The Family Historian

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THE FAMILY HISTORIAN

by

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Collecting Written Materials

The archivist of a great university library was once asked his secret in collecting so many important materials. He smiled and said, "My success can be summed up in two very important words: vacuum sweeper." His approach was to locate as many relevant materials as possible and then to analyze and classify them. His success was linked to having a wide definition of what records might be of value for historical archives. Where others threw away phone books, he kept them (valuable information on professions and businesses in the Yellow Pages), where others threw away menus, he kept them (valuable information on how much food cost in that day, what were current favorite dishes).

To be sure, there are born collectors--but collectors can also be made. To become a successful collector of family history materials, first, know that a wide variety of materials may help to furnish your history with more color, detail, and hard data than drawing from only a few sources, and second, be persistent and do not take "no" for an answer the first time around. Consider this example:

Jeanette was enrolled in a family history class and asked how to search for written materials on her family's history. She visited her grandmother who said nothing of value was saved about the old days. The next week, she visited grandmother once again and received "no" for an answer. Just about ready to give up, Jeanette persisted and visited a third time. Grandmother smiled this time and said, "You must be serious. I didn't really think there could be much that happened in our family that would be of interest. Let's go down in the basement."
There Jeanette was rewarded as her grandmother opened a dusty steamer trunk filled with memorabilia from fifty years ago.

One of the greatest dangers for the family historian is that family members may not take you seriously—or may put you off. Being persistent and following up hunches (as did the famous Sherlock Holmes) will guarantee that you won’t accept "no" the first time around but will continue to ask and look. Often people forget they have old materials. More common yet, some people simply don’t understand what it is you are looking for. It’s a good idea to write up a "wants list" for family members, so they will know precisely what you are talking about. For example:

FAMILY HISTORIAN WANTS LIST

Dear members of the Jones family: I am working on a family history for my social sciences class.

My focus is on Grandmother and Grandfather Jones during the time they lived in Ridgeville.

I am interested in doing some oral history interviews with family members who remember Grandmother and Grandfather and especially want to find written materials and photographs which will help me write my paper.

If you have any of the following items that you would let me borrow, photocopy, or look at, please call me at University dorm, 656-3451.

Thanks!
Phyllis Jones

Old Letters (to or from Grandpa or Grandma)
Ledgers from Grandpa’s service station
Grandpa’s stamp collection
Grandma’s scrapbooks from the 1920s and clippings
Photos
Anything saved by the grandparents from their big trip to South America in 1961
Anything from Grandpa’s service with the Kiwanis Club
Anything else you think might help me
When collecting, however, one should not rely on simply sending out such announcements. Only a personal visit can really help you determine what helpful materials a relative may possess. Of course, if Aunt Martha lives 1,000 miles away, then sending the wants list plus a friendly letter would be suitable. In fact, in this day of quick communication, a well focused long-distance phone call on evening rates might pay rich dividends. Some family historians have made personal contact with relatives this way, then followed up with a letter and the wants list.

Historians have long made a distinction between primary and secondary materials. Primary materials tend to be original and firsthand, while secondary materials tend to be printed or copied and secondhand. The family historian will want to locate a maximum number of primary or original materials and buttress this more personal type of evidence with solid secondary materials. For example, if you learned that Mother had saved a newspaper clipping (secondary material) of the election of Uncle Cristos as mayor of Evanston, that could be a valuable document in writing up Uncle Cristos' career in civic affairs. But the enterprising collector will want to find more and not stop there. If you keep digging, you might find a three-page entry in Grandmother's diary (primary material) which describes in detail the events surrounding the election. Your family history would be greatly improved by using Grandmother's more proximal and primary journal entry rather than using the secondary newspaper clipping.

For many years, genealogists have searched for basic records to pinpoint important turning points in a person's life: documents of birth, baptism, confirmation, graduation, marriage, death, sale of
lands, discharge from armed services, wills, and deeds. Such records are important to the family historian, but they are only a beginning. Unlike the genealogist, who is trying to pinpoint when a person lived and the relationship to other kin, the family historian needs to go beyond and explore the relationships in the family, the life and times of the family members, both individually and collectively. The family historian cannot be satisfied using only vital statistical materials, even though they are essential and should be the first thing the family historian looks for during the preliminary inventory of source materials. The only way the historian can write about what family members did, what they thought about, how they reacted to events, how they made decisions on employment or where to move—in short, what actually happened to the family over the years—is to locate personal experience sources. These are materials such as diaries, letters, scrapbooks, journals, memos, and so forth that can help the historian reconstruct the family's daily life. Once the vital statistical and personal experience materials are found, then the family historian will want to put these sources into context by using published materials, such as newspaper clippings, magazines, books, and pamphlets. The following discussion will be divided into these three categories, the first two representing primary, original materials, and the third, printed secondary materials.

Vital Statistical Materials

Family historians need to pinpoint where and when the actions and movements of the family took place. Gaining access to vital statistical materials is the best way of producing positive evidence that, for example, Great-Grandfather Mellini came over from Italy to New York on
24 July 1901, even though the family tradition may say that he came over in the "summer of 1901." It is preferable to write Emporia, Kansas, and get a copy of Grandmother's birth certificate rather than speculating on whether or not she was born there or in Kansas City, Missouri where the family was living in those days. Finding birth, marriage, and death certificates takes patience, but it is well worth the investment because it gives you accuracy and precision in locating family members in place and time and lends creditability to the history you finally do write up.

Many families actually keep copies of birth certificates, marriage licenses or marriage certificates, and baptismal certificates. The task of locating relevant vital statistical materials may involve looking in the basement or attic for documents that Mother thinks "are probably there--I remember seeing them back in 1980 when we repainted." For some researchers, finding an old family Bible may be helpful, especially when births, baptisms, and other important dates are noted. But for others, doing some oral history interviews first to find out what relatives remember followed by letters to registrars of vital statistics, county courthouses, or state departments of health may be the way to begin.

Several books list in detail places to write for help in tracking vital statistical material. Today, many places charge a fee for making copies or for sending a notarized statement; any letter of inquiry should ask what costs may be incurred. Because of the growing interest in studying one's roots, most public agencies are cooperative and organized to answer inquiries from the public.
Figure 7.1 reproduces a number of basic documents that can be researched and, in many cases, procured from public agencies. This can serve as a basic checklist for your search. For further reading in how to obtain these types of materials, see the selective bibliography at the end of this chapter.

For an overview and specific suggestions on locating important sources, consult these government publications: Where to Write for Marriage Records, HMS 72-1144; and Where to Write for Birth and Death Records, HMS 72-1142. Both are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 and are published by the U.S. Public Health Service, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Other Public Records

What do you do to locate public records beyond birth, death, and marriage certificates? The essential idea is to pinpoint a county in which your family was active. Consider the example of Inga Nordstrom:

I found that one branch of my family lived in San Bernardino County, California, in the 1920s. I was able to visit the county courthouse and find some fascinating materials. First, I found records in the Probate Court on the estates of Uncle Jonas and Aunt Edy; this helped clarify the property they owned and left to their heirs, the daughters and two cousins.

I also found in the divorce records that Cousin Cynthia's first marriage had broken up two years earlier than we were told during an oral history interview. Then by consulting the Tax Assessor's rolls, I found the taxes the family paid on the several pieces of property and the apartments they owned in those days; that helped me better understand why Uncle Jonas never had a steady job; he simply collected the rent from those apartments. I found the County Recorder's office to be useful, too, in locating deeds of real property registered in the county that were not mentioned in the probate court—and for good reason! This property, it turned out, belonged to another branch of the family, and will be useful for my research at a later time.
Figure 7.1

Examples of Written Documents Useful for Family History

These are examples of original documents that I found in the Special Collections department of the University of California (Santa Barbara) Library; they are representative of the types of documents that might be found in your family attic or cellar, in homes of relatives, or at the local historical society.

1. Excerpts from a family history of the early 19th century; I have found some of my own ancestors in a book on town history.
2. Excerpts from family history in the early 19th century; I have found family sources in military and probate court records.
5. State poll tax receipt, California, 1864.
7. Deeds for land and cemetery plot, California, 19th century.
8. Land sale deed, Massachusetts, 1881.
9. Last will and testament, California, n.d.
11. Hospital discharge, Rhode Island, 1863.
13. Amnesty oath at time of Civil War, Texas, 1865.
15. Thomas S. Collier, author of a shipboard diary typical of many American immigrants, about 1868-69. Collier had just joined the Navy.
16. Excerpts from Collier's shipboard diary, December 12, 1868.
In some parts of the country, such information may be located in parish (e.g. Louisiana) or town or village records (e.g. New England). The key persons to be in touch with in most instances are the county clerk, the clerk of the probate court, and the county recorder. Since it is not feasible in many cases to visit the county courthouse or administrative building, the family historian should not hesitate to write for information. If you opt for this solution, then you should be prepared to pay for any information sent to you; furthermore, you cannot expect a county employee to do general research for you. Writing for information therefore assumes you already have some leads to go on.

Let's assume that you know Grandfather died in 1958 and left a will. You could write to the county probate court and ask for a photostat of his last will and testament. In some areas, copies are restricted but you can ask for essential information such as the bequests of personal and real property to heirs. Often wills spell out clearly the kinship relationship of heirs that might not be available elsewhere (this is especially true when researching early family lines in the 19th century).

Land records may also prove to be an untapped gold mine. Jeane Eddy Westin says that "Early land records with their grantor/grantee indexes and tract books showing time, place, and length of residence are also real finds for the ancestor hunter. Often, these records in the hands of the county recorder also refer to a forebear's property ownership in other areas at an earlier time, or even to unknown
relatives." Obviously, land records and indexes can potentially push the search for your relatives even further back in time.

While the majority of relevant materials for family history lies at the local level, in some cases state and federal records are useful. This is true for military records if members of your family served in the state militia or guard or one of the national armed services. Searching for ancestors in military records is highly specialized; besides official military records available in Washington through the National Archives, there are a number of veterans' organizations or societies for descendants of combatants in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War (both Union and Confederate), etc. Pensions granted widows of veterans could be another source of information.

An important source for some families is the manuscript census of the United States decennial census. This has available from 1790 to 1900; in 1982, 1910 became available (for reasons of privacy, the census is generally closed for 75 years after it is taken). Information can be requested for later years from the regional centers of the national archives that contain microfilms of the entire U.S. Census; these centers will make available photostat copies for a fee. They also have microfilm readers for public use, a wide range of pamphlets and materials to help you search for ancestors, and an experienced staff willing to help you get started. At present, there are eleven regional centers of the National Archives; unless it is convenient to visit Washington, D.C., the family historian will find most needs met in the

nearest regional center. (See Figure 7.2 for a current listing of these facilities and the jurisdictions they serve.)

Generally speaking, census searching can be complicated. But for the person who has good leads and who is willing to spend time, it can be highly rewarding. What can one learn from the U.S. Census? All of the censuses were not the same— that is, the questions asked have changed over time. You can reasonably expect to find out what your ancestors' occupations were; the property and land they owned (if reported); members of the family and their ages; persons living with the family; who died and at what age; where (state or country) people were born, and so forth.

If you know, for example, that your Harris ancestors lived in Kentucky in the 1820s, then you should consult the census for the relevant community for 1820 or 1830 and see what you can find. If the Harrises were listed as coming from Virginia, then you could pinpoint an earlier residence and attempt to look at the Virginia census for 1800. Using census records requires patience, imagination, and persistence. For more information on the federal census, consult The History and Growth of the United States Census by Caroll D. Wright, available (with other relevant materials) from the National Archives and Records Service, Publications Sales, Washington, D.C., 20408.

The Family Group Record

The goal of establishing verifiable vital statistics is to put together an accurate picture of the composition of your family. For the genealogist, it is essential to link parents and children and to establish blood and legal relationships. For the family historian, it may suffice to be able to identify who those ancestors were, especially at the
outset. When doing a sketch of a family member, having all the vital statistical materials is not mandatory, but if you move towards doing a full-scale biography or attempt a nuclear or extended family history, then having birth, marriage, and death dates and places is strongly recommended.

Learning how to fill out a family group sheet is a useful research exercise. A sample is given in Figure 7.3. Finding photos of the relatives mentioned adds interest and can be an excellent way of visually getting a picture of your family for several generations. Following back to one's parents, then one's grandparents—three generations—is often possible for many people. Tracing your family back four to five generations becomes more complex and requires genealogical techniques of ancestor identification. Writing a family history based upon experiences and lives of family members can be done by most people as far as three or four generations, but the type of personal materials necessary for filling in the details becomes more difficult to obtain. Unless you have access to a trunk full of material, or believe you have relatives who have preserved old materials, aiming back three to four generations is the limit of feasibility for most people. Once you have been able to reconstruct your family on both sides for three to four generations and have done sketches for each family member, you will be in a stronger position to push further back in time. Being able to do individual sketches for four generations is quite ambitious for most people—yet these are the ancestors who have probably influenced your life the most.

A special case can be made here for the ancestor who first brought his or her branch of the family to America. For some families,
that may mean going back only two or three generations; for others, it may mean five, six, or more generations. The ancestor who first left the old country is a fascinating subject for a family history sketch; if both sides of your family have been in the United States for four generations, you would have to look for eight founding ancestors, assuming all of your great-grandparents on both sides arrived during their lifetimes in this country. If the first ancestor lies even further back, there will be even more founding ancestors.

At this point, to allay the fears of those who may be intimidated by the task of reconstructing their family, the best advice is to start with the known and proceed slowly backward in time to the unknown. Start with your best original primary source materials and then build towards the past.

Personal Experience Sources

Once you have a basic idea of your family composition several generations back (or however far back is important for your personal family history), then you are ready to search for personal materials that show how people lived their daily lives. Personal materials have been neglected by both genealogists and historians until recently; the genealogists had been more interested in pushing back the family tree, and the historians had assumed that only elected officials, tycoons, or brilliant physicists in the family were worthy of extended biographical treatment.

But personal family history today is based upon the assumptions that everyone can be his own historian and every relative is worthy of study. Every life has historical validity and interest; because professional historians in the past did not recognize this fact, today we
know too little about "ordinary" people. This can be rectified by the family historian who assumes that all members of his or her family are interesting people and worthy of researching. This means that a history of a welder is as important as the history of a state senator, or a housewife's story is as important as that of a woman who is vice-president of a bank. Each person's life and experiences take place on different levels, and the challenge for the researcher is to identify those levels and then to determine the available kinds of personal materials.

Diaries and journals were often kept by people in the past, and if you are fortunate enough to find some, they can offer unique insights into the personal world of your subject. They can also be frustrating because some diary keepers describe the daily weather or going for a walk, rather than giving details about what happened during the day. But from the person who records daily life or confides thoughts and problems to his or her journal, the historian may discover a great deal of information. Some diaries may be difficult to obtain if they were written recently and have reflections on persons still alive; such sources have to be treated with discretion and good taste if they are made available. Quoting directly from a diary or journal may also pose a problem since the writer probably did not intend the material written to be circulated. If in doubt, make reference to diary materials rather than quoting extensively. If the diary belongs to Aunt Jane and you are writing about your Uncle Samuel, then you need to ask her permission to quote passages. Such personal sources can give valuable details obtainable in no other way, but they should be used with sensitivity.
Letters are one of the best personal sources obtainable and often reveal informative details and observations. However, because letters speak of events of the moment, the significance of those events may not be clear without additional letters. If you don't possess supplementary materials, you may have to do some theorizing about what was going on. For example, Grandfather may write on 4 October 1939 that he was pleased that his job was being phased out. On the surface that doesn't make much sense. But finding the reply—which explains that Grandfather's company was being acquired by another company in a merger, and Grandfather was actually getting a promotion in the new company—puts the first letter into proper prospective.

Scrapbooks can be a particularly valuable source if they have been carefully edited and the items collected put in chronological order. The typical scrapbook might contain programs, letters, clippings, photographs, certificates, awards, postcards, and other memorabilia. Most scrapbooks, however, often need explanation or interpretation, preferably from the person who edited the scrapbook if possible. Looking at photos or clippings will often trigger the memory of the scrapbook compiler, who might expand on the items collected or might even lead you to further items not yet added to the scrapbook.

Many persons have good intentions of compiling a scrapbook but never get around to it. They collect, snip, and retrieve items and put them in boxes or folders. When searching, be on the lookout for materials that were being readied to put in a scrapbook—don't just ask for the finished product alone.

Memos and notes can be less accessible. They are often written in the course of doing a project (such as house remodeling) or planning a
vacation or attempting to resolve a crisis, and they can be extremely useful. Sometimes notes deal with inconsequential matters, but other times they give clues obtainable in no other way.

**Business materials.** Included in this category are statements, cancelled checks, and other home financial documents and ledgers and account books for family businesses or services. An accounting ledger or journal can tell a great deal about an accounting practice, if you are trying to piece together how Father made a living after being laid off from the accounting office of the factory. Or cancelled checks may tell you who Mom's customers were when she ran her catering service back in the early sixties. Also, look for stocks, bonds, and savings certificates.

**School records.** Report cards, school projects, essays, school programs, and other memorabilia from elementary or high school days can be helpful in reconstructing the early years of your subject. In high school and college, yearbooks often contain material showing the activities and interests of the person you are researching. Programs from plays, variety shows, concerts, athletic events, debates, or commencement exercises may also be helpful.

**Church records.** Birth, baptismal, marriage, death, and confirmation records (e.g., bar mitzvah) may be housed in a church or synagogue and are more properly categorized as part of the vital statistical materials. Many families, however, preserve mementos from church affiliations such as religious programs, fellowship activities, youth groups, convocations, service projects, and fund raising drives.

**Voluntary associations.** Because so many Americans participate in a variety of volunteer organizations, it is very likely your home has
programs, membership lists, directories, service projects, or other memorabilia. Consider whether or not your family members belonged to any of these organizations:

Service: Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimist
Fraternal: Elks, Moose, Odd Fellows
Veterans: American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Community: Big Brother, Big Sister, YMCA, YWCA
Special Interest: Toastmaster, literary society, book club, museum guild
Women: women's club, garden club, Junior League
Youth: Boys' Club, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, Girl Scouts
Hobby: model railroad club, sewing club, philately club
Sports: Little League, swim club, tennis club, golf club
Social: country club, dinner club, bridge club
Mutual Aid: Burial Society, Mutual Aid Society
Political: Young Democrats, County Republicans, Independents
Ethnic: Italian-American Social Club, Sons of Norway
Heritage: Daughters of the American Revolution, Ohio Club
Neighborhood: Elm Street Improvement Association, school board, town board

Although to many people searching for family history materials, voluntary associations seem far removed from the family scene, the fact is that many family members have devoted a great deal of time and effort to them. A family member may tell you, "Oh, Uncle Josh didn't do much out of the ordinary in his life. He worked at the factory and was a good family man. But nothing special." Perhaps this is true, but Josh may have had an impressive stamp collection that might just be the key to understanding the man--a hobby not directly related to the family, but which kept Josh busy for ten years as president of the local organization of stamp collectors.

You should also consider if your relative was an officer of a voluntary association. If so, the chances are greater that materials on the organization and your relative's role in it might be preserved. Did the organization sponsor an annual event such as a marathon race? If
so, an article probably exists in the local newspaper, telling about those organizing the event.

Land records. Deeds, conveyances, mortgages, tax receipts, and other family documents may be valuable in helping to reconstruct information on land the family may have owned for a residence, for commercial use, or for farming.

Job or career materials. Not every family has been or is associated with a business, but every family has a source of income which is usually related to a job or career. Let's assume Uncle Harry worked at the aluminum factory as a foreman. He might well have left materials describing his job, telling about the factory, names of employees he worked with, company rules, employee benefits and compensation plans, paycheck receipts, and so forth. Or let's assume that Aunt Harriet worked for the gas company. She might have accumulated several folders of materials about her job, the people she worked with, some of the employee picnics, service projects, award dinners, and so forth.

Or in the event Grandfather was an attorney, there may be transcripts of cases that he argued in court; committee reports he worked on as counsel to the Neighborhood Improvement League; mementos of bar association conferences in New York or London; and a general file of correspondence (not confidential) that could be consulted. Or perhaps you are focusing on Cousin Pamela, who went to Atlanta to serve as a buyer in a large department store after her training and several years of work in New York. She might have materials describing her training in the garment district, her transfer
to the South, sales campaigns she worked on, and her promotion to chief buyer after fifteen years on the job.

Very often scrapbooks are constructed around a person's career, and sometimes they are prepared for presentation upon retirement. If such a scrapbook exists in your family, it could be an invaluable source. Sometimes photo albums are geared to depicting various stages of a career: education, first job, promotion, advanced training, evening courses, transfer to another city, new job, special assignment, and retirement award.

