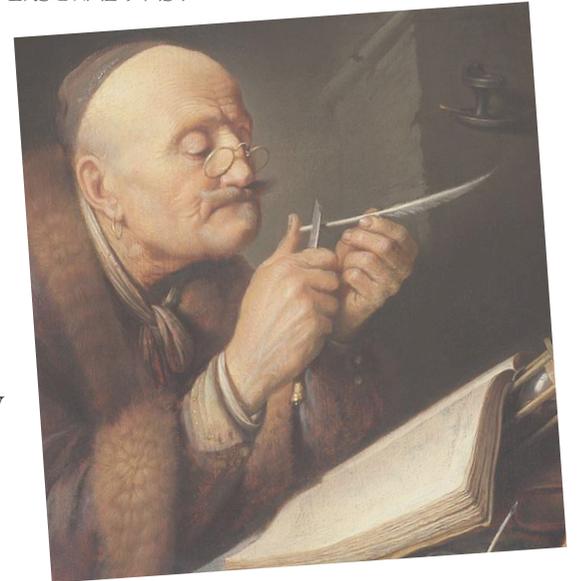


WRITING FAMILY HISTORY

USING NARRATIVE IN GENEALOGY

PRESENTED BY DR. DANIEL HUBBARD, PERSONAL PAST



MAKING A RECORD:

- Encourages others to preserve your research.
- Some things you know just don't fit on a family group sheet but could fit in a narrative.
- Stories give another way to convey information.
- Stories express connections and context in ways that raw data and group sheets can't.

CREATE INTEREST:

- People enjoy stories far more than raw data.
- People can and will remember and spread interesting stories.
- Images in context capture attention, sadly, microfilm printouts don't.

AS A RESEARCH TOOL:

- Can be part of the research process.
- Help you spot inconsistencies.
- Help you spot holes where you would like to know more.
- Help you focus on the context of your ancestors' lives.
- New ideas can come from the change in perspective from researcher to writer.
- Researching those small details can lead to big discoveries.

WHEN?

- Preliminaries: Timelines, checklists, organizing...
- Do you think you might have enough evidence? Does your evidence start to seem like more than the sum of its parts?
- Can you start to put meat on the bones?
- Can you go beyond genealogical questions to details and context?
- Remember you don't need to know everything to get started, you just need to know enough when you finish.
- Can you start to "get into the heads" of some ancestors?

NARRATIVE—PLANNING:

- The nonfiction contract—your reader trusts you to be factual, and to indicate when you are not totally sure. Do not break that trust.
- Will you tell the stories that come from the research, or also the story of the research?
- Remember that research moves backward through time, but history is told forward in time.
- Think about how you will handle all those ancestors. One line at a time? A series of vignettes? The interactions of ancestors from different lines with the same event?
- Think about how you will handle gaps in your knowledge and the mysteries left unsolved.
- How will you handle your black sheep? Do you mention the “unmentionable”?
- Who is your reader? Can you get into your readers’ heads?
- What are your stories? Where are the conflicts, mysteries, connections to history, familiar story arcs? How are the conflicts resolved? What is the deeper meaning?

NARRATIVE—NUTS & BOLTS:

- Think about the evidence that will aid with character development.
- Set the stage. What were your ancestors’ places like?
- Context. What in your ancestors’ environment shaped their likes?
- Think about your structure e.g. chapter breaks, connections between them...
- Editing needs to follow writing.
- There are many decisions around the look and feel of a book e.g. columns, fonts, footnotes...
- Printing: Type of cover and binding, print quality, paper quality...

ILLUSTRATE:

- Family photos, modern photos (grave markers, heirlooms, family places...)
- Maps, family trees, art. Records can give the reader the feeling of participating in the research.
- Some images will need to be retouched.
- Image resolution must be much higher for print than on a screen. Use 300-600 dpi.

FURTHER READING FROM MY BLOG:

- The Nonfiction Contract (in the June 2014 archive) (<http://www.thepersonalpast.com/2014/06/01/the-nonfiction-contract/>)
- Washing Hogs (in the June 2014 archive) (<http://www.thepersonalpast.com/2014/06/08/washing-hogs/>)
- A Man of Letters (in the Sep 2014 archive) (<http://www.thepersonalpast.com/2014/09/01/a-man-of-letters/>)
- Humans as Storytellers (in the Sep 2009 archive) (<http://www.thepersonalpast.com/2009/09/09/humans-as-storytellers/>)