearch.org/wiki/*) then search on BIBLE RECORDS
or BIBLE RECORDS + a location
Example: Missouri Bible Records
Example: U. S. Bible Records

NOTE: Anything in blue in a FamilySearch Wiki article means you click on it to go to more help
and information about that topic—not just at FamilySearch but at other sites on the Internet too.

- ❖ Ask relatives
  - o Check message boards, mail lists, online trees (Yes, these are digital era sources but
    these messages often mention people, researchers, and sources from previous eras.)
- ❖ Local, Regional & State Genealogical Societies
  - o Files
  - o Publications (PERSI)
- ❖ Lineage societies
  - o NSDAR Bible Project
  - o NSDAR GRC Index
- ❖ Historical & Antiquarian Societies
- ❖ Libraries & Archives

PERSI (Periodical Source Index)
(www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Periodical_Source_Index_(PERSI)

PERSI is now searchable at *Findmypast.com* but was previously at *Ancestry.com* and before that at *HeritageQuest* and originally published on CDs. The PERSI Project began in 1986 and is an example of how the digital era of genealogy gives us better access to materials from previous eras. While it is only a partial index to genealogical publications found at the Allen County Public Library, it can prove useful when searchers use the **FAN** methodology (searching not just for your ancestor's name but also the names of other **F**amily members, **A**ssociates, and **N**eighbors).

Other examples of free tools are Cyndi's List, Linkpendium-Surname, Linkpendium-UK, Linkpendium-USA, WorldGenWeb and USGenWeb sites. See the 'Z Links" Web page at Barbara Renick's Web site: http://www.zroots.org/links.html for links to these research tools.

If you know the name of a researcher (possibly now deceased) from a previous generation, try Googling their name and the names and/or localities associated with your ancestor of interest. Also search the FamilySearch Catalog and WorldCat. In the FamilySearch Catalog be sure to do at least four types of searches: Surnames, Titles, Author, and Keywords to find more resources.

HINT: Find the names of previous researchers by going through queries in old periodicals of genealogical societies in the areas you know your ancestor lived or from which they migrated.

MESSAGE BOARDS   (see search templates at searchforancestors.com)

Example: https://www.rootsweb.com/

Use the FAN principle when searching genealogy message boards, too.

Using GOOGLE and searching on *renick bible library of Virginia* returns links not only to family bible records in the Library of Virginia (which is both the state library and the state archives), but also a FamilySearch Wiki article on Virginia Bible Records, and the RootsWeb message boards hosted by Ancestry.com mentioned above.

According to their Web site, the Library of Virginia has more than 6,800 bibles in their manuscripts collections and published a two volume index to their bible collection in book format in 1999. Subsequent bible acquisitions were listed in the library's newsletter.

NOTE: The Library of Virginia's Archives and Manuscript Catalog includes approximately 20,000 catalog records. "Though this represents less than half the total holdings of the archives and manuscripts in The Library of VA, new accessions are added daily and retrospective cataloging projects continue to enhance the catalog." In other words, their digital catalog is NOT complete. Not all institutions have been able to do retro cataloging projects to include all collections from the Pen & Pencil era or even the Typewriter era into their digital catalogs.

Other tools for finding "one-of-a-kind" handwritten sources:
NIDS (National Inventory of Documentary Sources available for both U.S. and UK)
NSDAR Genealogical Research System
(*https://www.dar.org/national-society/genealogy/using-genealogical-research-system-grs*)

Digital Public Library of America (https://dp.la/)

The Library of Congress has migrated their American Memory collection into new projects. See (*http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html*)

PART II: The Typewriter Era

A. How They Searched

Relatives & Researchers created:

- ❖ Typed letters and included a SASE
- ❖ Telephone conversations
- ❖ Typed books/binders of reports and family group sheets (introducing typos and errors)

Took trips to visit (and take photos):

- ❖ Relatives
- ❖ Churches
- ❖ Cemeteries
- ❖ Courthouses
- ❖ Archives, Libraries, Historical & Antiquarian Societies

But did they label the photos?

B. How They Recorded

Example: Family Group Sheets (a compiled source but they can give you hints)

Typed family group sheets/records were readable, compact, and showed what was found (or in many cases guessed) about that ancestral family. Even good typists introduced at least a small percentage of typographical errors each time they typed a new family group sheet.

The printed forms themselves had major short comings: for the children there was space for the date of marriage but not the often more important place of marriage; also for the children there was space only for the date of death but not the often more important place of death.

The box for sources of information was typically inadequate and if you typed more source information on the back of the sheet it often wasn't photocopied when the family group sheet was shared and passed on to other researchers. Trying to

number your sources then superscript those numbers to identify where each piece of information came from was a slow and labor intensive process.

C. How Findings Were Preserved

Family Group Records Projects

State, Regional, and Local Genealogical Society Projects:
        Missouri State Genealogical Association
                Four Generation Charts
                Surname Book
        East Tennessee Historical Society
                First Families of Tennessee

PART III: The Computer Era

A. How They Searched
Family Group Records Collections (8 million Family Group Records)
- Archive Section
  - Main Collection 1942-1969
  - Oriental Collection 1930-1979
  - Greece & Misc. 1942-1982
- Patrons Section
- The 1924 Collection
- The 1962 Collection
- Miscellaneous Collections (at least 17 collections)

International Genealogical Index (IGI) (430 million records)
Ancestral File (ended in 2003) (40 million records)
Pedigree Resource File (started in Computer Era on CDs but now online)
Community Trees Projects (online)
FamilySearch Family Trees (online)

B. How They Recorded
Personal genealogy software programs (multiple databases for different purposes)
GEDCOM for pruning and sharing
C. How Findings Were Preserved

RootsWeb WorldConnect (now supported by Ancestry.com):

Mail Lists
Message Boards
WorldConnect

To search Genealogies section at FamilySearch.org
1. Go to familysearch.org
2. Click on **MORE** in the upper right corner of Web page
3. Click on **Search** to see more options for searching
4. Click on **Genealogies**
5. To search just one collection click on the small arrow on the right side of the bottom box (the "All" will be replaced with a drop down list to choose)

Pedigree Resource File:
Still open for submissions
Your submission remains under you control
No one else can modify it
Preserved indefinitely just as you submitted it
Review, revise or remove it as you see fit

PART IV: The Digital Era
Despite problems, there are still some strong reasons to put your family trees online:
1. BAIT. By putting your work online you allow other people to mess it up. Yes, you might want to do this deliberately to gain hints or find other people's errors (or maybe some of your own) so your documentation and analysis of why those errors are wrong can be published and attached to that online tree.
2. PUBLISH. ePublish your findings and conclusions from your research projects and attach them to the appropriate families on your tree as soon as completed [a.k.a. "Publish as You Go"]. This helps prevent duplication of effort and gives you immediate public credit for what you have done (before it can be pirated). This also permits other people with additional records, sources, knowledge, and research experience to contact you.

3. SHARE. It is cheaper and faster to publish your findings online than to physically copy and mail or e-mail them to all the cousins you collect when your online tree is at high-traffic sites (like Ancestry and FamilySearch). DNA matches have exacerbated this.

Genealogists in the future may well publish their research online as they do it. What? No boxes and boxes of paper files for future generations to toss away when we are gone? Our years of experience preserved in published reports with our educated analysis attached to online trees? We have the technology. We can build a better tree.