Military records. Service records are often saved as well as memorabilia from the days in the services. Photos of everyone who served on the same ship, a roster of all men serving in Company B in Uncle Wilfred's regiment in Germany, clippings in the newspaper telling of Cousin Stewart's medal for bravery in Korea are possible examples. Your family may possess other military records reaching as far back as the Spanish-American or Civil Wars such as pensions, bounties, or discharge papers. Leads developed from surviving personal documents can be pursued in the military service records at the National Archives or its regional centers.

Family histories. Some families are lucky enough to possess written or published histories of the family. Often these have been done by genealogists and provide only the basic vital statistical sort of information, but occasionally some families have produced a description of the family origins in the old country, their migration to the New World, and their settlement in different areas. Most of these works have been done by amateur family historians, but often their information is priceless. The main questions to ask when consulting
one of these types of works are: Where did the family or genealogist obtain their sources and did they rely upon primary sources or did they collect hearsay and secondary materials? Good history is determined largely by the quality of source materials; if the family history your family possesses is based upon solid evidence, then you are indeed fortunate. If no sources are listed, then you should be careful in how you use this material or should check with the family member who wrote it to find what sources were utilized.

**Autobiographical memoirs.** At first glance, one might be inclined to think that a memoir written by the person being studied would be the ultimate authority and most desirable form of primary source material and original evidence. Often that is the case, and if family members have left such documents, then you are lucky indeed. But a note of caution is in order since sometimes persons writing memoirs have specific purposes in mind: to vindicate themselves on a political question, to strike back at enemies, to rationalize behavior, to rewrite history by presenting only favorable materials, and so forth. The point is that personal memoirs can skew the truth of what actually happened in the past. This problem is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 11. Memoirs are desirable and should be sought out, but once found, they should be compared to other evidence and other sources that may influence their interpretation.

**Printed Secondary Materials**

Most families have few printed secondary sources unless members have been active in politics or big business. But many average families have some printed notices about their activities, usually from the local newspaper. Such items often turn up in scrapbooks or clipping boxes.
There are other possibilities. For example, perhaps your family homesteaded and pioneered in Nebraska and the local county history has a long essay on your great-grandfather and his sons, who were all active in the community in its early days. This may be valuable material.

Another possibility is a relative who may have been prominent as a member of the state assembly around the turn of the century and whose life and times are written up in a biographical dictionary. Some refer to these references as "mug books" because the editors would approach prominent or affluent persons and sell them space in the forthcoming book, charging an additional fee for printing one's picture. Some historians have derided "mug books," but many of these books contain valuable information and should be consulted. If your research leads to a biographical directory, proceed with caution and test what is said there against what you have been able to find from other sources.

Family members may have banded together to print a family history. Although you may find this work a real asset, you may discover that some chapters do not include sources, that the family historian did not understand the necessity of finding original materials and verifying them, or that the family historian did not know how to write an objective family history. You have a responsibility to approach the printed family history with a critical mind. Perhaps it was commissioned to celebrate the glory of Great-Grandfather, recently deceased, and the essays and materials point up only the laudatory aspects of his life. Or perhaps family members wanted to rehabilitate Uncle John, who was defeated in a bid to be reelected as a county supervisor. This is not to say that works commissioned for special
reasons, such as retirement, are not to be trusted; we are simply suggesting that the publication should be investigated thoroughly to help you understand why the work was being printed or commissioned by the family.

Newspaper stories should ordinarily be considered solid documentary evidence for family history and sought out, even if you have to comb the files of your local newspaper. But read the stories with a critical mind. Some newspaper accounts are rigorously factual; others are based upon hearsay or the opinion of the reporter. If possible, try to get a "second opinion" on any newspaper clipping you may find as evidence for family history. Try to ask family members or friends to verify the truth of the information found in the clipping.

Research Skills

The point in collecting written materials is to furnish you with a research base or mini-archive. Ordinarily, in doing a term paper in the library, it might suffice to take notes on articles and books consulted and keep them in a file box. Doing family history research poses different problems.

For one thing, you might discover in visiting Uncle Howard's apartment that he has a number of old documents, such as clippings, programs, letters, and deeds that would be very helpful. But Uncle Howard travels on the road as a salesman and does not have time for you to make an extended visit. He agrees to let you copy the material since he doesn't want to give it up; you may borrow it for twenty-four hours. It is to your advantage to do the photocopying and add these valuable documents to your mini-archive rather than frantically trying to take notes.
Or, you might have received a phone call from Aunt Jennifer, who says, "I just saw your wants list. I have twenty valuable letters from Great-Grandfather, but I won't let them out of my sight. Do you want me to send you photocopies of them?" You then will have to decide, without seeing the materials, whether you want to risk paying $10 to photocopy the letters. The collector and researcher must be willing to take some risks in finding materials.

In most situations the possibility of taking notes will be the best way of organizing your materials. But in many instances it will be preferable to make photocopies to enable instant access later when you start writing. Notes can be taken a variety of ways: on note cards, on slips of paper, or on lined paper in a three-ring notebook. I recommend a six by nine inch three-ring notebook, putting a basic reference note on each page in the same way you would fill out a card. Such notebooks have an important advantage for the family historian over note cards or slips of paper: they can be kept in a notebook and easily transported to do research when visiting family members. Carrying around cards could be dangerous if they were to spill and get mixed up. The research notes can be classified in the three-ring binders with dividers for each basic category.

Whichever system you choose, the important thing is to be uniform in how you take notes. There are several basic common sense rules that apply for family history research:

**SUGGESTIONS FOR TAKING RESEARCH NOTES**

1. Never put more than one basic fact or reference on a card or a sheet. A reference is like a building block: it needs to be separable, so that it can be deployed at any place as you need it.
2. Be sure to put down your source on each card. This will make doing footnotes or a bibliography much easier.

3. Put a subject heading on the card or sheet, so that you can tell at a glance the content of the note.

4. Leave space for a classification description, essential when you need to organize your materials.

5. Also, a space for the date the event took place might be useful.

Example A:

SOURCE:  
John Watkins' Scrapbook

CLASSIFICATION:  
Vacations

SUBJECT HEADING:  
Rescue of Aunt Martha

DATE:  
June 30, 1988

[NOTES:]  
1. Aunt Martha and Uncle John went to the Maine coast for a vacation.

2. While swimming off the Atlantic Coast, Martha got a cramp and had to be rescued by the lifeguard.

3. For the next ten years, the family vacationed in the mountains in Vermont.

Most researchers today wind up with two kinds of basic materials: notes and photocopies. Increasingly, as xerography and photocopying become less expensive and more widespread, researchers tend to take fewer notes. But if this occurs, then the researcher is faced with organizing many copies with multiple subjects upon each sheet. First, one should organize photocopies into basic subject groups and put them in file folders. Second, if the project contains much material, then the
copies should be indexed. This is accomplished by creating a Topical Index of the main subjects you are interested in—often an expanded version of your flexible outline. Using the categories developed for your Topical Index, then go over your materials and analyze each page and list any paragraphs that are relevant for your subject matter scheme. You would then note this on a card, and eventually, after analyzing all your photocopy sheets, you would have a number of cards (for each Topical Index subject) to guide you in retrieving material from the voluminous photocopy materials. In my opinion, this is a superior system to "scissors and paste" indexing, where original copied materials are snipped up and pasted into different categories, destroying evidence taken from its context and wasting time. Below is an example of preparing a Topical Index to classify and make retrievable your photocopied documents:

FILE FOLDERS  Life of Gertrude Burbach, career phase

1. Training in college
2. On the job experience at New England Bell
3. Research activities at Bell Labs
4. Experiments associated with 1942-1951
5. Move to Purdue University; sponsored research 1952-1960
6. Special assignment as consultant, 1960-1965
7. Retirement
8. Miscellaneous activities aside from employment

In other words, your photocopies are organized primarily in eight file folders, according to a basic chronology of your subject's life. The problem is how to retrieve various kinds of topical material from this basic organization. The solution: prepare a Topical Index. First, the Topical Index must be written on a master sheet to use in indexing (all of the topical categories you are interested in writing about). Second,
peruse all of your copied materials in the eight folders and assign each paragraph (or group of paragraphs) an index number or name:

**Topical Index**

**Categories**

1. Assistants

2. Colleagues
   - Campbell, Heather
   - Canaday, James
   - Schwarz, Benjamin
   - Taylor, Sam

3. Consulting assignments

4. Experiments
   - Bell Labs
   - College
   - Graduate School
   - Purdue

5. Research Contracts
   - Corporations
   - Government
   - Private Foundations

6. Research grants

7. Summers

8. Teachers
   - College
   - Graduate School

9. Travel

   By following this or a similar method, you gain topical control over the materials you have photocopied, increasing their usefulness by organizing your materials for writing. Whether you take notes in the time-honored way, or opt for this or some other method, it is important to bring order and system to your research since it will pay rich dividends when you begin to write. As for original materials such as birth certificates, marriage licenses, etc., it would probably be best to
keep such vital documents in a separate file which you can refer to when necessary.

There is an old saying that quality source materials combined with imaginative questions will produce a first-rate piece of research. To be sure, other elements are necessary, but the emphasis upon finding high quality source materials, whether primary or secondary, can never be stressed too much.
CHAPTER 8
Collecting Oral History Materials

The greatest repository of information and impressions about personal family history is the human mind. Locked in the brain's memory are a thousand images, opinions, and explanations of why family members joined the Coast guard, got married, dropped out of high school, changed careers, got divorced, or favored one sibling over another. It is rare to find these types of personal memories written down; occasionally, a family member will be a conscientious diarist, but far too many journal writers concentrate on trivialities like weather, food, and visits.

Until the development of oral history within the past several decades, interviewing was usually done in a nonsystematic way, with the interviewer taking notes and gaining general impressions. But with the acceptance of oral history by the historical profession as a valid method to recover the past and the development of the tape recorder, especially the portable cassette variety, access to personal memories has become relatively easy.

Oral history enables even the beginning family historian to find personal information that provides continuity, insights, and reasons for behavior not otherwise available. Not everyone, however, is able to recount their memories with perfect accuracy. The human mind is fallible, and while one person may clearly remember what happened in 1929 the day the stock market plunged, another person might be hard pressed to clearly describe what happened on the day Richard Nixon resigned the presidency in 1974. During the past thirty years, a methodology of oral history has been developed worldwide by both
historians and other practitioners in the social sciences; its safeguards and procedures enable the family historian to use oral history in a professional way. Oral history can be rewarding, but only if close attention is paid to procedures. Otherwise you could easily wind up with trivia, gossip, or questionable source materials.

Oral History and the Modern Family

Unless they have had members active in politics or some aspect of public life, few modern families have kept personal archives of written materials. Today, with the telephone and the airplane replacing the letter as our primary means of communication, most families possess little written documentation about family life. That is why oral history interviewing becomes so important in writing the history of the modern American family. For many researchers, there may be no other way to gain access to materials about the origins, lifestyle, problems, and activities of their families.

Luckily, Americans today are rapidly becoming used to being interviewed. Few persons today will deny interviews, and even fewer have never had contact with a cassette tape recorder. If the interviewer is calm, knows what to do, and is organized, there is little likelihood of being turned down.

The real challenge in oral interviewing is to produce an interview that yields high quality source material that later can be integrated with written and visual materials. Once the interview is completed, it can be transcribed or indexed, becoming a useful addition to collected written sources.

Tapes of family members can also be preserved for personal souvenir value. When the discipline oral history was first begun at
Columbia University in the late 1940s, recordings of interviews were discarded after being transcribed. Later it was realized the voice recordings were significant and should be preserved. Today the voices of loved ones can become valuable reminders of times and personalities past. The history-conscious family will make periodic tapes of their children, interview elderly family members, record anniversaries, mark special occasions, and keep these taped memories for future generations to hear and enjoy.

The Art of Interviewing Family Members

Interviewing is a stimulating and provocative art that needs to be learned and practiced because it puts the family historian directly in contact with family members. Much has been written about oral history from the perspective of the professional librarian seeking to record interviews for deposit or from the perspective of the professional historian taping for a specialized research project. My recommendations, however, are directed to the person searching for personal and family materials.

Have a plan for interviewing. Many oral history manuals suggest that interviewers simply let the interviewee talk. I disagree. Unless you have a great deal of patience and unlimited tape, I recommend you prepare a list of questions to be covered during the conversation. Following a research outline, (as discussed in Chapter 1), developing a strategy for collecting research materials and deciding on a certain format should be done before conducting interviews. It is imperative that oral history interviews be designed to fit into your general scheme of research.
In preparing to talk with a relative, determine the scope of your interview: Will it cover your grandfather's life-cycle? Will it cover his impressions of Great-Grandfather, whom you are emphasizing or are you interviewing him to shed light on your mother, who is the main subject of your paper?

If you are interviewing a friend of the family, will you do a full-fledged interview? The chances are that you will not; ordinarily, you might want to ask more specific questions about family members the friend knew. Or perhaps you are interviewing a business associate of your father's. The focus might be on events at the office, how they formed the partnership, and details on important business deals. In this case you would not conduct a life-cycle interview.

Kinds of questions to include in your flexible plan. Setting up a plan for doing oral history interviews calls for flexibility; there is no one ready-made plan to fit every person's needs in doing oral history interviewing. Beware of printed lists of questions, or producing a questionnaire for every interviewee. Such procedures convey immediately to the interviewees that you regard them as numbers, and have not bothered to prepare especially for them. Any person who gives time for an interview should be accorded a personal, customized interview. In other words, you should draw up a fresh list of questions for each person you interview. What should you ask?

Following are some basic suggestions (others are located in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6):

1. To begin with, make certain you obtain vital statistics on the interviewee. The amount of information will depend upon how important the person is to your interview series. Basic facts to
obtain would be full name, address, relationship to family, occupation, age, and birthplace. Some people will be reluctant to give their age or date of birth. If the interview is a friend of the family, find out how long they have known the family. Gathering this basic information will help give credibility to your oral history interviews as primary forms of evidence.

Vital statistics questions can either be asked at the outset of the interview, to put the person at ease, or they can be asked before the interview, written down, and included with the notes you take during and after the interview.

2. Ask a few personal questions in order to put people at ease—but make certain they are open-ended questions that will allow persons to speak freely. Open-ended questions don't require a specific yes or no or one word type of answer. Your personal questions should encourage the person to reminisce: "What brought the family to Springfield?" "What are your earliest memories of celebrating your birthday, Aunt Martha?" "What was life like in Philadelphia in the 1920s?" Such open-ended questions will trigger a flood of memories and encourage your interviewee to start reminiscing in a free, relaxed manner.

Close-ended questions such as, "When is your birthday, Aunt Martha?" "What date did you arrive in Springfield, Uncle Joe?" will earn you short, precise answers and will not encourage the interviewee to be expansive, remember, or search his or her memory. Remember, memory-searching is always the main goal in oral history!
3. If you are going to interview a person for their own life story, you should let them tell you their story. Many older people are especially delighted to have someone to tell their life's experiences to. Do not worry that this story may not come out in precise chronological order. You can sort out their remarks chronologically for your own research later on.

If you are doing a life-cycle outline, then try to keep to your chronology of birth, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, maturity, middle years, senior years, and advanced age. This is a more natural format that most people can relate to easily.

Once you have obtained an overview of the person's life up to the present (or up to death, if the person discussed is dead), you then are ready to proceed with detailed questions. It is important to not begin asking most specific questions until your interviewee has had the chance to tell his or her story; specific answers to questions may not come for an hour or two.

4. If you are doing a specific focus interview—asking about a segment of a person's life or general impressions about the family during a certain period—then specific questions will come earlier in the interview. Even so, it is wise to start all interviews with a few open-ended questions and let your interviewee warm up by giving a few general impressions.

5. Your questions should be suggested by your previous research. Before doing oral history, the family historian has usually done research in written sources or found photographs that might trigger memories. Do not expect the interviewee to remember precisely what you need; while working up a general research
outline for the project, you should decide in advance why Aunt Martha or Uncle Joe need to be interviewed. You should be prepared for the interview, even if that means being familiar with birth, marriage, land, or court records pertaining to the family. Demonstrating your concern and interest will help create the proper setting of trust and credibility needed to insure a good interview.

6. Perhaps the life story is not necessary and a topical interview is in order. Assume that Cousin Andy was in the Marine Corps for five years and that you are trying to find out about all close relatives who served in the Navy during World War II. Your questions will revolve around Andy's training, active service, travel, demobilization, impressions of foreign countries, and other military-related events.

Or perhaps you are interviewing Grandfather and the point of the interview is to find out what family members worked at during the Great Depression of the 1930s. This too would be a topical interview. Proceed the same as in the two previous types of interviews: start with open-ended questions to give people a chance to warm up, to express themselves, and to feel comfortable about memory-searching. Once they are at ease, then switch to the questions required by your topic.

7. Make certain that your questions distinguish (at least to you) facts from opinions. Some people have the ability to recall details with great accuracy; others ignore or forget details. As you proceed, ask yourself, "How credible is this person's memory?" Sometimes this is difficult to do, since a family authority figure may insist on
a point; the interviewer should try to remain objective. There is no need to contradict the speaker during an interview, but don't be afraid to ask questions of clarification ("What year did John leave for New York?").

8. For specific questions as background for preparing your interview, see the extended discussion of life-cycle ideas and topical and specific focus ideas in Chapter 14. From these suggestions you will be able to write up your own list of "customized" questions for each interviewee. Unless you make this preparation, you risk taping a nondirected interview or of having your subject take charge of the interview. This can happen if the interviewer is not prepared and abandons the initiative to the interviewee. Failure in collecting useful oral history evidence usually stems from lack of preparation. You should be in control of the interview at all times because you requested it and are doing it as part of your task of collecting materials for family history.

How to proceed with the interview. Once you have adequately prepared yourself, it is time to meet the person to be interviewed. It is of utmost importance that your interviewing place be free of extraneous noises, distracting persons (children running in or out), or television or radio sets in the background. If you expect to obtain a tape recording that will be clear and capable of being transcribed, you must screen out all possible outside noises. Avoid interviewing persons in a place of business where telephones, incoming messages, secretaries, and clients, can easily become disruptive.

All interviewing should be one-to-one. Experienced oral historians repeatedly confirm that interviews with more than one person at a time
are fraught with difficulty. The general rule is to always interview one person at a time. In some instances, a husband will request to be present at the interview of his wife or vice versa. Sometimes comments here and there by an interviewee's spouse can clarify answers during an interview (especially with older persons), but at other times, excessive banter between the couple may occur. As a general rule, do separate interviews.

An exception to the one-to-one rule is when you want to pick up some general leads. Assume that you have several aunts and uncles gathered to discuss the family's past: doing a tape of this conversation or conducting a "brainstorming" session could prove valuable later in sorting out what questions to ask and which relatives to visit. Such tapes are usually only for listening because they are very difficult to transcribe.

To conduct a successful interview, an arrangement for comfort and eye contact with your host is absolutely necessary. This may mean rearranging furniture to meet your needs. The most desirable position is to place your interviewee at a right angle to you, with a table in between you (see Figure 8.1). This positioning puts your tape recorder between you and the interviewee so you can operate it easily. Another seating arrangement is to sit at a table with your host directly opposite you, placing the tape recorder to your side. Avoid sitting on the other side of the room from your host, away from easy conversational distance. Above all, do not be afraid to ask your host to move chairs or tables. Getting both yourself and your subject comfortable will insure higher quality interviewing and memory-searching.
Eye contact is essential. Without it, your subject may wander or not respond fully to your questions. You must remember that an interview is best when it goes like an animated, personal conversation—but with the interviewee doing most of the talking. If you look at your tape recorder, fumble with pencil and pad, or look out the window, your interviewee may wander, lose the focus, or stop. Show your interest in the person you're interviewing by maintaining eye contact throughout the taping session.

Of course, it may be essential to check your tape from time to time or to quickly scribble certain questions that come to mind to come back to later. Or you may want to jot down names (obtain proper spelling later), dates, or problems mentioned by the narrator. Such note taking should be accomplished swiftly, resuming eye contact as soon as possible.

Do not be an amateur radio ham or hi-fi buff in unpacking and setting up your taping equipment. One of the greatest advantages of using cassette tape recorders is that the equipment is small and compact and hence nonthreatening. Old fashioned reel-to-reel recorders can create nervousness in some people (watching the tape go round). You should become the master of your equipment and set it up with ease, thereby keeping the conversation on the interview. Keep an extension cord for your tape recorder available to be prepared for houses where plugs are not plentiful. In short, minimize the technical aspects of the interview and maximize the human relationships.

"Breaking the ice" may be an important first step if the interviewee is a distant relative or friend of the family. Explaining briefly the nature of your research and chatting about friends, family
members, and common interests will help put the interview on a personal basis. Or asking the narrator to tell how long he has lived in his house, has been a part of the neighborhood, or when he moved to town can establish a good rapport that will result in a rewarding interview.

