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Editor's Corner

by George R. Ryskamp, J.D., AG

"I am a genealogist." As I stand and say these words before a gathering of academic historians, I sense how an alcoholic must feel at his first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, or the repentant sinner at his first revival meeting. The maligning and distrust of genealogy is not a new phenomena. There is even a medieval Spanish saying, "He lies like a genealogist." Nevertheless, my position, and that of other professional genealogists, is that genealogy is a discipline that can and should play a significant role in the field of family history and among her sister fields in the development of history in the future. This new journal stands both as a call to genealogists that they can and should do the kind of quality analysis and evidentiary research and presentation that will make their work useful and respected by historians and to historians that they can and should use and encourage the work of genealogists "to widen [the historians'] empirical knowledge of family patterns."¹

What is genealogy? What is its place in the field of family history? The historical study of the family can be seen from three perspectives:

- 1) the traditional genealogical reconstitution of ancestral or descendant families,
- 2) the biographical study of individual reconstructed families placing them into the historical milieu of the period in which they lived in order to understand their experiences and even the detailed functioning of their daily lives, and
- 3) the gathering of data on groups of families in order to better understand the family as an institution in society analyzed in demographic and sociological terms.

The BYU Family Historian plans to fill its pages with articles from all three perspectives; articles that are

excellent genealogical writing; articles that are excellent historical writing; and, occasionally, articles that are both.

In keeping with the mission of family history at BYU, *The BYU Family Historian* seeks materials that will teach and instruct about quality genealogical research, for those at every level from beginner to professional, as well as articles that show the application of high standards to research problems and solutions. Also, we, the faculty who supervise *The BYU Family Historian*, hope that students will find in its pages a forum to show their capacity to apply such high standards and to address issues that currently face family historians, much like the students who publish in the *BYU Law Review*.

Who is our intended audience? The professional genealogist, yes; the professional historian, yes; but also the family history consultant in a Family History Center and the beginner looking, for the first time beyond the context of his own excited searching, to learn how to do better genealogy. We invite as our audience anyone interested in the family in history who looks for excellence, who looks to learn, who wishes to fill a computer program or write "a book containing the records of [one's ancestors], worthy of all acceptance."²

Genealogy and family history are the most personalized and intimate of historical studies, looking at individuals and families, often one's own ancestors. If the primary purpose of the study of history is as "a road to self knowledge and a means of understanding the attitudes and motives of people of disparate backgrounds,"³ then no field offers a better beginning than from the perspective of the experience of one's own ancestors or other individual families in a given historical period. To serve those who understand and seek to implement that purpose through family history research is the mission of *The BYU Family Historian*.

Notes

¹Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Editor's Corner," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 89 (December 2001) 243.

²Doctrine and Covenants 128:24.

³Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider, *How to Study History* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1967), 3.