

Getting Organized

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For some genealogists, the biggest challenge in their family history research isn't tracking down that elusive ancestor in the 1930 U.S. Census. Instead, the toughest job is organizing all their valuable notes, records, photos and more. While it's a daunting task, an organized system for genealogy materials prevents duplication of efforts and helps researchers to determine what (or who) is missing from their family trees. Perhaps even better, it prevents that sinking feeling when a cousin calls and asks for a copy of a great-aunt's birth record, which could be buried in any number of boxes.

Organizational styles and systems vary among family historians. But whatever their preferences, the reason for creating such systems is the same. Getting organized allows genealogists to set a standard for cross-referencing a record among multiple family names, such as a land record that describes a sale from one ancestor to another; it establishes a format for note taking and a system for tracking correspondence; and it makes it easier to prepare for a research trip, thanks to research calendars and lists of what should come next in the research process.

Keeping track of sources used, even sources that did not include information relevant to a particular family, can make research more manageable later on. Noting what you looked for and the date the source was checked gives context to your research. Did you check that county history before or after you uncovered information about an ancestor's first marriage? Including the call number for a source will help you locate it later if need be. Books on genealogical standards of evidence discuss the types of records and research materials available, while serving as a guide to citation and analysis.

The Library of Michigan has an extensive collection of how-to genealogy books, from sources that provide an overview of organizational methods to materials that deal with specific topics, such as preservation of family treasures or identification of undated photographs. Some genealogists choose to bring their research together in a written family history or in a scrapbook with photos of everyone from distant ancestors to the newest addition to the family. The Library has a number of books on these topics as well, and many people also find it helpful to browse the Library's collection of family histories to explore possibilities for their own compilation.

In addition to books that highlight the pros and cons of genealogy computer software available for use in organizing research, several new books focus on digitizing family documents or posting research online to create a family history Web site. For more information about the titles recommended in this publication, please search ANSWER, the Library's online catalog, www.answercat.org.

No matter the system you choose to organize your genealogy, the Library of Michigan is here to help. Pedigree charts and family group sheets are available at the Genealogy Desk or on the Library's Web site, www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan. While the thrill of the hunt remains one of the most exciting aspects of genealogy research, organizing and preserving that information creates a legacy that will last for generations.

GETTING STARTED

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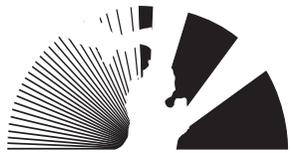
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