**Testing and identifying.** Some authorities suggest testing your tape recorder just before you leave for the interview. Others suggest making a short test at the outset to insure all equipment is working well. A short test can be combined with an identification, in this manner:

**Today is January 24, 1988, and this is John Smith visiting with Mr. Robert Jones in his house at 254 East Sycamore Street, in Spring Dale.**

Once you have recorded this, play it back to see if your recorder is functioning properly; your interviewee will feel relieved, seeing that recording is not at all complicated, and hopefully, the stage will now be set for a major taping session.

You should also put a short identification on the beginning of each cassette side, such as "This is the interview with Uncle John Ferguson, cassette number 2, side B."

**Memory searching.** The main point of doing oral history interviews is to help people search their memories about impressions, anecdotes, descriptions, images, dates, facts, and opinions. The preliminaries described above have a common goal: to set the stage for a pleasant and productive interview. Once this stage setting is done, the success and excellence of the interview will depend upon your ability in helping people remember the information you seek.
Do not assume that because you are looking for information, you need to cross-examine people. Many people will "clam up" at the notion of being interrogated; most people respond warmly to a well-directed, friendly conversation. It is important from the beginning to not ask structured questions; let interviewees "tell their own story" or respond to open-ended, general sorts of questions. Once the momentum has been established, once the interviewee is at ease and remembering and expanding, then more detailed or structured questions can be attempted.

For example, let's assume you are visiting Aunt Anna because she is the oldest aunt in the family and remembers better than anyone about Grandfather. To immediately question her about Grandfather might be a mistake; better to discuss aspects of her own life and impressions first before going into questions about Grandfather.

Often the first session with an interviewee helps show them what it is you want—and they will want another session because now they will be able to spend time trying to remember. Some family historians choose not to tape the first interview, preferring to set the stage and tape the second time around. Some people, despite explanations given on the telephone, cannot really comprehend what it is you are doing until they see you in person. Keep in mind that for many persons, the second interview will be more informative and therefore of higher quality than the initial interview. During the time between first and second interviews, interviewees often look at scrapbooks and clippings, or phone neighbors to refresh their memories.

A critical question for any serious historian is, "How far can the human memory be trusted?" Ability to remember details varies among
humans, depending on how important the event was, if the person had first or secondhand knowledge, and if the person was emotionally affected. Questions that may seem important to an interviewer may in fact be only of marginal interest to persons interviewed. Another factor is the psychological makeup of the interviewee—some people are scrupulously accurate, others tend to exaggerate, and some tend to downplay occurrences. These problems do not mean that oral history cannot be useful. Rather, oral history interviewers must know something about human nature and be able to assess whether the interviewee is too elderly to remember accurately details of fifty years ago or whether the interviewee has reason to "cover up" his or her testimony (perhaps because of a minor or major family scandal years earlier).

The best rule in these cases is to follow common sense and good taste. My opinion is that the family historian should not be on the trail of scandal. Every family has a few skeletons in their closet, and nothing is usually served by taking them out. Another common opinion was voiced by a student in a family history class: "I want to write the history of my grandfather the way he really was—warts and all. My parents and aunts and uncles have put him on a pedestal. I want to take him down and make him human again."

As for trusting the human memory, the best policy is to corroborate stories, anecdotes, and events with other sources like tape recordings, clippings, letters, diaries, vital statistics, or records at the local courthouse. The thorough historian deals in evidence and ferrets out bits of information; before putting together information to form a hypothesis or general notion of what happened, the historian is
obligated to critically evaluate evidence (for more details see Chapter 11). After the interview, the interviewer must decide how credible the witness was and how reliable the interview will be as a piece of evidence in analyzing family history.

For example, Uncle Tom tells how the family survived during the Great Depression of the 1930s. He describes in detail how the family existed on potatoes alone, embellishing the privation they suffered. Next week Aunt Cynthia is taped, and she says, "Actually, we didn't do so badly during the Great Depression, compared to most people. We ate rather well and never wanted." Who is accurate, who is telling the truth? It is entirely possible they both are, but both remember the events from different perspectives. Or it is possible that one account may not be accurate. That is for the interviewer to determine.

Another example is Mr. Brown, a longtime friend of the family who tells you in an interview how Uncle Matthew went bankrupt. This is shocking news to you, since the family has always maintained that Uncle Matthew decided to sell out and move to Southern California for health reasons. Often events painful to the family have been whitewashed or buried and the truth comes to light in later years. The family historian has an obligation to find the truth when facts don't correlate.

Discretion is a virtue recommended to interviewers. That means if someone says, "Please turn off the recorder while I tell you something personal," the request should be honored. Newspapermen, detectives, and other professionals often rely upon anonymous sources for their information. The family historian should learn to honor such requests and build a climate of confidence. It will pay dividends quickly and create a reputation for you of fairness and probity.
Bringing the interview to an end. There is an art to ending an interview. Your aim should be to make the interview a positive experience so that the foundation is laid for any future questions that need to be asked. After asking for a description of what happened in the past, a recitation of the "facts" if you will, ask for the interviewee's opinion or interpretation of what happened. Far too often, novice interviewers will concentrate only on finding out the facts of the past and neglect to ask the most important question: Why did it happen that way? This is where oral history sources often can be superior to written sources, which after all are difficult to interrogate. Being able to discuss the facts of a situation and why it happened is a unique opportunity for the family historian to delve into the causes and motivations of the past--something documents often do not tell.

On the other hand, one should be able to distinguish fact from opinion. When weighing the ultimate value of a testimony from a relative or friend of the family, you should consider the merits of both types of oral evidence. Sometimes there is no single best explanation for events: Aunt Martha may ascribe Grandmother's success as a cook to "born talent," whereas Uncle Alfred may tell that Grandmother worked for twenty years in a restaurant. Why did Uncle John run away and join the Marines? "Because his sweetheart jilted him" is one reply; yet another source, no less authoritative, may indicate that John was the most patriotic member of the family and had always planned a military career.

To bring about a conclusion to your interview, reserve some of the big questions until the end--overview questions, summary questions,
opinion questions. In fact, it may well be impossible to finish with such questions, and that inability to finish—the sense that there is more to discuss, more to talk about—may be the best indication that another interview is really necessary. If you have a feeling that everything has been said, that "it's all wrapped up," then another session would be superfluous. But if Uncle Jake has just warmed up and is bursting with stories, if Cousin Victor insists he has told only half of what he knows about the family business, if there is much left unsaid, then conduct another interview. Always leave the door open for another round.

Perhaps after you have finished taping the interview, you remember several questions you forgot to ask; or when listening to the tape, new questions pop up in your mind: the simplest remedy is to phone the interviewee and ask the questions. Since tape recording from phones requires special devices for clarity, it is easier to take notes on your conversation and include them with the notes you have taken during the interview.

How to process a taped interview on cassette. Leaving the conversation on tape can be useful for archive purposes but not helpful to your research, especially if you interview six or ten other family members or friends. How can you refer to topics covered if you have to rewind and listen to a half an hour or more of conversation? One answer lies in indexing the tape, which is best accomplished soon after the interview when the subject and responses are fresh in your mind. Most tape recorders today have digital counters, but since digital counters vary, be sure when using yours that you indicate the make and model of your tape recorder. Ideally, in using an index keyed to
a digital counter, you will want to play the tape back on the same
machine.

The easiest way to proceed is to start your counter at zero and
make a simple index log of all subjects treated. A sample log may look
like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW</th>
<th>INTERVIEWER</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jones</td>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>96 East 7th Street</td>
<td>4 September 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tulsa, OK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

000-034 Identification of interviewer
035-073 Mary tells when and where she was born
074-123 Story of Mary saved by Uncle Hal from speeding train;
reactions of family
124-139 Impressions of Grandmother
140-189 Impressions of Grandfather
190-256 Story of Grandfather's first business trip for the McKay
Company to New Orleans in 1933
257-291 Mary tells of living with grandparents after death of her
parents; her problems making friends; going to private
school; finding new interests in the big city

If your tape recorder does not have a digital counter, then an
alternative method is to use a stopwatch. You can note the amount of
time lapsed, such as 01:25 to 02:45, Story of John's election to city
commission; 02:45 to 05:10, Uncle Tom's account of Grandfather's trip
to Philadelphia, and so forth.

The important thing is to get a basic subject index made from your
tape recording so that a number of tapes can be used easily later on
when writing your family history. The ability to interview relevant
sources makes oral history more valuable; yet the average person who
takes the trouble to interview a family member will often not take the
next crucial step of making the index. Later when you are writing,
you can refer to your index of recordings as part of your notes, and
then easily rewind your cassette to the general area where you
remember a story, incident, or statement of fact occurred. Your index
also would be a most helpful tool for later historians who might use
your work.

Many researchers, especially if they do a number of tapes, will
also prepare a name index. This is highly recommended and helps
insure accuracy of identification and spelling. Getting the spelling of
names correct the first time around is preferable to thinking that a Mr.
Cluff on one interview is different from a Mr. Clough on another
interview, when in fact they are the same person. In listening to the
tape for making your subject index, jot down every name that is
mentioned on the tape as you proceed. Later, if you find you don't
know some of the names mentioned, you can ask the interviewee on the
phone for clarification, opening the way to a second interview if it's
necessary.

For those who are fortunate enough to type easily, it is further
recommended to prepare a typewritten transcription of the interview.
This does not necessarily mean transcribing every word, but means that
in listening to the tape for the subject and name indexes, you might
also determine what sections should be transcribed. You might note
that 056 to 231 and 457 to 577 on the digital counter should be
transcribed and then leave the rest of the interview indexed but not
typed up. For easier transcription, a foot pedal is suggested (most
tape recorders have them available for a nominal cost). Foot pedals
stop and start the tape, leaving your hands free for typing. They do not backspace. Backspacing can only be accomplished by utilizing a dictating and transcribing machine, designed to backspace at different intervals. For typing up a long tape session, obtaining a transcribing machine with this backup-rewind capability is well worth the effort.

There are several schools of thought about transcribing. One says that the manuscript should be a strict reflection, word for word, of what was said on the tape. That point of view is recommended if you are simply typing up your interviews; the notes will basically serve to help you write your family history. If on the other hand, you contemplate putting the transcription in a presentation history to Grandfather or photocopying it so that a dozen other family members can also share the interview, then it would be advisable to do light editing: for instance, we all tend to say "yeah." But on the transcript, it would look better to type "yes." The idea is to not violate what was said, to adhere strictly to the very letter of what was said, but to change anything that may put the narrator in a bad light—things such as bad grammar, mispronunciations, and so forth ought to be edited out. Such works as Collum Davis' *From Tape to Type* (see bibliography) spell out the details of this problem. The general rule is to use common sense and to put yourself in the shoes of the interviewee: How would you want your remarks transcribed for other people to read?

If you contemplate diffusing the interview in any form (copying the tape from another family member, making a transcribed manuscript), then it is advisable to get a short release statement from the interviewee. Most large oral history research projects as a matter of
practice routinely ask all interviewees to sign a release form, which simply states that the interviewee has given permission to the interviewer to tape his remarks, transcribe them on paper, or duplicate the tapes. The interviewee may also want to know where the tapes will be deposited (see Chapter 17). It is for your ultimate protection to have the release or permission forms signed. Below is a simple example:

I, John Doe, on 25 June 1988, do give permission to Jack Brown to transcribe, by duplication of tapes or typewriter, my remarks made in my interview of this date. I also give permission to the interviewer to use my remarks in preparing a family history. I also understand that the tape recordings will eventually be deposited at the Long Beach Public Library in the Doe family collection.

John Doe                                      Jack Brown

How to utilize oral history source material in your research. Today, we look at sources from oral history as valuable and useful in doing historical research. Oral materials comprise a special kind of evidence and all such materials should ordinarily be kept separate from printed documents or notes taken from documents. In Chapter 10 we will consider how to classify and set up these materials so they can be integrated easily into files for writing. Oral materials should generally be used as further evidence to corroborate documentary materials; that is, they are best used in a complementary way.

For example, an old clipping may give the rudimentary facts about Uncle Jim and Aunt Sally's wedding in 1923. But several interviews with other family members who were there can add color, humor, and life to the meager facts gleaned from the newspaper account.
Oral history materials can also be used to interpret what may not be clear from factual documentary accounts. So often documents or printed accounts neglect to tell why something happened or the reasons behind the scene. Interviews can often reveal the why and how of a situation better than written materials and pinpoint the motivating factors.

Ideally, oral history materials should be consulted after having read all of the written sources. In some instances, of course, written materials may not be available, and the only trace of evidence may be contained in the oral interview tapes. If this is the case, it is essential to get more than one person's reminiscences on the subject. If it is a casual reference, then obtain two testimonies; if it is important, then obtain at least three. This will strengthen the usefulness of oral evidence and provide a safeguard against a faulty memory or a conscious misrepresentation.

What should you do if several versions exist of the same incident? A family historian must do as all historians: make a judgment and decide which is the best version. If there is real doubt, then a footnote in the manuscript could indicate the versions and let the readers make up their own minds. But that is possible only occasionally, since few readers would want to read a family history filled with alternative versions on every page. The solution is to collect as much evidence as possible, hopefully to find some corroborating written evidence, and then to make an informed judgment.

Use of questionnaires. Sociologists utilize fixed questionnaires prepared in advance for most of their interviewing. They are generally interested in generating quantitative data from which they can make
generalizations and comparisons. On occasion a family historian can find a simple questionnaire profitable to use, especially when dealing with a large family. Sample questions from such an exercise might include the following

1. Do you think the family's fortunes have risen or fallen since World War II?

2. Do you approve of the younger members of the family leaving Meadow Ville for other parts of the state?

3. Traditionally, our family has espoused Methodism. Do you approve/disapprove of the younger members shifting to some of the more recent "cult" religions?

Generally speaking, such questionnaires can generate mainly data on attitudes of family members. For large, extended families covering several generations, survey material could be presented on annual income, value of housing, or level of education, in order to present a composite picture of the extended family. To insure impartiality and anonymity, such materials should be obtained with the greatest of care and discretion and preferably with advice from someone trained in survey techniques. (See the Appendix for some examples of questionnaires which have been used in classroom situations and in private research situations.)

Summary

In this chapter we have set out a simple, workable way of proceeding to collect and process oral history interviews. While doing oral tape recordings is new for some, it is increasingly becoming popular, especially since the cassette tape recorder has become such a popular item in many households and schools. Today, historians no longer question the usefulness of oral testimony if it is properly
collected, classified, and critically evaluated. In the case of doing family history, oral evidence is critical for getting at the why, how, and motivating factors pertinent to the family's past. Especially in families that have preserved few documents, the oral tradition may be the primary source of learning about its past. This may be particularly true in families who have been displaced by frequent migrations (for example, Midwestern families emigrating to California during the Great Depression, black families from the South seeking jobs in Detroit during World War II). Access to the old family home may no longer exist or the home itself may no longer exist. Since frequent moving often leads to discarding materials that may be extremely valuable in reconstructing a family's history, oral history must be seen as more than a supplement or complement to written materials. In some instances, oral history interviews may be the bedrock on which the family's history will have to be built.
CHAPTER 9
Collecting Visual Materials

For the family historian, "a picture paints a thousand words"—not having a visual representation of the family member or members under investigation seriously restricts your family history. Knowing how a person looked, dressed, stood, or sat, is revealing in ways that documents cannot begin to approach, especially in our own day when many professionals insist that visual materials be given the same weight and emphasis as written and oral materials. Until recently, photographs, drawings, or paintings of family members were viewed as supplementary materials, but today this has changed: internal analysis of this visual data may reveal relationships and attitudes never before suspected.

Take for example the case of my own family. For years, Great-Grandmother's portrait hung on the wall, a stern reminder of a pioneer woman who single-handedly ran a ranch in New Mexico in the 1890s after her husband had died of blood poisoning on the range. She had led a difficult life and this stress was mirrored in her portrait that greeted me every morning for breakfast. Only forty years later did my image of her change: going through some family materials in a basement, I found an old photo of a woman wearing a stylish bathing suit of the period around the turn of the century; the woman was at the beach. She was my great-grandmother, Margaret Sanders! She was pretty, stylish, and laughed at me from her photo. It was as though I had discovered an entirely new personality; I had misjudged her strictly on the basis of that stern photo hanging in the family kitchen all those years—a photo taken when she was in her eighties.
Because I found the photo from her young adulthood, I was led to make a reassessment that rescued Margaret Sanders from being unfairly stereotyped in my family's history.

Photographs began to appear in the American home in the 1890s with the popularization of small, portable cameras. To be sure, for several decades previously, many photographs were taken, but usually only by professional photographers. Perhaps your family is lucky enough to have photographs handed down for several generations from this much earlier period. Such professional early photographs are highly posed, with people assuming positions and postures that look stilted by today's standards; but we must remember that lenses were not yet perfected for high speed photography; nor was there film with fast speed ratings.

After 1900, the chances of your family having candid snapshots begins to increase somewhat, but for many families, only in the 1920s or 1930s does the family photo album fill up. There are also a few families that started taking moving pictures in the late 20s and 30s; these often are invaluable for getting a visual image of how a person looked and acted. Some families have a surfeit of photographs and you will have to selectively pick and choose; others possess few visual representations and every photo or picture found might well be treasured.

The great prizes in photography are the marvelous family portraits that were fashionable from the turn of the century to World War II. Many of these were finished in rich sepia tones and convey warmth, dignity, and a sense of character much more successfully than black and white processing. Visiting the professional photographer was an
important and formal occasion, and family members wore their best clothes.

The same was true for the individual portrait, often beautifully reproduced on high quality photographic paper, sometimes set in an attractive frame or cardboard folder. Commencement ceremonies were the occasion for the cap and gown photo that decorated many family walls. Starting a new business or gaining a promotion in one's career often caused the head of the household to obtain a professional portrait. In fact, looking at the life cycle may be a useful way of establishing a checklist of photographs to search for at home or among your relatives:

Baby photos. These range from photos taken in the hospital nursery to those taken formally by a professional photographer. As portable cameras became more frequent, more snapshots of babies appear in photo albums. Look for "baby books," which usually have photos in addition to other infant memorabilia.

Children's photos. There are many events in a child's life that parents photograph: a visit to the zoo, a birthday party, a religious baptism or confirmation, the first day of school, a visit to grandparents, a vacation at the seashore or in the mountains.

Adolescence. Young adulthood commonly photographed activities are: sports activities or competitions, first dances, part-time jobs, club memberships, trips to debate tournaments, new outfits, visits to another city, dating and courting, first job, high school graduation, going away to college, college dorm, college social club or activities, or being engaged.

Marriage and family. Marriage photos, honeymoon, new apartment, first child born, trips, vacations, buying a new house, joining a civic club, promotion on the job, etc.

Senior years. Retirement ceremonies, moving to apartment, a vacation cruise, volunteer work, death of a spouse, funerals, visits to children.
In some families, photographs are not kept in one place (in a photo box or photo album) but are kept with other related memorabilia: a letter announcing a promotion may have a photo Dad had taken for the company newsletter; a box of clippings on Mom's activity with the Women's Club may have a photo taken when she served as treasurer.

Group photos are usually taken under different circumstances. In many families, group snapshots are taken when the family gets together for special occasions such as baptisms, confirmations, engagements, marriages, or funerals. Perhaps the most popular excuse for taking photos is an annual celebration, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, or other religious holidays when all the family comes together. A birthday is also an excuse to celebrate, and every family has several birthday "parties" each year. A wedding anniversary also is an occasion to reunite parents and children on an annual basis.

A special note should be mentioned about vacations. Most Americans take an annual vacation, whether relaxing in the backyard, taking the family on a trip to another state, motoring across country with a trailer or camper, exploring a foreign country for two weeks, taking a grand tour of Europe, sailing on a midwinter cruise in the Caribbean, or backpacking in the mountains. Vacations are the favorite time for many "shutter-bugs" to shoot several rolls of film. Chances are that if you go through a typical photo album, the majority of photos of snapshot quality will probably have been taken on vacation. Some families even put away their camera during the year so the resultant photographic record is from vacation to vacation.

Vacations have positive and negative values for the family historian. On the positive side, people are relaxed, activity is usually
informal, and you can see the lighter side of the family. On the negative side, vacation photos may reveal only a glamorous, artificial side of life, with no reference to daily life, day to day activities and surroundings. You should be thankful for any kind of family visual material that can be obtained, but you should be careful how you build up a pictorial image of the family from limited or slanted evidence.

Obtaining Copies of Photos

A frequent problem is similar to what a student of mine, Arthur, encountered in collecting visual materials for his family history: He found that Uncle Peter seemed to be the family repository for old photos, especially those of the great-grandparents and grandparents. Arthur ran into a snag when Uncle Peter told him, "You may look at them all you want in my study, but I will under no circumstances let you borrow them--they're far too valuable and irreplaceable." What can you do in such a situation? Luckily, today there are several solutions for getting copies of valuable family photos.

The best (but most expensive solution) is to ask Uncle Peter if a local professional photographer could borrow a selection of photos for a few days to make reproductions. Few possessors of family treasures would object to that.

A second solution if funds are limited is to propose that you borrow the photos and return them the very same day--if Uncle Peter agrees; take them to a high quality copy center and ask to have the photos reproduced on a copier designed to reproduce photos, such as an IBM, Kodak, or larger model Xerox machine. These copies will never approximate photographs, but they are better than obtaining nothing. Photocopying is also a recommended procedure if you have
decided to have a dozen copies of your research paper on family history duplicated and are wondering how to reproduce the visuals within a limited budget.

A third solution, and the preferred one for the dedicated family historian, is to obtain (borrow, rent, or buy) a 35 mm slide camera, single lens reflex model, equipped with a macro lens for doing close-up photography. Manufacturers such as Nikon, Canon, Pentax, Minolta, and others produce such cameras and lenses which allow you to copy the photographs yourself. This procedure is particularly recommended if Uncle Peter says, "Those photos are so valuable I will not let them out of this house, in fact not out of my sight." Fine! You then ask permission to visit him with your 35mm camera and close-up lens. Unless Uncle Peter is an ogre, he will not object to that.

Doing your own photographic close-ups can be highly rewarding. Many universities have photographic clubs or labs that will allow you to check out this type of camera for 24 hours and also give you basic instruction. Don't be dissuaded from doing this by someone who did close-up work a few years ago and who talks about how difficult it was; today, the whole process has been simplified by several changes:

Macro close-up lenses now can focus from infinity to the size of a postage stamp or smaller—this means you do not have to change lenses at intermittent distances, which used to be tedious and time consuming.

Faster film has recently been developed with ASA speeds of 200 to 400 (or even higher). This means you can do close-up work without a copy stand to hold the camera, which used to be required and was often tedious and expensive. The new fast films allow you to simply point and shoot. You can also eliminate flood lights and shoot by sunlight or good room light. However, if you have access to a portable copy stand, its usage will insure optimum focusing during your copying.
You don't have to be a professional photographer to get excellent results. The only expense (if you can borrow a camera with macro lens) will be purchasing black and white film, getting it developed, and getting a few enlargements of group scenes that may need amplification for clarity.

Another solution is to borrow the photos and take them to your university, college, or adult education photographic facility, where the work might be done for less than a professional photographer would charge. Select a reliable laboratory because many family photos are irreplaceable. The last thing you want to do is to cause a family rift because you lost two dozen valuable and irreplaceable photographs of your grandparents.

If you are dealing with a large number of photographs, you may prefer to have contact prints made at the outset—prints the size of the 35mm negative—saving yourself money. You can then look at the contact prints and choose the photographs that reproduce the best for your purposes and have them printed or enlarged.

Another important technical innovation that is now simplified when doing macrophotography is making close-ups and detailed shots within a given photograph. For example, Figure 9.1 shows typical family photograph. But what if we want to know more about Aunt Camilla on the extreme left hand side—or more about the boy who stands in the middle, who is younger than the rest of the family? The new macro lenses simplify doing this type of close-up work. With a simple twist of the lens, you can focus down and make a detailed shot of what you want. This way, in your discussion of the family's visual sources, you
can pinpoint and highlight certain observations about the family's members. (See Figures _____.)

For another example, consider a crowd scene. Perhaps you are interested in the general crowd, but more specifically you're concerned about the persons standing in one corner. By doing a close-up detail shot, you are able to focus on the persons that really matter for your discussion. Sometimes, close-ups of this variety can reveal details that were lost or not noticed when the detail was part of the larger photograph.

Doing detailed close-ups while making copies of photographs is particularly useful if you decide to do a slide show: collect family photographs, use colored slide film in the camera, and have the slides developed. Slides can be projected for a family presentation, and they can also be copied and made into black and white photos that you could use in the written version of the family history. Perfectionists, however, would do separate slides and black and whites, since making a black and white photo from a slide does not yield equal quality in some instances.

**Other Visual Materials**

While photographs are the largest body and most important segment of pictorial materials available to most families, there are a number of other forms of visual evidence the family historian should look for.

**Paintings.** Before the widespread use of photography, some families had portraits of family groups painted by an artist. Few people today can afford to keep up this practice, but some homes have kept the portraits, mainly in oils, on their walls or in the attic. Families commissioned portraits of children growing up, young persons
in their teens, a young girl upon her engagement, couples upon marriage, a successful businessman at work, and various family scenes. Only the wealthy could afford artists of professional training, but many towns and cities boasted semi-professional or amateur painters who were able to create a good likeness of the subject. These paintings can be valuable evidence for the family historian and should be searched for with the same zeal one would track down photographs.

Assuming you find a painting, how do you make a copy of it for your research and writing? The procedures outlined above for copying photographs also apply for making copies of paintings, but there are a few special considerations. First, you will undoubtedly want to do the photography in color, since most paintings are done in color. You may choose colored slides if your purpose is to project your ancestors onto a screen and study them at your convenience. If you opt for photographic paper reproduction, you will probably want to have the photo enlarged, since the standard 3½ x 5 photo can hardly do justice to a much larger painting. Second, you will need to give serious consideration to using photographic flash equipment to take the photo of the painting, unless it can be moved into the sunlight. Using existing light in a room may not capture the highlights and other subtleties the artist may have intended. If you photograph out of doors, remember that midday sun is usually too bright; better to photograph earlier or later, especially in summer.

If possible, find out something about the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of the painting. There could be an interesting story about how the artist was asked to portray the family. Finding out about the artist should also be attempted, since the artist
or his or her descendants may have other information or drawings connected with the painting. You may also want to interview several family members to find out what they know about the paintings, how they feel about the likenesses, and whether a given painting captures qualities or an essence of a family member.

**Drawings.** Drawings are essentially similar to paintings but may be found more frequently, since drawing in pencil or crayon is a medium open to more artists. Some drawings of value of family members may have been done by amateurs, or in fact by other family members. Small drawings could be successfully photocopied, but the chances are you will want to take close-up photographs of the drawings.

Particular attention should be paid to drawings that show the old family house or homestead. Sometimes these places were never photographed, and a rough drawing is all that is left. In a few instances, oil paintings were done of family homes, but more often than not, if a photograph does not survive, then only a drawing may exist.

**Maps.** Maps showing land acreage were fairly frequent in the 19th century as Americans moved across the plains westward in search of new land. Searching title or abstract companies could be useful, although many families have maps handed down with deeds and other land conveyances. Look for maps that describe the family land, where the residence was, where crops were planted, and where grazing lands existed.

**Objects.** An important visual category that often furnishes concrete and firsthand evidence for family history is that of objects. All types of objects have been conserved by families, from clothing (Great-Aunt Natalie's shawl used in crossing the Atlantic back in 1867)
to guns (Great-Grandfather's rifle used in the Spanish American War). Most objects that have been in the family for one or more generations have an interesting story to tell, if imagination, curiosity, and perseverance are used. And most often, doing the history of objects becomes a province of oral history interviewing, because few people keep a history of the antique tea cups in the cupboard; yet those tea cups may well suggest a colorful family history story.

Objects may range from the precious, such as jewelry or gems, to the mundane, such as boots or a horse whip. Objects may convey an intimate association with one person (Grandmother's teakettle); association with the entire family (a crib used for four generations of Smiths); or association with an interest the family possesses (books collected over several generations). Objects may be the only shred of existing evidence linking the family to the old country (a tool kit brought over by Great-Grandfather Schmidt, who was a carpenter). Objects all have a story behind them, and if they have been associated with some intimate aspect of the family's past, they should be examined carefully and brought up as a subject in an oral history interview.

A note of caution is in order. Make certain that you possess some hard evidence as to the authenticity of the object. If Aunt Elsie has a tea set she tells you came over from England with her grandmother, and the teacups have "Made in Japan" stamped on the bottom, then something is wrong. Sometimes people forget, or get mixed up, or indeed, objects may get mixed up and the wrong story gets attached to an object. If you want to use an object as part of your evidence for family history, you are responsible to verify the legitimacy of the object and how long it has been possessed by the family. A household
SOME VISUAL SOURCES FOR FAMILY HISTORY

DRAWING of relative in the 1920s

PAINTING of 18th century ancestor

SILVER SERVICE (above) in family for 5 generations

BOOTS belonging to Confederate officer (side)

MAP showing family farm in 1880s
COMMUNITY VISUAL SOURCES FOR FAMILY HISTORY

LAW OFFICE for B. Smith (above); family church (below); Dad's old grocery store (right).

STEEL factory (above); local high school (below left); old family home with 1934 family auto, on Locust Street (bottom).
object's age may be verified by an antique dealer; a piece of clothing may be dated by a costume specialist at a larger art museum; an old lantern on the family porch said to have been the first lantern in town may be dated by the local historical society.

When doing an inventory of documentary materials that might be used for your family history research, explore the history of certain objects connected with the family. You probably will not have time to pursue all objects and should therefore be selective, choosing those which seem to have the richest association with the life and times of family members.

Once the object has been authenticated and you find it lends itself to unfolding the family's history, then you might want to photograph it for inclusion with copies of photographs and other visual materials. Thus, several objects could easily be as important as an old family photograph or a family deed in helping you piece together the family history. (See Figures ____.)

**Houses and Buildings**

If your family still possesses a house that goes back several generations, you are fortunate. Most people in this modern industrial society, with its geographical and social mobility, change residence several times during their lives. Staying rooted in the old family homestead simply is no longer a fact of life for most Americans. But for those who do have access, the house may become an important visual resource on its own. If your family still owns the house, then it can be studied at your leisure. Interviews about the house, when it was built, what important family events took place there, how people lived, and why the family bought it will add much to your research.
Deeds, mortgages, land taxes, or improvements may furnish documentary evidence to hold the story together. Photos can be taken of the exterior of the house, showing its setting within the neighborhood; how it was landscaped; how it has been modified over the years; and in which architectural style it was designed.

Photos can also be taken of the inside, reconstructing how the family lived. One successful method is to invite the most elderly members of the family to visit the house and to record their memories with a tape recorder. Photos can be taken of rooms, furnishings (if still part of the family tradition), and paintings on the wall.

Other buildings might be of equal value. For examples consider the importance of an apartment formerly lived in by the family; an old barn; a building with a shop the family once owned; an office building where Uncle Jake practiced dentistry. Photos of such places plus the local church, grammar school, high school, neighborhood grocery, next door neighbor's house, factory, mine, farm, or store can all be of value in reconstructing how the family lived. (See Figures _____.)

*   *   *

While visual sources cannot usually help you construct the main lines of your family history narrative, photos, drawings, maps, and other evidence of this type can add a dimension to your work not possible in any other way. Often it takes a cumulative effort—finding a photo here, a drawing there, an old map from another relative—to finally produce a visual portrait of your family. That extra effort will yield great dividends when it comes time to publish or make a public presentation of your completed family history.
Part IV

CLASSIFYING AND CRITIQUING
CHAPTER 10
Classifying Sources

These next two short chapters cover two essential steps in doing family history: classifying your source materials, so that they can easily be used when you move to the writing stage, and doing a critical assessment of the evidence you have collected.

So far, the family historian has been like an investigative reporter—looking for written, oral, and visual materials. Now it is time to explore two other professional skills: the archivist's for organizing your sources, and the judge's for weighing your evidence.

Organizing and weighing evidence separates the amateur from the professional in doing historical research and writing. The same criteria apply to the family historian, who must organize the raw materials—diaries, deeds, clippings, notes, scrapbooks, vital statistics—and judge them, critically evaluating the nature, authenticity, veracity, and usefulness of the sources. Remember our archivist friend mentioned in the beginning of Chapter 7, whose great success in collecting was as a "vacuum sweeper," someone who saved everything? All great collectors eventually must evaluate their materials since they do not collect everything and then hide it under the rug. The moment of truth is now, when the quality and content of the source material is fresh on your mind. The best sources need to be retained and properly classified, the others thrown out, stored, or returned to their owners.

Let's assume that you have collected enough material to determine precisely where you are in doing this family history project. It may be that some materials haven't yet come in (perhaps Cousin Lucinda has
promised you photocopies of several wills), but you should not wait
until the last minute to organize. Once you have collected enough
material to classify, the best advice is to begin. For one thing,
classifying your material helps you see weaknesses in documenting your
story. If you find that in doing the life history of Grandfather you
have a box full of memorabilia from the 1920s and 1930s but nothing
from the 1940s, then you should make a special effort to close that gap.
Getting your materials classified helps you to pinpoint problem areas in
collecting before it is too late, before you face a deadline.

Written materials. The bulk of what you have collected should be
in written materials, whether original or printed, primary or secondary.
The question now is, how can I organize all of these materials, which
exist in diverse formats and come from diverse places, into a meaningful
sequence so that I can use them in writing?

The first choice of most researchers is to organize material on a
chronological basis. That is, sort out everything, put a date on it,
and then classify it by year. However, for most persons, using a five
year system might be preferable, unless you have an immense amount of
material within a certain time period.

I strongly recommend that you bring your original and photocopied
materials together in manila file folders (available at all stationery
stores in two sizes: 8-1/2 x 11 or 8-1/2 x 14). For most projects, the
smaller letter size folder will be sufficient.

Your research outline should stand you in good stead now,
especially if it was done chronologically. You can use it or you can
divide up the life of the person in question into five year segments and
classify your materials accordingly. Your classifying scheme might look like this:

GRANDFATHER YABLONSKI

Five year segments

1895 Born in Poland
1900 Comes to USA, childhood
1905 Adolescence, schooling
1915 Finishes school, first job, World War I
1920 Marriage, new job
1925 Three children born
1930 Coping with the depression
1935 Moves to Wisconsin, new job
1940 Defense, war work
1945 Sets up own business, first grandchildren
1950 Business fails, new job
1955 Moves to California, sets up new business
1960 Retirement, death of Grandmother
1965 Second marriage, travel, death in 1969

Under this scheme, you would need fourteen manila folders for classifying your work. Chances are that for some five year segments, you would have too much material for just one manila file folder. Take for example the period 1945-1950, when Grandfather set up his first business. You have fortunately found a wealth of original business materials that add a great deal to his life story. In that instance, you might want to set up a folder for each year. Set up your filing scheme so that it can benefit you. It needs to have some structure, but let the structure be flexible enough to include what you want.

Another way of classifying materials that could either be an alternative or supplement to the chronological method is the topical method. Let us look at a situation in collecting materials that might lead to this solution. Randolph did research on his maternal grandmother, Olivia Brown, and was able to bring together enough material to flesh out the life cycle outline very nicely. Olivia was an
aviatrix involved in flying air races in the 1930s, and she also ferried American bombers to Britain during World War II. She retired from active aviation roles in the 1950s. There is about a twenty-year period when Olivia enjoyed a fascinating career, and Randolph decides he wants to emphasize this. He decides to employ a topical approach as his main organizational approach combining it with some basic chronology:

MY GRANDMOTHER, OLIVIA BROWN, PIONEER IN AVIATION

File Folders (Chronological)

1. Birth to High School
2. College to Marriage
3. Marriage, family centered events
4. Retirement

File Folders (Topical)

1. Learning to Fly, 1933-35
2. Cleveland air races, 1936-39
3. Personal appearances, 1937-40
4. Flight instructorship, 1940-41
5. Wartime service, 1941-45
6. Experiences over the North Atlantic
7. Experiences in Britain
8. Running flight school after war, 1946-49
9. Transcontinental race, 1950, and retirement

In this case, Randolph organized the voluminous material lent him by his grandmother and emphasized the topical area of her interest in aviation. Her aviation career becomes the central part of his classification and will become the main focus of this research effort. The first four folders contain the regular materials pertaining to the normal phases of the life cycle, and the other nine folders tell in detail Olivia Brown's special interest. Note that Randolph has attempted to organize the topical materials in a chronological sequence as far as is possible.
It may be instructive to look at another example of topical classification, in this instance when the materials do not have much chronological validity: the example is that of Hester, whose Aunt Sylvia was an artist. Aunt Sylvia, who is now dead, was reared in Boston but was educated in England. There she studied painting and later spent ten years in Paris working with several noted French painters. Sylvia then returned to the United States where, for the fifteen years before her death in a car accident, she became a well-known painter. Hester found very little about Aunt Sylvia's life abroad but was given Sylvia's notebooks, letters, and account books detailing her fifteen years of painting in the United States. Sylvia did portraits, landscapes, seascapes, and other types of painting. Here is how Hester classifies materials found:

A PROFESSIONAL PAINTER: MY AUNT SYLVIA

File Folders:

2. Sylvia in London
3. Sylvia in Paris
4. Sylvia sets up shop in Houston
5. Early clients, 1952-1956
6. Commissions for portraits
7. Charcoal drawings
8. Move to Coast of Maine and seascape period, 1949-1951
9. Landscape paintings and clients
10. Showings of Sylvia, 1944-1959

So you can see from these two examples that in order to classify your materials, you can arrange them either in sequential chronological order without regard to topical material, or you can arrange materials according to topics that form the basic themes in your subject's life. Naturally, if your interest was in the educational attainment of your
family members, then you would set up a series of topical files for the six family members you chose to investigate.

One great advantage in procuring photocopies of original family materials you have seen is that they can now be classified and form part of the corpus of material you can preserve. In lieu of this, of course, you can take notes; and for synthesizing research materials in your mind, note taking is recommended. But the ease of photocopying and its relative low price strongly argue for attempting to copy the original document and then placing that in your classification folders at least for archival purposes.

What of notes, whether taken on cards, on slips of paper, or in a notebook? There are two solutions. The better of the two is to keep them separate from the original or copied materials you are classifying in your folders. Then when you are writing up your project, you would consult first of all the file folders with the original and copied materials, then your notebook or cards with the written notes. A second solution is to put your notes into the same relevant folders. If you don't have too many written materials, that solution should work well.

Probably the best advice on classifying materials is if in doubt, classify them in a way that they are useful to you in writing. There is no "one way" or "right way." If you feel you can devise a better system for organizing your materials, so they have some sequential or logical arrangement, then you should do it.

A summary is a useful device that may be helpful for persons dealing with voluminous collections of materials. An example would be the case of Uncle Ralph, who collected twenty-four scrapbooks related
to his career and hobby. How is it possible to file that material in your folders? The answer, of course, is that it is not practicable; moreover, you may not want to take formal notes on all that material. So one solution is to do a summary, or précis, of what is in each one of those scrapbooks, to give you a mental reminder when writing up your materials. The summary could be placed in the file folders with the other original materials.

Another useful device most researchers use is an index, which is particularly helpful for locating specific materials on family members if a great number of sources need to be consulted. An index simply lists a number of basic topics and where they are found in your source materials—what those basic topics are is for you to decide. Let’s assume that your Grandfather Zachary, who edited a small town newspaper in Ohio, died last year and left fifteen boxes of materials. There is no point in organizing those boxes in folders, especially if Grandmother wishes them to stay as they are. The solution here is to make a topical index to the materials, since Grandmother will let you use them as you wish. The index then becomes your conceptual tool for using that wealth of source material. For example:

**INDEX OF ZACHARY GREENS’S PAPERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic Affairs</th>
<th>Political Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Box 3, file 3, 4, 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 4, file 6, 7</td>
<td>Box 2, (entire box)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 7, file 13</td>
<td>Box 7, file 6, 7, 9</td>
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<td>Box 10, file 1, 2, 4</td>
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<tr>
<th>Managing the Newspaper</th>
<th>Grandpa’s editorials</th>
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<td>Box 5, file 3, 4, 7, 8</td>
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<td>Box 8, file 4, 6, 10</td>
<td>Box 8, file 1, 2, 7</td>
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</table>
Make certain that you do not confuse a topical index with an inventory; an index helps you locate various topics, whereas an inventory gives you a summary of the contents contained in a box of materials. You may well want to do an inventory, too, of a collection of the size described above.

Classifying Oral Sources

One reason some historians are skeptical of using oral interviews is that they believe they are too hard to classify for convenient use. Today, there are several ways of making oral materials more accessible.

First, if you have carried out the instructions for indexing your tapes, as set out in the last part of Chapter 8, you already have in your possession a convenient and efficient way of locating materials on tape. But for some researchers, this is not enough, since it only tells what is contained on a particular tape and doesn't give you a wider overview of topics treated in the tapes.

If you wish to remedy that situation, then you will need to develop an oral history topical index. This is not complicated—it can be done fairly easily. All you need to do is establish what the major topics in your oral history interviews are—that is, assuming there are some common themes. Write out these themes on a sheet of paper:

THEMES IN LIFE HISTORY OF UNCLE WILLARD

A. Childhood
B. Years at U.S. Naval Academy
C. Service in Korean War
D. Assignment at Pentagon
E. Service in Mediterranean
F. Retirement/New Boat Business
G. New Resort at Lake Pinewood
H. Speed Races
Then when you listen to your tapes, you can easily jot down the counter number for sections which tell about these themes:

A. Willard's Childhood:

Aunt Julia: 105-156, 189-234
Mother: 456-523
Grandmother Jones: 110-156, 198-254
Uncle Willard: 023-145

What this means is that you have interviewed four family members and have logged the place in the tape where they discuss Uncle Willard's childhood: Aunt Julia, your mother, Grandmother, and Uncle Willard himself.

Why even bother doing oral history indexing? If you have more than several oral history interviews, it is well worth the small amount of extra time and effort to do it, because it pulls together the oral history materials topically when you are writing up your family history. But if you have only done one or two tapes, you could easily get by with a simple index for each individual tape.

Both the individual index and topical index are useful, especially on larger projects. The individual index is your guide to the subject matter in each individual interview, and the topical index provides you with coverage for all the interviews. Using both of these simple techniques insures that your oral history interviews will be useful and accessible when you write.

Some people type up their oral history interviews or have them typed up professionally. In that case, you would still need to index the interview both individually and for the group of interviews—so indexing is useful whether or not you have the tape transcribed. There are, naturally, great advantages to using a typed interview: the
eye can scan much more quickly than the ear, which must absorb information sequentially. Most professional oral history projects type up tapes. But my own experience during the past few years has shown that the family historian can make do very nicely with the dual indexing system described above. It takes a bit of extra time but costs very little and yields great dividends.

An important note: you must do all the interviewing on the same tape recorder since you will need to refer to the same digital counter for each interview. Digital counters have a tendency to be different from one brand of tape recorder to the next. If possible, use the same machine or at least the same brand and model for the most accurate results.

Classifying Visual Sources

In most cases, classifying visual materials is not a problem. As photographs, maps, and drawings are found, you should establish a separate file in your family archives for them. Some historians prefer to keep their visuals with the main body of material; that is, if you have found old letters, a scrapbook, and ledgers from Uncle Walt, then you may also want to keep the 39 photos given you with the same sources. Other historians prefer to set up a separate file for visuals and would put a summary list and description of the photos with the written materials of Uncle Walt. The photos would be stored separately.

A good common sense rule might be if you have only a modest number of visual sources, keep them with the materials they support; if on the other hand you find a large assortment of items, it would be
preferable to set up a complementary "photo archive." If the latter is your choice then turn to Chapter 17 for suggestions on how to proceed.
CHAPTER 11
Critiquing Sources

One of the most stimulating challenges facing the student in law school is to study the rules of evidence. In a court of law, there are various procedures, safeguards, and rules surrounding how evidence may be introduced into a trial. The attorney preparing his case for trial meticulously weaves his evidence together to form a pattern, which will be his plea, argument, or rebuttal.

The rules of evidence in the field of history are not so formal or codified, but they are just as real. History demands that source material be weighed, criticized, and evaluated with the same care used in a court of law. The goal of history is to discover the truth of the past, but this discovery is difficult unless sources which stand the test of assessment are used. This section is designed to discuss how the family historian can evaluate the personal sources collected.

I have already discussed the value of original versus secondary sources: written or oral sources from an eyewitness observer or a participant are the most reliable and credible. Establishing the credibility of sources is important to the family historian, since in most cases you cannot go to the library or archives and consult deposited material verified as authentic by a professional archivist.

In most cases, the family historian is able, with the help of family members, to establish the authenticity of family documents. If a letter or photograph is not identified, yet appears to be important, recourse should be made to having knowledgeable family members identify the materials in question. Photos are usually a problem in many families because people rarely take the time to write the date, place, and name.
of persons in the photo on the back of the photo. Thousands of old photos are thrown out each year by families who are no longer able to identify persons, many of whom are now deceased. Local historical societies often receive family albums of photos that have no identifying captions. If in doing research you come across original materials such as letters, legal documents, or photos, and they are undated or unidentified, strive to get them properly labeled while you are collecting your evidence.

Besides authenticity, there are other questions to be asked in evaluating evidence:

Is this the best evidence available? If Uncle Harry tells you an interesting story about Grandfather, do you settle for Harry's account, which may be exaggerated or do you try to find a letter in which Grandfather himself describes the incident that Harry mentions? Perhaps the situation may be reversed; you find an old letter telling about a family problem. Do you let that suffice or do you ask an aunt whom you know to be knowledgeable about the period when the problem occurred? Always ask yourself, have I gone the extra mile and tried to locate the best evidence that is available?

Is a high proportion of my evidence original material? The desirable answer here is "yes," but in some instances family historians may have to settle for secondary sources, especially if they are writing about a relative living in a part of the country that is inaccessible for one reason or another. The ideal situation is to collect and verify a high proportion of primary original source materials. If you are finding a high proportion of secondary, derivative source materials, your family
history may lack clarity, freshness, and authoritativeness. If possible, take steps to remedy this before you write up the history.

Do my pieces of evidence reinforce each other? Often students of history will pick up bits and pieces of evidence here and there but never stop to examine whether the pieces fit together. Every historical project is bound to have sources that conflict with one another or have discrepancies that can't be explained. But a good test of the evidence you have accumulated is to examine whether information from letters support information from clippings; whether a story told in an oral history interview supports the same story as mentioned in a diary; whether a newspaper clipping bears out an item seen in a family business ledger. Just because something is written down or printed does not mean it is authentic.

What do you do if your evidence doesn't match up? In that case, which would probably only occur to segments of your source material, the best advice is to keep digging until you unearth the truth. Once in a while the historian comes to a dead end. If this happens to you, one solution is to mention both versions in a footnote—anecdote A as told by Grandfather, and anecdote A as told by Uncle Jack. Then suggest that the reader may want to choose. This is not, however, the best solution, since the main job of the historian is to interpret the past and make judgments. Weighing the evidence should be your job in most instances and not the reader's.

What if there are gaps in my source materials? This is normal for many historical projects. Take for example a history of John Rideout, a maternal great-grandfather, who was a merchant in St. Louis during the 1890s. The family has preserved clippings from the St. Louis
newspapers about his activity in business, civic affairs, and military service in the Spanish-American War. But there is a gap from 1906 to 1916 because a flood destroyed family scrapbooks and clippings for those years. What do you do? The resourceful family historian might scan copies of the St. Louis newspapers for the ten year missing period and interview older relatives who may remember hearing about John Rideout's activities during those years. Further research, asking more questions, and being persistent are all essential to plug gaps in the evidence.

What if a sustained effort fails? Then the historian must be prepared to hypothesize, to infer what may have happened during those missing years on the basis of what happened before and after. Sometimes the historian has to go out on a limb; the trick is to never go out too far. The researcher is much like the detective, who must play hunches, who must theorize, who must be able to synthesize. The best historians always stay as close as possible to the evidence. But in writing about John Rideout, it would be rather lazy to say, "Between 1906 and 1916 we know nothing of Mr. Rideout." Rather, one might write, "Although the sources between 1906 and 1916 were destroyed, we can surmise from comparing a newspaper clipping in 1916 to the ledger sheets of his accountant in 1906 that Mr. Rideout's business had doubled in volume since 1906. Also Aunt Lila told a detailed anecdote about John's trip to Europe during three months of 1912, indicative of the success he was beginning to have in his store."

Idle speculation or fanciful imaginings have little place in serious history. They belong to the world of fiction. But history at times must build bridges between pieces of evidence. It is the responsibility
of the family historian to be imaginative in reconstructing what happened, following the evidence closely, and then making conclusions on the basis of common sense.

What if I have only one source to document an important point? In this case the best procedure is to "hedge"--not to write absolutely and unquestioningly about the incident, event, or episode. An exception would be a notarized birth certificate; one can usually rely on such vital statistical sorts of materials. But the best test for the family historian is that used by the famous investigative reporters of the Washington Post in the Watergate affair, Woodward and Bernstein, upon the demand of their managing editor, to always "corroborate with two reliable sources." If you have two reliable sources, whether written, oral, or visual, then you should be in a position to write with some confidence.

How should you handle "hearsay"? This is a particular villain for family history, since family members often like to repeat stories or anecdotes. Many of these stories reach the family third or fourth hand. It is important to ask the question, "Was my source an eyewitness? Did he have firsthand knowledge of the event?" If the answer is negative, then you will want to weigh very carefully how much credibility you give to the source. If it is corroborated by several other secondary sources, then it might have some validity. But there is no substitute for the eyewitness or participant as opposed to the person "who heard about it second hand."

Family traditions or legends. A thorny problem for historians are traditions handed down in families; traditions are difficult to verify by normal rules of evidence. For example, tradition in my family has it
that a seventeenth century founding ancestor was a well-known pirate, but efforts to uncover specific details about this have failed to date. In some families, colorful stories may surround the first person from the old country to emigrate to the United States. Such traditions or legends should not be discarded; in fact, there is a branch of learning, folklore studies, which treats many aspects of this. The best rule of thumb is that if you can't verify it, but it seems as though it may have a reasonable basis in fact, ascribe it to "tradition" or "family folklore." Many specialists feel that such stories, often handed down from generation to generation, even though they may become exaggerated in time, are valuable indicators of values held in the family group or they may indicate attitudes family members held about manners or mores. But unless you can substantiate such stories or traditions with some basic documentary evidence (written, oral, or visual), then they should be attributed to "family tradition." Such stories may be rich sources for establishing the uniqueness of your family, one of the main goals of the family historian.

What about skeletons in the family closet? Another perplexing problem is what to do about sensitive issues that the family has kept buried for years? Inevitably, digging for family history materials means the researcher will unearth long-buried problems or issues: For example, illegitimate children, annulments, divorces, and other events considered scandalous in some communities in the past were often kept secret. Other embarrassing issues might be bankruptcy or being forced to move from one town to another for bad debts or other financial reasons.
Much depends on your family's willingness to let you dig into the past. Some families feel they have much to hide, others have nothing to conceal. It is a wise idea, however, when you feel that you are probing into a sensitive area to stop and ask the counsel of someone in the family you respect (and trust) before moving on. Often sensitive areas don't really hide very much by modern standards and many "skeletons" turn out to be insignificant. In some instances, the problem itself may not tell you much about the family, but the attitude the family took towards the problem may reveal a great deal about shared values.

Family wishes for privacy should be respected. Family history is a poor place for aspiring investigative reporters to cut their teeth and dig up scandalous materials; there are plenty of other arenas such as government and business to investigate in that way. Doing family history today is to undertake a balancing act—on the one hand, if you ignore problems or issues in the family's background and gloss over such things, you will wind up with sugar-coated family history that will be of no greater value than the family crests or coats-of-arms that are sold through the mail to families searching for roots or respectability. On the other hand, digging up materials or problems still regarded as sore points in the family could do real harm to family unity and morale, causing hard feelings and hostility.

What about heavily biased materials? In some families a person may leave letters justifying a particular course of action, for example, in selling valuable property held in the family for several generations. The actual reasons may have been to sell to a syndicate that one family member was connected to in order to turn a handsome profit. Unless
the family historian is alert, digs into the sources, and raises questions, the notion that "Grandfather's old place was finally sold to pay the taxes" might go down in the family history unchallenged.

In other words, a healthy skepticism should be employed by the family historian in looking at all documents, in hearing all family stories and accounts from memory. Be warned that human nature is such that many persons will want to justify why they did (or did not do) something. You may be presented only one side of the story, and unless you are able to dig deeper, you run the risk of repeating only that one side in your historical account.

Now, this should not be a matter to unduly worry the family historian—no one should throw up their hands in despair and say "I give up!" It is rather a frame of mind that you should have in approaching family members for source materials. Keep in mind that most people are not really too different from the proverbial politician who always wants to present himself in the best possible light. We all do it. But a historian should try his best to be objective.

**Summary.** Being able to look with a critical eye at the materials collected for your family history is a challenging assignment because diaries, letters, scrapbooks, and oral testimonies are personal statements. Trying to be objective about such personal memorabilia requires the family historian to be constantly alert. Exercising good judgment is easier if the entire project is kept in focus: as the bits of evidence come in, ask the question, "What does this new piece of evidence add to what I already know?" If the fresh piece of evidence doesn't add very much, or if you actually know quite a bit without having to use it, then you might want to discard it. Cultivate the
ability to look at the larger research design, "the big picture," and critically evaluate your source materials accordingly.
Part V
CORRELATING YOUR HISTORY:
OR, PUTTING IT IN CONTEXT
CHAPTER 12
THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL HISTORY

Until the decade of the 1970s, local history often was the preserve of the antiquarian. That meant it was often considered a "backwater" for professional historians and left to the amateurs. This was not all bad, since many amateurs (and antiquarians) did an excellent job of collecting local happenings. The failing, however, was often in the way in which the "local historians" went about their business. They tended to be myopic, not realizing that although certain facets of their town's history were unique, their story was an oft-repeated one very much like that of communities elsewhere in the region or country.

During the past ten years, many professional historians, led by urban, community, and family historians, and even political historians, have rediscovered the community. They have found local history ready for professional analysis. In many cases, local historical societies have accumulated a wealth of data waiting for the analytical mind of the professional historian to mold into articles and books.

There are many reasons for the recent resurgence of local history. Local history was once a vibrant enterprise in many places by the end of the nineteenth century. In some areas, it almost disappeared during the 1920s, reappeared briefly in New Deal sponsored writers' projects in the 1930s, and was all but forgotten by the war years of the 1940s and the prosperity years of the 1950s. One cause for its comeback was the legacy of the 1960s with emphasis on racial and ethnic pride; much of this pride was transferred to the level of the group, neighborhood, or town; each community now began to assess its own worth and uniqueness. This was a reaction to the highpoint of integration that
was reached during World War II, when many groups strove to bury their ethnic and national origins in an attempt to become "more American" and part of the melting pot.

This was further influenced by the American Bicentennial of 1976, when millions of Americans became more aware of both their local and national origins. The Bicentennial also caused many local historical societies to upgrade their activities by adding staff (in some cases the first professional help) and by helping to raise the consciousness of Americans about their own local heritage. The activity of many heritage, genealogical, and national origins societies increased and then received a great boost from the telecast of Alex Haley's *Roots*, a mini-series which symbolized a renewed American preoccupation with origins, families, ethnic groups, and communities.

Parallel to this popular development, scholars took a fresh look at the local scene and concluded that the literature was in need of refurbishing, and that new techniques (such as demography, quantitative history, oral history, historical preservation) could open up fresh horizons and create a full agenda for serious researchers. Larger historical societies now worked hand in hand with professional historians to help unravel the past history of cities, towns, suburbs, ghettos, neighborhoods, and even city blocks. This congruence of interest of local persons, groups, and institutions was also stimulated by the nationwide growth of organizations such as the American Association for State and Local History, which provided a means for local interests and scholars to come together through seminars and annual conferences.
Today the local and regional scene is the focal point of serious historical research, much of it at the cutting edge of innovation and originality. Within this context, the family historian who is interested in integrating local history can take advantage of new archives, expanded collections, updated bibliographies, oral history collections, photo repositories, demographic data banks, and other new developments.

Where do you begin? The first requirement for correlation at the local level is to find out in what ways your family related to mainstream events in the community that may be on record at the library, historical society, or special collections reading room. Take for instance the subject of voluntary associations: Was Grandfather a member of Rotary Club? It is quite possible the historical society has a collection of scrapbooks and memorabilia from the 1940s that could be helpful. Despite the fact that photos of the club are missing from the early 1940s, when Grandfather was active, the clippings and other mementos give a clear idea of what service projects the club undertook and how and why they were concerned with scholarships, getting the town's outlying streets paved, and boosting business. This information may tie in with some letters you found in Grandfather's old trunk; it may be a way of seeing how his participation in community affairs in the 1940s prepared the way for the many boards, committees, and other town service groups he participated in during the 1950s and 1960s.

Or take the example of labor in the local textile factory; whereas many members of your family had worked in the mills since the late 1880s, the depression years of the 1930s caused the mills to shut down and your family to move to the South, creating major changes for your
extended family. Looking at the mill's old records, now preserved in the historical society, could help you gain insight into the problems the family faced during that difficult period in the community.

Another example of correlating your family's history to the community would be to look at the tax and property assessment records at city hall (or the county courthouse). These records could help you trace the places your family lived in the city over the past sixty years. Or assume that your family moved to the community only fifteen years ago—what could you find that would be helpful? In that instance, daily newspapers on file at the local newspaper office might help you recreate the campaign to build a new civic auditorium that Dad was heavily involved in; or some articles might shed light on the football career of Cousin Rob, who went from stardom in local sports to an NFL contract. Or if the local college has maintained an oral history collection, there may be tapes on file that tell about the mental health committee that Mother was involved in.

Your focus must come from your family's involvement in the community; once you have found out what that involvement was, then you can start finding the relevant local sources. If your uncle was head of the school board, then consult the school district minutes and records. If your aunt was the driving force behind the "clean up the city" campaign, then consult the records of the City Beautification Committee.

There are exceptions. Perhaps your community was hit by a tornado twelve years ago; it partially destroyed your family's house and injured several family members. This was an involuntary involvement on your family's part in a community tragedy that had lasting effects on
both the town and family. You need to consult newspapers, interview neighbors, visit the Red Cross, and talk with the local disaster unit to supplement and flesh out the painful memories etched in the minds of the members of your family.

**Identification of Areas of Congruence**

How can you find out how your family's own history fits in with the main topics of local-regional history? Perhaps the best way is to proceed in two directions--at the same time! First, you should talk to your family members to find out their memories and ideas about community involvement. Second, at the same time, conduct a survey, with the help of local historical sources, of the most important happenings and trends in the city's history during the time your family has resided there. By doing a simultaneous reconnaissance, you should be able to find points of overlap and congruence to investigate.

There are several basic categories to keep in mind as you search for the correlation between your family and the community. These categories are not all-inclusive and may suggest other points of departure: events, conditions, issues, institutions, groups, and personalities.

**Events.** Essential for both family and community history is a knowledge of the main events that have taken place. For the family this could include Dad serving on the water board or Mother registering voters for the city elections; for the community, it could be the debate on whether to close down three schools in the district (Dad was on the school board) or the election of Mr. Burroughs as mayor (Mother was active in the campaign). Using the events-approach, you need to sit down and discuss with relevant family members which events in the life
of the family impinged upon the community. A sample might read like this:

1924 Grandfather head of committee to inquire into telephone service
1926 Grandmother treasurer of church's ladies auxiliary
1928 Grandfather regional delegate for Lion's Club convention
1930 Uncle John serves on mayor's committee on unemployment in the city
1934 Aunt Jane becomes member of community players workshop
1935 Grandfather elected to term on neighborhood incorporation council
1938 Grandmother heads hospital auxiliary
1942 Uncle John leads War Bond drive

Another way of looking at events would be the following:

1942 Decision made by Hooper Co. to expand steel wire plant for war effort; Dad made assistant foreman
1945 Hooper Co. expands to suburbs; Dad appointed foreman
1948 High school expands; Mom offered job in office of principal
1950 Regional talent show: Cousin Svetlana wins; launches her dancing career
1953 Union election: Dad becomes president
1956 Local strike hits family for six weeks
1958 Interstate highway construction means family must sell house and move to new neighborhood

In the first example, it is the person of the family who is relating to community events; in the second case, it is the community event that has made an impact upon the person or family. And in the case of the
second approach, you would need to ask family members (or look at records at the historical society) about events in the community life which had an influence upon the family. Some communities or regions have books or guides which give a basic chronological background for city or county history; these might be used as a checklist of important events; take this list and discuss it with your family to see which events they remember as influential.

Events could be drawn from a person's life cycle, from the family cycle, or from the "community cycle"—since often communities have their ups and downs, some cities rise and fall, but others continue to grow. Each city has its own particular rhythm.

Conditions. In some instances, particular events which can be dated are less important to the family than certain conditions which may have prevailed in the community. Take, for example, the aftermath of a hurricane; the town may have been involved in reconstruction for three years. That creates a condition which may have affected the family physically (some members injured during the storm; one sister hurt by a piece of ceiling that fell from a weakened roof six months later) or affected them economically (factory closed for six months of repairs; benefits gave out after three months). A condition may be an economic one, a social one (for example, the effects of discrimination in the school system in the city before the Supreme Court desegregation cases), or a health condition (such as an outbreak of polio that resulted in one cousin dying and a brother being crippled).

Perhaps the condition was imposed from outside: during World War II some towns were declared "off limits"—perhaps that situation struck Grandfather's tavern and almost put him out of business. Or maybe
the railroad decided to move its main line to another town ten miles away, bypassing your town; the resulting condition ruined Uncle Bob's fruit packing business until he was able to contract for a fleet of trucks.

Perhaps the city went through a condition of political corruption, in which your uncle and cousins lost their jobs at city hall because of political fighting in the party. Or maybe your neighborhood became a victim of a decaying condition of blight as people moved to new areas.

The other way of approaching conditions would be to look at the situation in your family: because Dad had a heart condition and was forced to give up work, it meant that several older brothers in the family had to go to work and leave school; one even had to leave town because of lack of employment opportunities. Or consider the condition created by the grandparents, who lost their house in a fire: moving in with the family created a new set of circumstances that eventually led to help from the parish welfare office.

**Issues.** Sometimes issues are important for the family. Take the case of a political election; some family members back one party, other family members back the opposition. Tempers flare and some members don't speak to each other for weeks as a result of being divided on the issues the candidates represent. A different situation may be caused by family perceptions on a social and religious issue such as birth control; the net effect of differences may be one branch of the family changing its religious affiliation.

In one city, an important issue in the community was whether to construct an elevated freeway through the downtown area; some family members originally favored it but later realized the freeway would
bypass the family business and leave it almost inaccessible. How the family got into the campaign to defeat the express freeway and managed to do it becomes an important chapter in family loyalty and togetherness.

Perhaps some of the issues that faced the city over the past twenty years did not affect your family directly; if that was the case, then a different direction could be taken: in order to find the "intellectual outlook" of the family, compile a list of issues that confronted the community over the years, and see how the family "voted" on each one. Another way of proceeding would be to ask, "What has the family's policy been on these six key issues in the past ten years?" That type of question could be particularly stimulating, especially if you had knowledgeable and cooperative oral history interviewees. Finding out the viewpoint or policy of the family could be just as interesting as exploring the impact of an issue on the family.

Institutions. We are all surrounded by a host of institutions: schools, churches, businesses, government offices, banks, utilities, transportation systems. What has been the relationship between the family and the key institutions in the community? Did your family become staunch supporters of parochial schools and spend much time with their committees and activities? Did your father spend much of his free time on the board of the Good Samaritan Hospital, working for better patient care and facilities? Did Cousin Len work for the city's transit system as a planner for ten years and leave his mark on the community? The main question is what institutions was your family actively involved in? In which were they employed? In which were they asked to take a volunteer role?
In most local history situations, there will not usually be a history of various institutions in the community; you may have to track down important information from original sources. Some people's lives are rarely affected directly by institutions in the community (most everybody is indirectly affected), but most of us are influenced in some way. Finding out what impact institutions may have had leads to some fascinating insights into family and community history.

Groups. Closely related to the main social, economic, and political institutions of your city are the various groups that make up the community. Most prominent in many communities are ethnic, national origins, and religious groups. In fact, these groups are important for several reasons: for the political impact they often have, for their cultural contributions, for their aggregation in certain industries, and for their influence in the way the community uses its space. Often parts of a city will be staked out by an ethnic national origins group, or religious group; for example, some sections of cities are predominantly Catholic, Jewish, or Greek Orthodox.

Much depends on your family background. Some families have become integrated and have lost touch with national origins or ethnicity; other families have become highly secular, often as the result of interfaith marriages. In some cities, ethnic groups may be concentrated in one area, as formerly was the case in the Lower East side in New York; in other instances, ethnic groups may be widely spread over a city, as is now the case for Hispanic Americans in Los Angeles.

If your family was actively conscious of ethnicity, national origins, or religious affiliation, what did this mean in terms of relating to that
particular community of interest within the wider context of the city? Were social events attended by the family strictly those organized for other black families? Did the children growing up in Grandfather's family attend only the Catholic school and Catholic social affairs? Did Grandmother's social and community life revolve around the German-American club?

To be sure, there are also other kinds of groups worth examining that make the community work: service clubs, garden clubs, Boy Scouts, church and social auxiliaries, political clubs, neighborhood improvement committees, and so forth. Most families have contact with such groups and family members belong to them. The question here is to find out the impact of these groups upon the family's activity during the past. Most organized groups of this type are less likely to have histories or historical sources available than institutions; the exception would be a service club that might have a club historian.

To find out the history of a social, economic, or political group influencing your family may mean doing oral history interviews. In this instance, you would not want to carry out an extended personal interview with the long-time president of the neighborhood improvement organization (with whom Grandfather worked to upgrade parks and playgrounds); rather, after finding out a few essentials ("How long have you lived in Midvale?"), you would turn directly to the project at hand and explore the nature of the neighborhood organization, how Grandfather got involved, and some examples of his activity over the years.
Multiple testimonies may be necessary if you are reconstructing the past from oral history sources, especially when there may be little supporting documentation. Contrast the situations below:

Ed decided to explore the impact that the Light and Power Company and the Midvale Royals (a basketball team) had on his family.

In the case of the Light and Power Company, he found a small library in the main office which had clippings, photocopies, and other information helpful to documenting the career of Uncle Wil, the chief engineer at Substation No. 34 for a number of years. Ed decided to interview one of the officials at the main station who remembered Uncle Wil. The clippings and memoranda in the library and the one interview gave Ed enough information to write an excellent part of one chapter in his family's history.

Then Ed explored the Midvale Royals, a semi-professional basketball team that Dad had played for in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The City Library had part of one scrapbook with photos and some clippings, but Ed found only one photo of Dad. Dad for his part had retained only two clippings on the activities of the club. Ed decided to do oral history interviews of Mr. Jones, who was the coach, and Mr. Bronchowski, who was the outstanding player on the team. Bronchowski suggested he should also see Mike Lampert, retired sports editor of the Daily Bugle, who covered the games. With some documentary evidence and three solid oral history interviews, Ed was able to reconstruct the activity of the Midvale Royals, how important this activity was to Dad, how the family attended the games, and how Mom often invited the team for dinner.

Personalities. Every family has friends or acquaintances who become involved in the family's affairs. Some of these are excellent sources for unraveling the history of your family's activities in the community. Take for instance the high school principal, now retired; she saw Mom and her five sisters go through high school. What could she tell you about the family? Or take Mr. Wyatt, the grocer, whose small store has barely survived the competition of supermarkets; what does he remember about your family and the neighborhood as it grew
up after the area was built in 1946? Or consider Mrs. Pratt, the next door neighbor who was always there if the family was sick or in need?

The above are examples of persons who may have been quite close to the family; they may have more than a few cursory details to tell in an oral interview situation. But you should not overlook other personalities who were perhaps not so intimately acquainted with the family on an everyday basis, but who nevertheless have information. Take Mr. Brunner, the family lawyer; Miss Parsons, the organist at church services; Mr. McDonald, who has taken care of the family car for the past eighteen years at his garage; or Mrs. Jefferson, whose beauty parlor served Mom and your two sisters over the years.

You should be flexible when interviewing personalities and friends of the family. Some may have only one or two reminiscences to tell you; others might "bend your ear" for an hour. It is probably better to see two or three such references for short visits rather than relying on the impressions of just one person. The aggregate of testimonies about your family and their role in the community could be helpful and provide you with material unobtainable in any other way.

Uniqueness of the community. When you are involved in researching events, conditions, issues, institutions, groups, and personalities, keep in mind the hallmark of local history uniqueness: What was unique about living in Riverview? What made that community different from Centerville, twenty miles across the hills? Was it the economic emphasis (electronic manufacturing vs. carpet manufacture)? Was it the fact that Centerville was predominantly Protestant while Riverview was largely Catholic? Who populated Centerville--the
Scandinavians or the Italians or does our city have a unique heritage traceable to the Revolutionary or Civil War?

The essence of local history is contained in the proposition that all towns or cities are unique. Some are more unique and unusual than others; one town may have little unique history but economically be a unique place. The challenge is to find that uniqueness and see if it relates to your family's history.

Regional characteristics. Finally we come to the regional part of local history. For many persons, living in a region may be as important as residing in a town or city. For some, being a Southerner defines the family background and values; for others being a Westerner may do the same. Or it may be regionalism defined much more narrowly. For example, the Ozarks are a hilly and upland region straddling parts of Missouri and Arkansas, but for those who have lived there many years, it is more than a geographical region: It has social, economic, and cultural implications as well.

For some families, identifying with the Ozarks, or the Appalachians, or towns of New England, or the farming communities of inland California may be a better guide to what that family is all about than any other indicator. The O'Briens for example are a family who raise cattle between Phoenix and Flagstaff in Arizona and have sent their children to schools in both cities. They physically reside in neither community, yet their activities place them as part of both cities. For them, it may be the fact they are cattle-raisers and are part of the Western tradition and live a lifestyle that keeps them integrated into that tradition that is most important for their identity.
Regionalism is still a vibrant part of American life; specialists in folklore, rural sociologists and anthropologists, and art historians are busy trying to preserve what is left of our regional milieu. Many communities have built and maintained museums which house artifacts attesting to a particular way of life in the past (the Winterthur Museum in Delaware is an outstanding example of preserving the pre-nineteenth century period in American life). Some larger cities, such as Chicago, have a combined historical society and museum that periodically puts on displays recreating Chicago's past and delineating its influence on the rest of the Midwest. A city such as Astoria, Oregon has its own particular history, but it also stands for the opening up of the Pacific Northwest to the rest of America.

It would be a mistake to equate regionalism with provincialism, which has a negative connotation to it and is more properly a European phenomenon. In traditional European society, such as in England and France, the life of the country was often dominated by the capital city while the rest of the nation was considered to be provincial or backward. In the history of the United States, while we have had remote parts of the country, the speed and mobility of the American people in filling up the continent in just two centuries after independence suggests the fact that most sections of the republic have been intimately connected with each other. Our form of government, with representatives in Washington, assured from the beginning that all parts of the governed territories and states would be in contact with the center of power. Some places have been more remote than others, but the history of the twentieth century especially is one of transportation and communication developments (interstate highways,
high powered automobiles, airplanes, telephone, and television) obliterating, in many instances, regional differences.

Regionalism, therefore, is something that today most Americans seek after because it is rapidly vanishing; it is often a matter of pride, since some families have no regional roots or identification whatsoever. If a regional background has been part of your family's roots, you should be proud of it and collect stories, songs, sayings, dialect, and historical sources that can help you preserve and interpret that regional affiliation. In fact, some families may have dual regional identifications (mother from New England, father from the Dakotas), giving an even richer cultural heritage for the family's history.

Today many families live in urban areas, many of them built since World War II, which have few historical or regional implications. Our suburbs today are most often populated by people who have moved in from various parts of the country. Looking at contemporary families, you might easily conclude that they really don't have any tie with local or regional history. But in most instances, thorough research work by the family historian will reveal a plethora of local and regional affiliations for most families.

To get started, look at the following checklist. Only when you have exhausted these and similar sources would you be able to say, "We don't have any local or regional connections in our family."

**Checklist for Local History**

1. City historical society
2. State or county historical society
3. Historical Museum
4. City or county archives
5. State archives and library
6. Local university library and special collections room
7. Local community college library
8. Library of local newspaper
9. Church libraries or archives
10. Heritage societies and clubs (national origins, ethnic, and geographical)
11. Genealogical societies and libraries
12. City and public libraries
13. Oral history collections at libraries or colleges
14. Photo collections at libraries or colleges
15. Neighborhood organizations
16. Voluntary associations (clubs, committees, etc.)
17. Neighbors
18. Extended family relatives in the area
19. Registrar of Vital Statistics, city and county
20. School offices and administrative headquarters
21. Businesses with records centers or archives
22. Union local offices
23. Professional associations (bar, medicine, etc.)
24. Chamber of Commerce
The family is influenced by both local-regional and national events and conditions. While what comes from Washington (political) or New York (financial) or Detroit (industrial) may affect all of us, relating an individual family's life and times to national happenings may at first seem difficult. This difficulty might be caused by too strict a definition of national impact (an example would be the selective service system during World War II, when initially numbers were drawn; an uncle of yours might have been called to active military duty by that turn of events). But a larger definition of impact would include conditions that were nationwide, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s or the Anti-War Movement of the 1960s.

In studying the law of impact, an often repeated example is that of the stone tossed into the pond. Ripples spread out immediately from the stone's impact, surging across the still water. Within two feet, a ripple knocks a sunning grasshopper off a lily pad: that is proximate impact. Twenty feet further, a ripple causes a piece of paper to be washed upon the shore--although since the wind was blowing, it may have been a combination of both wind and ripple. Thus causation is a complicated business. In the case of family history, you may think that only the local situation where you can measure proximate causation is important. But it is our purpose in this section to suggest that the ripples that come from far away, while not always being proximate causes, are often of capital importance.

For example, who in the college class of 1942 (that entered in 1938) would have guessed that few male members of that class would
ever graduate from college in the spring of 1942 because of a war from Europe and Japan that would involve the USA? Families had their social, economic, and cultural lives totally disrupted by World War II and by the directives that came down from Washington: men were drafted into the armed services; women worked in war industries; rationing affected the family's use of food, clothing, and the family car.

Probably the simplest way to begin finding out which national events or conditions may have affected your family is to take a course in modern American history or to review a good, concise textbook on the recent American past. By identifying the major problems, issues, and situations that have confronted the nation, you will be able to draw up a checklist to use in probing your family's relationship to the national scene. Let us look at some examples using the same analytical pattern we employed for local-regional history.

Events. Wars often come to mind as national events that usually wind up affecting everybody in the nation. The United States has been involved in its share of wars during the past century. The Spanish-American War was limited, but World War I involved millions of men and women, as soldiers or workers in factories for the war effort. The war had a profound impact upon our country because many families had someone in the service; family life was disrupted by changes in civilian life brought about by reallocation of resources, goods, and materials for fighting the war. The war also unleashed such psychological influences as an anti-German campaign, which altered the way German-American families lived and were perceived by their neighbors and which also brought a new national origins prejudice into the mainstream of American life.
In many ways, World War II was a recapitulation of the earlier global conflict, except that the war lasted longer (for this country) and disrupted American lives in a more thorough fashion. Japanese-Americans suffered the indignity of being sent to "relocation camps" and having their basic freedoms abridged; American forces fought on two fronts, in Europe and the Pacific, meaning more men and material were needed than in World War I.

The Korean War and the Vietnam War were supposed to be "local" wars, police actions fought to contain what many believed to be the spread of communism in Asia. These limited wars involved many Americans, but, especially in the case of Vietnam the wars became unpopular. Vietnam was too remote and the goals of the war were not clear or crucial enough to keep the country in the conflict. As a result, the anti-war movement turned many university campuses upside down in an effort to call the attention of the the rulers of the country to the frustrations of war for those most affected--the young people.

Wars then are prime examples of events that reach down deep into American society and become both proximate causes or indirect reasons for change. Their impact is felt in myriad ways so that no family is exempt from impact. Measuring the impact of Vietnam, Korea, or World War II is feasible for most families because these wars have occurred within the last two generations; studying World War I's impact on the family is still possible for the next few years (if personal testimony is desired) while survivors still exist. It is no longer possible to generate firsthand accounts of the Spanish-American War or of other nineteenth century wars. While documents in the family's possession may be helpful (such as clippings on Grandfather's role in war
production in 1918 or Dad's service in Italy--his mementos and citations--unless someone has kept a diary or you find a cache of letters written during wartime describing what happened at home, your best source will probably be oral history interviews.

How can you narrow down the topic to meaningful proportions, since so much "fallout" took place because of the war? One way is to divide up your inquiry into basic areas such as the following:

**The War's Impact on Our Family**

| Military:                  | Dad served two years active duty  |
|                           | Uncle Dan killed in action       |
|                           | Uncle Brad served three years    |
|                           | Cousin Hal wounded twice and disabled |
| Economically:             | Mother left home to work in factory |
|                           | Sister Sue joined USO, gave up job |
|                           | Family moved to smaller house since |
|                           | so many members were away for war effort |
| Socially:                 | Uncle Brad divorced by his first wife |
|                           | during middle of war              |
|                           | Hal returned, lost job because of |
|                           | disability; becomes recluse       |
|                           | Sue married New Yorker and moved away |
|                           | from our home after war           |
|                           | Prejudice shown by neighbors because of |
|                           | Mother's German roots             |
|                           | Dad changed occupations after war |
|                           | causing us to move to a new city  |

Another type of national event would be an election. Perhaps your family was heavily involved in campaigning for Lyndon Johnson or perhaps they were strong supporters of Barry Goldwater. Did the campaign of 1964 bring forth some positions and attitudes towards the nation's problems that influenced your family afterwards? Did they support the Great Society or were they convinced that the federal government should not spend so much on anti-poverty programs? What
insight into your family's values and behavior does the election of 1964 reveal?

Or what about the memorable television debate of 1960 that pitted John F. Kennedy against Richard M. Nixon? How did your family members respond to that historic series of debates, reminiscent of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of the nineteenth century? Do you have family members who recall when Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to run for an unprecedented third term in 1940 and was opposed by Wendell Wilkie?

What about the explosion of the atomic bombs against Japan in the summer of 1945? What did your family think about that? Did they think Truman was justified or how did they feel later as more news was released telling how many civilians had died? What has your family's attitude towards nuclear energy been during the past several decades since the 1945 bomb explosion or more recently since Three Mile Island?

What do relatives remember of the successful landing of men on the moon in 1969? Was your family affected at all by the space race? Did you have relatives employed in aerospace industries? Were they affected by the recession that curtailed further space exploration? Or what does the family remember about the successful voyage of Sputnik in 1957 that rudely awakened the American people to the accomplishments of the Soviet Union's scientists (and helped trigger our space program)?

In looking at events that had some impact upon your family, be certain to look at both initial impact (proximate cause) and deferred impact (eventual or indirect cause). To identify events relevant to your family's life, proceed in the same manner as in local history: ask your family about events that influenced them and then simultaneously
draw up a list from your reading that you might want to ask them about. It is better to reconnoiter a bit and not to take down information on every event that comes to mind, but to pick the three, or four, or half dozen events that really did have an impact, and then study them in some depth. Compiling a long list of events with superficial impact is not at all useful.

**Conditions.** In some instances, complex forces bring about a condition that affects every part of the country. While it is true you could ask your family members, "What impact did the stock market crash of 1929 have on you?" the better question would probably be to ask about the conditions that followed during the 1930s. (It is true that some families had money invested in the stock market and its crash was a proximate cause of distress; but for the majority, the crash and other complex forces in the next several years created a condition of poverty and despair that shook the nation to its foundation. The same line of reasoning could be applied to the idea of war.)

Aside from depression, a condition that has characterized the world for the decade of the 1970s might be more meaningful to recent family histories: that of inflation. Inflation has affected the housing market, decreased the standard of living, forced (or encouraged) millions of women to join the job market, and lowered the value of the American dollar internationally. Another condition that has been accelerated in the twentieth century is that of urbanization, as millions of rural families have moved from farm to city, or like some Southern blacks, from tenancy to jobs in factories in the North. The trend toward city living created the situation of larger ghettos by the 1960s, a condition causing violence and a diminished standard of living for
many Americans. During the middle part of the century, there was an exodus of central city dwellers to the suburbs, which now became the homes of many ethnic groups seeking to become integrated into the American melting pot. One or both of these processes probably affected the majority of American families. Did these processes have an impact upon your family?

Or take the related condition of migration. America's citizens have long been mobile, from the earliest days of the expanding frontier. Migration is a national condition that has included emigration from overseas countries (especially Europe but also the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America); most Americans or their ancestors have come to this continent as immigrants. Our national policies have affected this immigration: in the 1920s quotas were imposed against certain European groups; in the 1950s and 1970s, immigration accelerated from the Caribbean and Mexico, some of it illegal. Did any of these migration policies and procedures affect your family?

Another condition is that of changing manners and mores. The United States today is far different in questions of sexual practices and attitudes than it was during the 1950s; and the 1950s were different from a generation earlier. Divorce has increased; live-in arrangements have replaced long engagements for some couples. Dating practices have changed for many people since the days when Grandfather "courted" Grandmother or Dad "went steady" with Mom. What has been the proximate impact of this social revolution on your family? What have been the long-term consequences?

Institutions. This category is less applicable for national impact because institutions of national significance rarely have a direct impact
on the family. Yet as government has become more centralized and has taken on more tasks, we are all much more aware. Take for example the Social Security system which appeared in the mid-1930s. Today, there are millions of Americans who literally survive economically because of the checks they receive each month from Social Security. How has this national institution affected the lives of your grandparents?

What impact have other government programs such as Medicare had or how have inoculations and immunizations sponsored by the government or Action or Vista programs in your community affected your family? What of regulations from the federal government, such as OSHA--have these affected your father's place of employment? Or going back to the New Deal, was your family affected by the Civilian Conservation Corps or the Works Progress Administration?

In the private sector, have policies coming from the Catholic Church on birth control, women and the priesthood, and celibacy for priests affected your family's relationship and activity in the church? Have increased intermarriages among Jews and Gentiles affected the institutions and attitudes of the American Jewish community? Or if you are Protestant, did the ecumenical movement affect your own church and its institutional priorities and policies?

What of educational institutions? What impact did grade schools have on the family during the Great Depression? Did any family members suffer because of crowded classrooms and inadequate teaching staff? What impact did access to higher education through the G.I. Bill for veterans have in your family? Has your family related to the continuing battle between church and state in educational matters? And
what about busing in your community--what impact has it (or its absence) had on your family?

Issues. Our national life has always been enlivened by issues before the public. In the 1930s, it was whether or not government should become involved in the economic life of the country; in the early 1940s, it was whether we should remain neutral towards the fascist nations (until Pearl Harbor); in the 1950s, it was the challenge of the communist menace at home and abroad, and in the 1960s, it was the issues of civil rights and war in Vietnam. Such issues have rocked the nation and have had reverberations in every home. Does your family remember their attitude toward the New Deal's big government, toward the non-interventionists, toward those who sided with Senator McCarthy? And did they favor the swift pace of civil rights in the 1960s or did they believe that pace was too slow for a question long deferred? What was the family's attitude towards the Vietnam War (and here one should distinguish between 1965, 1968, and 1971)?

If you are working on the history of your grandparents, then you should become familiar with national issues that characterized the era in which they were active--say perhaps the 1920s. Did they approve or condemn the Ku Klux Klan? Were they for the repeal of the Volstead Amendment--that is, did they favor keeping or abolishing prohibition? Did they feel the country was in the grip of a crime wave? Did they favor tariff protection on American goods? Did they support the labor movement in its activities in organizing industries? Did they enjoy the social freedom of the 1920s or did they view it as promiscuous?

What has been the view of the family on the role of women in the work force, at home, or in the community? What changes have
occurred in the attitudes of three generations on the activities deemed suitable for women? What was the reality of the tasks women in the family performed? Did any go against the "family policy" or by their acts did some female members help change it?

What about racial prejudice and attitudes towards minority groups? Has bigotry been replaced by a more liberal attitude in some families? Did the civil rights movement help? Did changing economic opportunities create a new social climate? What positive steps did your family take to overcome admitted prejudices? Or if your family was in a minority position, what instances or examples of prejudice did they suffer in the community? Was any redress ever achieved? When and how did improvement take place?

Examining a family's attitudes and action on issues of national concern can be a most rewarding and stimulating exercise; however, the family historian should be diplomatic and tactful in handling some issues whose memories may still be too painful or too real. In some cases, too, today's views may differ radically from views that were popular in the past. The historian should learn not to judge but to collect information and incorporate in an overall interpretation. In most cases, the general rule to follow is to evaluate and assess what people did and believed in terms of their own times.

Groups. National groups and organizations may have made an impact upon your family in many ways: for example, even though you are white, perhaps your father joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) three decades ago because he believed this organization was working for human equality. This action may have influenced your family's attitudes towards racial policies of
the community long before the advent of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Or assume that you are a member of a family that takes pride in its European heritage but which tended to downplay that heritage during World War II. A sense of pride and loyalty to the national group re-emerged in the 1960s because of the national activity of heritage groups. Or if you are Hispanic, consider the impact of several cultural and political groups which have emerged nationwide in the past two decades to serve the needs of a growing and more self-conscious Hispanic population. Perhaps your family has been influenced by the national auxiliaries of your faith that became interested in social issues in the 1960s and wanted to translate faith into action.

Other types of groups may have had an impact on your family's activities: for example, the National Trust for Historic Preservation spearheaded preserving many historical buildings; the Sierra Club lobbied for conservation; Young Republicans or Americans for Democratic Action have encouraged early political action.

The groups and what they stand for are endless. The question is which ones may have had an impact upon your family?

Personalities. The impact upon personal family history by national personalities may be greater than is suspected. At first glance, one might be inclined to say, "Our family didn't know anybody of national importance." Yet the influence of a Jack Kennedy or a Muhammed Ali or a Henry Kissinger might have been enormous, especially for those given to hero-worshipping. There may be an influence on those who
become disillusioned with national personalities—such as Richard Nixon in the Watergate affair.

We live in an age of media saturation: television, films, magazines, newspaper, radio, phonograph records, videocassettes. Our populace in the twentieth century has created a whole new pantheon of heroes (and not always drawn from the world of politics or business)—especially in the past several decades, when sports figures and recording artists have become national figures overnight. For example, what kind of impact did the Beatles, Elvis Presley, or Frank Sinatra have in your family? Did Grandmother weep when Rudolph Valentino died?

What was the impact on the family when Jack Kennedy was assassinated or when Martin Luther King was killed? What did the family think when General MacArthur was recalled from Japan by President Truman? Did your parents view Truman as a worthy successor to Roosevelt?

The perception of public personalities and how they may become symptomatic of attitudes and beliefs is a complex area of study. For the family historian, however, begin by asking different members of the family who are the ten most influential public figures they know of in relation to the family. Doubtless such a list as drawn up by Grandfather, by Father, and Roland your brother would probably be different, because of age variations. But it could also vary if lists written by female family members were compared to lists drawn up by men.

Asking the family who they admire the most is a good beginning; but ideally, more subtle questions should also be asked: Who did they
oppose (and why)? Who did they think had the most influence for good on the country? Who did they believe was particularly effective but never given proper recognition? Who would they have invited to dinner if given the chance? Who would they like to debate the issues with? And who would they like to see humbled? Such questions, if carried out deftly, and in a spirit of good-natured humor, might yield fascinating insights into the family. Hopefully, too, older family members could tell you about personalities revered or hated by earlier relatives. Perhaps Great-Grandfather once dined at the White House because he fought at the battle of San Juan Hill with Theodore Roosevelt. Perhaps letters, diaries, and memoranda may attest of Grandmother's admiration for Jane Addams and her social work in Chicago. Perhaps an old photo of Uncle Jim with Lindbergh may help explain why he became a pilot at an early age. And perhaps a scrapbook kept by Aunt Flora on Babe Zaharias may explain her lifelong passion for golf.

The ease of communication in our society for the past century has made possible intimate relationships with national celebrities even if the personalities involved knew nothing about it. A serviceman during World War II may have had a special relationship with pinup queen Betty Grable, much as FDR symbolized hope to the farmer whose land was drying up. If there is any evidence of direct contact—a letter from Ike Eisenhower to Dad, a photo given by Thomas Edison to Grandfather, an invitation to tea at the White House for Aunt Madge from Lady Bird Johnson—then the relationship is anchored more firmly in the history of the family.
Conclusion

The point of this chapter has been to suggest ways by which you can correlate your family's personal history with what has happened at the national level. Some families will naturally have experiences that will lend themselves to this sort of treatment; others will not. Finding such correlations are probably not easy; but those who try will be richly rewarded because a family's identity, experiences, and attitudes will be related to the larger society and hence become more meaningful. Placing your family within the context of American society gives the history you will write greater perspective.
Part VI

CREATING YOUR FAMILY'S HISTORY
CHAPTER 14
Different Interpretive Approaches

For the past century, historians have talked long and hard about how to interpret American history; in fact, the very essence of becoming a professional historian is learning how to interpret historical data, analyze historical problems, and delineate historical trends and patterns. Increasingly, the interpretive options open to the historian have become more complex: economic history, ethnohistory, psychohistory, public history, quantitative analysis, and so forth. For many new fields, specialized training is essential before one starts to write.

The historian of personal family history need not feel inhibited by these new approaches and cross-disciplinary perspectives for interpreting history. To be sure, these and other developing emphases can help enrich your work in family history; if you feel the need to study demography because you are going to study a large extended family through manuscript censuses, then specialized supplementary training should be encouraged. But for most students of family history, there are three main approaches that can be employed for maximum flexibility in interpreting the family's past. Historians never simply start writing; before the pages and chapters appear, a decision is made on how to interpret the materials that have been collected and classified.

The three basic interpretive methods I will present are chronological, thematic, and documentary interpretation,
The Chronological Interpretation

For the beginning family historian, the chronological interpretation for employing your source materials may be the best plan. It is easy to understand and apply since it is at the very heart of history; chronologies have been fundamental devices for recording social and historical change. Some of the best known examples of the chronological approach are works which interpret the history of the United States by presidential administrations or the history of European nations by reigns of kings and queens. Although considered "old-fashioned" by some critics, this approach is useful for the family historian because it emphasizes narrative development over time. For example, the family historian's goal might be to explore the family history over two generations ("The Brown Family, 1920-1970"). The chronological approach will help you organize your materials in a logical sequence and will give a feeling of form and structure to your essay that will stamp it as a work of history. It also offers the advantage of interpreting your materials rather effortlessly, if you have completed your basic research in a systematic way. It is important to determine which type of chronological method best suits your interest and requirements. We will now examine the three chronological approaches most relevant for the family historian: the calendar, the life cycle, and the family cycle.

Calendar approach. This is the simplest way to do family history. You determine at the outset that you want to start your history in 1900 and come up to 1975; your work will then be divided into parts or sections that reflect different periods in the life of the person or family under study. You may proceed by decades to examine how the family
changed—the era of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s. Or you may want to look at the Browns in pre-World War I Pennsylvania, during the Great Depression, during World War II, and finally in the postwar world until Grandfather Brown's death in 1968. Perhaps you will want to follow each period in detail; perhaps you will decide after your materials are classified that you don't have that much on the early years of Grandfather and decide instead, after a short introduction, to emphasize the two decades that Grandfather worked for the telephone company.

Using the calendar approach does not imply that the family historian must come to the study of the family with a stopwatch in hand. But developing a finely honed chronological set of events, happenings, and dates will give structure and form to your study. For example, you might select to emphasize Uncle Karl's ten years in the artillery; during his periods of active duty in wartime, the story may unfold in monthly installments as he participated in the invasions of Italy and France. After the war, a year-by-year account may suffice to round out the study of his military career.

The heart of the calendar approach is to divide your family history into meaningful sequences, usually determined by exterior dates important to the subject or family. The exterior dates could be determined by residence ("The Jones Family in Iowa, 1910-1939"), by occupation ("Dad's Work on the Tennessee Valley Projects, 1935-1947"), by a period in time ("Our Family in the Great Depression in South Carolina"), or by dates of migrations ("The Smith Family Moves West: 1934-1942"). Economic, social, political, or other reasons may account for your taking an arbitrary slice of time and focusing on it. If, on
the other hand, you want to look at interior dates as a point of departure in constructing a chronology, then employ life or family cycles.

**Life cycle approach.** This approach is based upon the idea that every human being is also a biological organism which must follow certain laws of biological development such as birth, growth, maturity, and death. From this concept, social scientists have fashioned the notion of analyzing personal history by using the life cycle. This approach may sound clinically oriented, but in the hands of the historian, it can become a sensitive instrument for recreating the essential stages of a person's life. Rather than using external factors, such as migrations, residences, occupations, wars, or depressions, as benchmarks in developing the chronology, the life cycle fashions a personalized life chart for each individual, according to the stages of growth and development. For example:

1. Birth and infancy
2. Childhood
3. Adolescence
4. Young adulthood
5. Maturity
6. Middle age
7. Advanced age
8. Death

Life cycle analysis has the advantage of focusing on the development of the individual rather than using external criteria or yardsticks. It helps to distribute the analysis evenly over the person's life span, rather than concentrating on one or two periods of development; it also provides an organizing concept that allows flexibility (in how the different stages of the cycle are interpreted) yet still has structural unity.
An unfortunate byproduct of doing haphazard family history, especially of older people or ancestors, is to examine their lives only in the context of what happened toward the end of life. Thus, Great-Grandfather may be presented only with his long beard, sunning in a rocking chair, uncomfortable in a high starched collar. But if life cycle analysis is used, you look for the whole man and find his activities and development over the entire life span and do not focus just on the family's patriarch in his declining years. You find out about his childhood, his prowess in sports as a teenager, his courting days with girls, his first job with an insurance company, and his transfers to different parts of the country as he ascended the company ladder. You try to understand how he developed as a person over time, rather than concentrating only upon one segment of a lifetime.

An important question now asked by life cycle historians is that of timing: When did Uncle John get his first job? When did he do his military service? When did Elsa decide to marry? When did she start work in the factory? When was the first baby born? Because every person has different times at which they carry out decisions and activities, no two life cycles are the same despite the fact that everyone goes through the same general stages of growth and development.

More recent developments, especially by Glen Elder, Tamara Hareven, and their associates, have emphasized the idea of life course development as a refinement on the life cycle. This variation to the life cycle approach suggests looking at the transitions people make in their life course patterns rather than concentrating on stages, which is another way of emphasizing the importance of the timing of events in the development of a person or even a family.
Take for example the history of the Parkinson nuclear family. They had five children, the oldest born in 1919 and the last in 1928. By applying life course analysis, we could get a comparative idea of when the transitions were made by the siblings in one family. We would see that one sister left school at an early age, while another went for an advanced degree. We would see one brother marrying at nineteen and his older brother waiting until age twenty-seven and completion of medical training to get married. The younger brother starts a family at age twenty, while the older brother has a first child at age thirty-one. In other words, members of the same family, moving along the life cycle, do so in different sequences, based upon various external social, economic, and cultural factors. Each person has an individual life course and moves through the cycles of biological life in different ways. Glen Elder, who has pioneered the life course analysis, suggests that his technique is particularly valuable for the historian because it emphasizes the idea of change, whereas some earlier studies using the life cycle settled for "snapshots" of the person or family at particular points in time. Elder says: "The life course refers to pathways through the age-differentiated life span, to social patterns in the timing, duration, spacing and order of events; the timing of an event may be as consequential for life experience as whether the event occurs and the degree or type of change."*

In other words, the family historian should not be content to fill in the "stages" of growth with examples of childhood, maturity, and old

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age—but should seek to see how a person made the transition from one stage in the life cycle to another during the course of his or her life. To be sure, this assumes access to a fair amount of source material; it should be considered an ideal to strive for; but if the data aren't available, then the "snapshot" approach of giving the reader some coverage over the life cycle is more desirable.

Keep in mind too that during the life course, most persons belong to two families: the family of origin (or orientation) and eventually, after marriage, the family of procreation. Elder also suggests that the simple life cycle concept may not allow for this dual membership, which means different influences coming from both family groups. For example, in doing the history of the McFadden family, where does the major influence on the life of son Christopher end and the influence of his own wife and children begin? Christopher belongs to both of these families at the same time: there may be a period in the early years of marriage when the family of origin continues to exercise a dominant influence, but this probably wanes as his own children are born and he moves to another city.

Family cycle approach. This way of handling chronological development is recommended if you are attempting to do the history of a nuclear family: one would emphasize the coming together of the parents and the creation of the family, and then follow the birth and maturation and eventual departure of the children. This approach allows the historian to look at family history from the perspective of the parents. If you desire the perspective of one person (parent or child), then the previous life cycle or life course approach would be better.
Families have their own internal logic in developing; none are the same. Yet, by looking at different stages of evolution and development within the context of the family, you can discover a sense of structural development that is lacking if you simply searched for random memories of the past. Using the family cycle approach assures greater attention to different episodes that otherwise might be ignored or passed over in constructing the history of the nuclear family. For the analysis of the family cycle, use the following example list:

1. Meeting and courtship of spouses
2. Marriage and establishment of household
3. Activity of spouses during early years of marriage
4. Arrival of first child
5. Arrival of second child
6. Changes in lifestyle and activity of the spouses as family grows
7. Arrival of third child
8. Episodes in childhood and adolescence of the children
9. Episodes in the career and activity of the spouse
10. Examples of family dynamics and relationship of parents to children
11. First child leaves home to found a family of procreation
12. Second child leaves home
13. Third child stays at home for extended period
14. Death of father; mother and third child continue at home
15. Third child marries; mother remarries
16. Relationship of three children to mother within context of several families, in-laws, and remarriage
17. Death of mother

Certainly, the concept of family cycle may be applied to an extended family, but in that instance, you would probably prefer to mesh several family cycles rather than playing out one cycle over several generations.
Demographers today are interested in such questions as when women leave home to enter the work force, whether a couple has married at, above, or below the median ages for marriage nationally, or what the fertility of a woman is compared to a national sample. If you feel interested in comparing your family's vital statistics of this kind, then seek out a good sociological or demographic textbook and see how your family compares to other families nationwide. Such an exercise might suggest how "typical" or unique your own family's past has been.

The Thematic Approach

History in our own time is increasingly written on one of the thematic models discussed below. It is not that the chronological models are old fashioned; it is rather that historians realize that variety is desirable in interpreting the past, and by using a problem, topical, or interdisciplinary approach, the job of explaining takes on a new dimension. During the past century the short story has risen to prominence in literature because its shorter length is an attractive alternative to the novel or play. Historians are particularly concerned with in-depth analysis, exploring problems, and attempting to shed light on new areas of inquiry not imagined a generation or two ago. Being restricted to a chronological or survey-type approach is viewed as too constrictive by many scholars, and they frankly have opted for different solutions. The three discussed below seem particularly applicable to the situations faced by the family historian.

Problem approach. This is an "active" approach that asks the questions "What basic problems did the family face or what special or unusual problems did the family encounter?" Examples might be how the family coped with sister Margaret's battle with polio; how the family
weathered father's losing his job during the Great Depression; how the family shifted from attendance at one church and took up interest in another; or how the family managed when Dad was transferred to four different cities in seven years. These are family-oriented problems.

Or the focus could be much more blunt and basic: the problem of alcoholism in our family; how the family split up after our parents divorced; or how Aunt Marian kept the nuclear family together after Mother died. Other focuses of a problem approach could include an examination of why the family has maintained an active interest in politics; why the family lost a sense of identity after the move to California; or why the family of a simple farmer produced three Ph.Ds in one generation?

A problem-oriented approach is not recommended for the beginning family historian; it is perhaps better attempted after one has completed a life sketch of a family member or written a nuclear family history. Once the larger dimensions of family activities, interests, and dynamics are understood, then a problem approach could be pragmatic and stimulating. But in the hands of the neophyte, it might easily be misunderstood by family members expecting a more straightforward account.

If on the other hand your family history is well-known to you and members of your family, then a problem approach could be a way of producing a lively and thoughtful treatment of your family's past. In fact, a preferred format would be to explore several problems rather than one (lest family members think that the family only had one problem!); this could provide variety and provide several focuses for extended treatment.
Another caveat to consider is that a problem approach, if really pursued to its logical end, might in some instances suggest a negative criticism of the family's past (either overt or implicit). Much depends on your interest in problem-oriented subjects and the reaction that you can predict from your family: Do they debate issues? Do they enjoy analyzing problems or situations? If the answer is affirmative, then this approach may be well suited to your interests. But some families are not oriented towards critical thinking and take criticism badly; only you can judge.

Topical approach. This is probably a safer route to follow than the problem approach; it is the most widely used alternative to the chronological approach. The essence of the topical approach in most cases grows out of the subject matter itself: a topical study of Mother's paintings and her talents in art; a study of Dad's work at the paper mill laboratory; an essay on Grandfather's activity in local politics; an inquiry into Mother's service in the Woman's Club; or a study of the impact of World War II upon the extended family. A topical treatment sounds easy enough to do on the surface, but you need enough material to enable you to do such an essay. That is, if you find a lot of memorabilia on Grandfather's days as alderman in Columbus, then that naturally lends itself to topical treatment. But if you want to treat the musical talent of Aunt Marge, and find very little material, then it would be better to search for another topic.

Topical subjects therefore should evolve naturally out of your source material; with this in mind, you might want to reassess what you have collected and ask the question, "What do I possess that might be treated topically?" Topical subjects can be tried by beginning
historians, as opposed to problem-type subjects, without fear of "ruffling the feathers" of the family. But for ease in execution, topical essays are much easier to do if you have first completed a life cycle or calendar survey of the person or family.

Another variant would be to do a family history in two parts: first, a survey of the life cycle of the family, giving the basic parameters of what happened; then, a second part where you address three or four basic topics in the history of your family. This solution combines the structure of the chronological approach but reinforces it with in-depth exploration of several areas that point up the uniqueness of the family. For example, instead of doing a life cycle or life course analysis of each sibling in a nuclear family, you could pick out one topic that you think characterizes or captures the essence of that person:

Part I: Family Cycle Essay

Part II: Topical Essays on Family Members

a. Dad's Green Thumb  
b. Mom's Years as Chorister  
c. Jack's Success in Track  
d. Jan's Doll Collection  
e. Sam and Stamp Collecting  
f. Grandpa's Love of Travel

If you decide that this approach suits your purposes, then turn back to Part II and review some of the suggestions made in those four chapters on how to conceptualize your research. Any one of these conceptual topics makes a solid essay; or combinations produce a more sophisticated, well-rounded history.

Interdisciplinary approach. The period since World War II has seen the growth of interdisciplinary scholarship. Historians now meet and work with anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists,
geographers, economists from the social sciences, and specialists in English, foreign languages, and literature in the humanities, as well as art historians. These and other disciplines furnish important insights for the historian; since few scholars can aspire to master a rudimentary knowledge in all these areas, it has become the practice in the past several decades for historians to build up a competency in at least one or two allied fields. The same would be good advice for family historians.

Let's suppose that you enjoy economics and have taken several courses in economic history. Focusing your study on how the extended family has supported itself over three generations could be stimulating; or examine the demise of Grandfather's cleaning establishment empire in the late 1930s; or study the real property that family members have owned in Iowa and Illinois, from 1880 to 1970.

Suppose you are doing a minor in sociology. You might do a study on the social mobility of your family over several generations, from farm to factory to office. Or you might examine how life styles have varied in the families of your Grandfather's sons over two generations. Or you could look closely at the dynamics of your family's religious faith or the intricacies of sibling relationships at the level of your father and his brothers and sisters.

Whatever allied discipline you choose, make certain that you are not working "out of your depth." Hearing a lecture or two on social mobility does not qualify you to undertake a study of historical social mobility in your family; but if you did extra readings, wrote a term paper on the subject, and had extended conversations with the instructor in the course, then you would probably be ready for such a
study. Also, consult with a professional sociologist on your subject, and ask him for selected readings which could help you frame more precisely the questions you want to ask and the methodology necessary to get the answers.

Doing a history project in conjunction with another discipline can intellectually be very rewarding, provided that you fully understand how that discipline and history converge. If you are uncertain how you can relate anthropology to your own family's experience, it is best not to attempt it. But if you are conversant with the literature on extended families and want to examine your own family within this context, then go right ahead.

You also might want to consult such scholarly journals as The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Journal of Social History, or Journal of Family History and others for ideas and insights into how historians use materials and concepts of other disciplines. You also might want to consult one of your teachers in history for advice on how to proceed on an interdisciplinary project. Such a project could prove to be stimulating and original; but any person who attempts an interdisciplinary approach should be prepared to go the extra mile.

The Documentary Interpretation

The documentary approach is not a traditional way of doing family history. But a documentary interpretation may be ideal for your family situation; the three approaches discussed below are not substitutes for straightforward family history writing and analysis, but they may prove to be useful alternatives in certain circumstances.

Oral history interview approach. One possibility is to build up an oral history library of interviews with members of your extended family.
If funds could be procured to have taped interviews typed, then you would have a combination archive and family history repository. In this instance, have each interview bound, and include a photo (or photos) of the person interviewed, and a short description of the circumstances surrounding the interview. A collection of five to ten interviews with nuclear and extended family members, properly transcribed and edited, bound, with photos and release forms could be a most attractive way of getting at the family's history. And an added advantage is that in a very real sense you are letting family members speak for themselves. Moreover, photocopies of the transcripts could easily be made available for family members who wanted them, helping to defray your expenses.

If transcription is beyond your reach, then as an alternative you could compile a thorough subject and name index of the interview tapes, and then make the tapes (which are easy to copy) and the indexes available to family members. This way several families could own "sets" of the family history tapes, and they could be played for the benefit of family gatherings or for children. Photographs in plastic folders might also be attached to the tapes and indexes to give visual reinforcement to the narratives.

**Scrapbook and photo album approaches.** Much creative thought can go into organizing a family history by using the scrapbook or photo album format. A guiding principle is to have a central plan or outline of what you want to accomplish and then to execute this design with high selectivity. An ordinary scrapbook is just that: a collection of scraps and snippets. It serves a good purpose as a repository but may be no more than that. The same is true of the ordinary photo album, which often serves as dead end storage for many unselected photos.
If you decide to do your family history in one of these modes, then keep in mind that selectivity is the key to producing a successful scrapbook or album. You could use the chronological approach (calendar, life cycle, family cycle) quite easily, or you could adapt the topical approach. (The problem or interdisciplinary approaches would in most cases not be suited.)

Trying this documentary approach also assumes that your family has collected adequate materials for preparation of such a volume. It also assumes that you will copy most of the materials for inclusion, since it is unlikely family members will want existing photo albums or scrapbooks "cannibalized" for benefit of your project. Copying of photos and clippings and other memorabilia can be done quite easily and inexpensively today, so that should not be a deterrent. In some cases, families have boxes with loose clippings and photographs: if that is the situation, then this approach may be strongly recommended.

Once you have sifted through your materials, construct an outline; organize your materials (but don't paste them in yet or affix them) and see how they fit together. You might need to regroup them several times. Once this is done, turn to writing your "narrative line"—that is, a running narrative that will hold together your clippings and photos and bring them alive as history. In a very real sense, what you are doing is putting together a personal documentary history of your family and that means explanations of clippings, photos, and memorabilia appear in order. Your narrative section requires more than affixing a short caption or sentence by each item; clippings and photos should illustrate the development and growth of your family over time.
If you think in terms of your output being a documentary history of your family, or a photo essay on their past, then you will be ready to do a useful historical project. Do not confuse what is proposed here with a simple scissors and paste job for preserving a few items in a family scrapbook. I am suggesting something that requires imagination, a creative urge, and a good understanding of how to present your family's past within the context of the documents and photos that help explain the past.

One final suggestion. Perhaps the easiest way to do this type of project is to utilize plastic sheets or "pockets" that are closed on the bottom and which readily fit into a three-hole album. This way, items for display and typewritten commentary can easily be arranged (or changed if necessary). Such pocketed plastic sheets cost more than ordinary plastic sheet protectors, but they are well worth the cost involved over the long run. Such a system, which can easily be stored in any three-ring binder, is much preferred over special format scrapbooks with non-removable pages or photo albums which have self-sticking features or plastic sheets which pull back on the page. (See Figure _____.)

Conclusion

In the final analysis, whether you opt for a chronological, a thematic, or a documentary approach with their different variations for interpreting your family's past, there is no substitute for a good outline of what you intend to do. It will give you confidence and a sense of purpose and will provide a yardstick by which to measure what you are actually doing. As I stated earlier, never be afraid to modify an outline; in fact, if an outline remains the same from start to finish,
it suggests that something is wrong, that you did not benefit from being immersed in the original materials you collected.

We now turn to specific questions on organizing and writing your paper, once you have made the decision how you will interpret and present your materials.
Once you have decided upon your particular way of interpreting your family's past—whether chronological, thematic or documentary—"plunge in" and start writing. Both artists and writers alike complain of "white paper fear," which comes when trying to get an idea for writing or drawing. Professionals agree that once you have plunged into work, then a certain momentum builds up that can carry you through to the end of the project. But often it is that first chapter—or introduction—that may keep you tied up. The best prescription is to start writing to get yourself in the mood, to get the feeling of the project. Don't worry about starting at the beginning; many writers find it more convenient to write a middle chapter first or to do part of one chapter now, another a bit later. The important thing is to start writing.

Historians have a fault well-known to publishers and editors: they want to keep waiting until "all the evidence is in." While this is theoretically admirable and defensible for the academic who may take ten years to finish a research project, it should not affect the family historian. Better to move forward, write up what you have found, and keep to your schedule. For one thing, if important materials do surface later, you can revise your family history or update it. (This is especially true for those using word-processing equipment). The professional scholar usually goes on to other topics and hence understandably wants as much in hand as possible, since he may never return to his subject. But the family historian who views his or her
role as an ongoing task welcomes the opportunity to revise or update a study of the family.

Another reason for not procrastinating on your research and writing is taken directly from the experience of some academic historians; some historians become well versed in a particular area, master the sources, but procrastinate publishing their findings. Along comes a young graduate student who looks through some of the same material and publishes quickly. The academic historian may lose his claim to the originality of his research, may even lose the possibility of publishing his material, but most important sacrifices the opportunity to communicate and disseminate his work. The essence of being a family historian is to communicate with readers; otherwise, you should aspire to be an archivist or librarian (which are very desirable roles, but they are very different). Ideally, the family historian has to be a researcher and archivist, too, in the early stage of preparing a family history. But after researching, you must write.

The distinguished writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre was interviewed several years ago about his method of writing and getting ideas. Sartre observed that only when he wrote, when the words appeared on the page, were his ideas really worked out for a book or play. The same is true of historians: until the process of creating takes place and the synthesis of writing begins, there exist only the sources, notes, outlines, ideas and plans. But sources, notes, outlines ideas, and plans do not substitute for a finished historical manuscript.

"Frame of mind" is an important part of the writing process. If you are thinking about something else and are not able to focus on your project, then your writing will reveal this. History is not boring,
but it can be made so by bored writers. When you approach your paper or typewriter, come with imagination, creativity, and purpose, and these qualities will most likely be transferred to the paper as your history unfolds. Having a positive point of view is essential, and it usually comes from being self-confident. Now that you have collected and researched, arranged and correlated and considered how to interpret your research, writing should become enjoyable. It is only when a writer hasn't done his homework that frustration, lack of purpose, and dullness of mind set in. Keep in mind that you are now the best qualified, most knowledgeable person in the world about the history of your family, and that you are now writing as an expert. When you have authority and credibility, writing comes easily and naturally. So loosen up, relax, and start writing!

Organization of Your History

Doing family history is quite similar to writing a research paper or report: there are certain rules of etiquette that should be observed so that everybody will be pleased: reader, author, and critic. Your family history should have your personal stamp on it and reflect your original ideas for interpreting family experiences. But the first obligation of the family historian is to write with clarity, for if your family members cannot follow what you have written, or your narrative doesn't read in a coherent manner, then you have lost your audience of family readers.

The best way to obtain clarity is to make certain your manuscript is well organized. Following are some suggestions that may be helpful as you pull your source materials together in preparation to write:

15-3
Introduction. Even a short family history study needs an introduction to explain how the study came about, who helped provide materials, and what the author hopes to accomplish. Shrewd readers always turn to introductory comments first, to find out what it is they are about to read. Line per line, the introduction may be the most important segment of your family history. Don't ignore it, omit it, or write it at the last moment. Since in most family history projects, many family members and relatives pitch in to support the endeavor, it will be crucial to give proper acknowledgment, for those persons could become boosters for your study.

Body of the study. Now is the time to make use of your flexible outline, which by this time has no doubt been revised many times. Even the shortest study should have some organization and be divided into sections, for nothing is more tedious than trying to read page after page of prose without relief. If the study is twenty-five pages or less, it should have at least several sections. If it is more, it might require several sections and some sub-sections, or better yet, should be divided into several chapters. Keep in mind that attention spans are not very long; the wise writer provides maximum variety to hold the reader's attention.

Let's assume that you have decided to do a biography of Grandmother Welles who lived from 1885 to 1970. You have found a number of her letters, three scrapbooks, have done eight oral history interviews with her children and one sister and two friends, and feel that you will probably need about sixty to seventy pages to complete the work. For that length, consider having at least three or four
chapters. The general rule, of course, is to let your material be the determining factor in how to structure your work.

Or perhaps you have attempted a history of the nuclear family, which in this instance is Mother, Father, your three sisters, one brother, and you. That would possibly call for a short introduction on the nuclear family, then a chapter each for Mom and Dad, and then a long chapter on each of the girls and boys. Or, if you don't have sufficient material, a short chapter on each child would be suitable. The important thing to remember is to provide some sense of structure to your work for clarity and to help you to keep all the details straight!

**Conclusion.** For a shorter study, a concluding section might be superfluous; but in a longer work, finishing up with a separate conclusion can be exciting and useful. Certainly some type of concluding paragraph enhances your research efforts. A conclusion may be a summary of the most important points you discovered in your family research, a synthesis of major themes of your work, or impressions that go beyond the facts you have accumulated. Or a conclusion may be the appropriate place for you to give some of your own personal opinions on what you have researched and written.

**Footnote citations.** Footnotes and endnotes (which are becoming more popular) serve several useful purposes for the family historian. First, they indicate to other family members who read your history where you found your basic materials. That could be crucial for a relative who wants to do a family history himself. Without the footnote references, research by others could be seriously hampered. Second, footnotes establish your work as a serious piece of scholarship,
indicating you have done "your homework" and have unearthed the most relevant primary and secondary sources. Footnotes are not a bother; they are an essential part of a good family history.

You should also investigate some of the simplified systems of citing notes that are gaining ground today. For example, anthropologists now use a bibliography of all authors at the end of the essay, putting each author's works in chronological order. The same can be done for reports, memorabilia, oral history interviews, etc. The advantage of this system (see Figure ) is that in your footnotes, you only have to make a short citation. For example, suppose you used a letter from Uncle Nate to Aunt Sophia; under this system, you would only put down "Letter from Nate Higgins to Sophia Smith, 3 July 1932," and the balance of the information would be in the bibliography. If in doubt, however, it's best to use the more traditional form of footnoting set out in such reference works as Turabian's A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations.

Bibliography. As mentioned above, a bibliography is essential if other family members are to find your work helpful to them in their own family history research. Also keep in mind that your history will be kept for years to come by members of the family (yours may be the first history ever written in your family); a generation from now, interested relatives may look at your work and wonder, "Where did Uncle John get all this information about the family? I would love to do some research on our family's lines!" But, if you have not included footnotes and a bibliography, your relatives will not be able to continue the chain of research that should be the goal of all families.
Here are several practical suggestions. Include entries of all the oral history interviews you conducted, with place and date of interview, if there is a transcript or index of the tape, and where it is stored. The same should be done for photographs, clippings, letters, vital statistics documents, and so forth.

It should be apparent that once you have finished your family history, ideally copies of all the materials you collected or consulted should be placed in one place for future reference. Whether this is a home archives or records center or a local library or historical society doesn't really matter. The important thing is for your original records to be preserved somewhere, so they can be consulted again (by you, other current relatives, or generations to come).

Appendices. In some cases, you may find it worthwhile to include or append materials that add interest to your family history that would not be appropriate in the text. Such items as original or copied letters, reports, vital statistics, or clippings, may be more suitably placed in an appendix rather than cluttering up your prose in the body of the text. Remember, family histories are made to be read and consulted; keep your text clean and easy to read, and put materials for consultation in the appendix.

If you have amassed a mountain of documents and materials that you judge to be crucial to understanding your family's past, then you might be well advised to issue a separately bound volume or folder with your appendices.

The appendix is also the proper place to have family trees and generation charts showing ascent or descent in the family lines. If your goal is to show the relationship between the person (or nuclear
family) you have done in your study, and the larger extended family,
then you would be wise to visit a genealogical supply house and look
over the collection of charts, family trees, and other materials that
could be valuable in your research and identification of ancestors.
(Examples of such charts are given in Figure ___.)

**Visual materials.** A basic question faced by all authors is, "Do I
put the photos and visual materials in a separate section (or sections)
or do I integrate them in my text as they come up in the story?" It is
easier for an author to group photos and drawings in one place; but
for readers, having the materials integrated as the story unfolds is
much better. Editors in publishing and printing houses often prefer
having the materials grouped in one or two sections because it saves
money. If there is any chance your work will be published for the
family, even by the simplest means, it might be advantageous to group
the visual materials together.

Whichever solution you opt for, keep in mind that photos,
drawings, and other visual representations add life, color, and interest
to a family history. Photos of houses, towns, neighborhoods, early
ancestors, members of the nuclear family at different stages of both the
life cycle (personal growth) and the family cycle (family growth) are all
desirable. You should attempt to find individual portraits of family
members, family portraits, and photos that show change over time.
Snapshots add an informal dimension, helping us understand the way
people lived and played.

Don't forget to write literate and accurate captions for all your
photos and visuals. It could be maddening to future members of your
family to have you label a fine portrait of Grandfather Brown simply
"Grandfather," when you actually knew that this was a portrait of grandfather in 1917, just before he volunteered for World War I, standing in his automobile repair shop in his Sunday best. Knowing the background of a photo can make the difference between its becoming a prime source of evidence and simply serving as an illustration of dubious value. Also be certain, whether in the caption or in the bibliography, to tell where you obtained a copy of the photo, where the original is housed, and other information that might help future researchers. One of your best portraits or family photos might be selected to serve as a frontispiece for the family study, opposite the title page.

Writing Style

The best advice for the family historian is to follow a natural, free-flowing narrative style. Family history should be written to be read, not filed away. Even a conversational tone would not be inappropriate. Remember what some editors counsel professional writers: pick out a person you know as your audience, and write that book for him or her. If you do have a specific person or persons in mind, it will help keep your work lively and colorful. Some writers suggest that the best practice for writing is to write regular letters to a friend, loved one, or family member in which you attempt to write concisely and imaginatively. It might help your project by writing your study to Mom and Dad, to Aunt Helena, to Grandpa, or to Cousin Ted.

A few other suggestions for writing:

Paragraphs. Keep paragraphs short and to the point. Each paragraph ideally should convey one main idea (although Victorian writers such as Dickens obviously ignored this). Journalists learned
long ago that by writing in shorter paragraphs, they keep the attention of their audience. The family historian should take note.

Accuracy. Since your family history study may be published or duplicated in some form and passed around to other family members or friends and even handed down to another generation, you should strive for accuracy. That means spelling names accurately, finding precise information to support dates, getting the exact location where the old family farm stood, and finding out exactly when the family moved to Ohio (not "sometime during the depression").

If there is doubt about a fact you use, then indicate this in a footnote. The historian should make judgments and not always sit on the fence where there are several plausible points of view; by the same token, if there are several possibilities in the evidence as to when Great-Grandfather was born, the three dates should be mentioned and some indication noted of your opinion.

Permission. If you quote extensively from a family member, whether from oral or documentary materials, you should give that person the courtesy of being consulted for authorization. Most oral history projects use a release form for all persons interviewed, giving the interviewer the right to use the materials according to his good judgment. If you are dealing with a large family and some relatives you may not know very well, consider using permission forms to protect yourself. Ordinarily, however, among members of the nuclear family, the presumption is that the natural closeness of family members and their interest in the project will make permission forms unnecessary.

If at the outset your goal is to write something for publication or something that will be deposited in a library or in a historical society
for others to see and read, then securing permission forms is advisable.

**Copy editing.** Before delivering your work to a printer for duplication, it is a good idea to have another qualified person look it over for possible errors that might have escaped your attention. This process is known as copy editing in publishing, and it pays dividends in the long run since it is preferable to issue a family history that is accurate and not filled with spelling errors, typos, and incorrect usage. There are some professional typists who provide this kind of service together with typing or separately. Most professional historians and writers have their material copy edited as a matter of routine, so copy editing is a step towards professional performance.

**Review committee.** Most historians will also have their work reviewed by several specialists who are familiar with their area of research, whether in submitting an article to a journal or a manuscript to a book publisher. By analogy, if the family historian has done a substantial piece of research and writing, it makes good sense to have a "family committee" look it over and make possible suggestions. For shorter essays and sketches on the family, this is probably not necessary. But often, even a cursory reading by a knowledgeable person may save an author from errors of fact and interpretation.
BECKER, John.


HIGGINS, Nate.

1932-38 Letters to various family members, now stored in the Brown family home's attic.

JONES, Abel.

1935-49 Two scrapbooks of his career in county politics, compiled by his daughter May Jones in about 1942. Now at the Spring Valley Historical Society Library.

JONES, Ralph

1978. Oral history interview, by John Black, at R. Jones' farm house in Marietta, Ohio, on 4 November 1978. Two cassettes, both sides for total of about 3 hours. Tapes are indexed and in possession of John Black.

NORTON, Lazarus

1922-40. Scrapbook with clippings of activity in Rotary Club, housed at the Norton apartment, Columbus, Ohio.

1943-45. Photo album with mementos of service in Merchant Marine during World War II. In possession of Columbus Genealogical Society Library.

The Sentinel (Johnsville, Kansas)

1913-18 Excerpts from daily newspaper found in home of Tom Higgins relevant to Higgins family history and real estate business during these years. Xerox copies in possession of John Black; originals (in decayed condition) are housed in basement of Tom Higgins' house.
CHAPTER 16
How to Disseminate Your History

Family history is meant to be enjoyed and communicated; it can help any family gain new insights into origins, principal events, and main characters that have shaped the family tradition. As opposed to a college term paper, which may never see the light of day once an instructor has handed it back, family history papers tend to be kept with important books or papers in the house, often are passed around to curious family members or relatives, and may even make you somewhat famous within your own family.

Once you have done basic research, collected your family's historical materials, and put together a life sketch, nuclear family study, biography, or some other form of family history, start thinking about ways to distribute that history and communicate it to other people. Consider the following possibilities:

Your Uncle Thad, one of Mother's cousins, is visiting from Canada. As a member of the family who lives away from the extended family, he is delighted to see your study and wants to order five copies for other cousins he knows will be interested.

You are visited by Great Aunt Lucinda, who has difficulty reading. Since you have made a short slide-tape show of your research, you set up a slide projector and tape recorder and let her see and hear the results of your research.

Jane Brewster, a maternal relative, calls you and says, "I saw a typed copy of your research on Grandfather Barnes, my father. I really think other members of the family should have one, especially the children. What about doing an abridged version in large type with some drawings for the children of our extended family?"

You are part of the Martini family which decides to have a large family reunion on the Fourth of July, inviting relatives from several states. You are asked by the committee in charge to produce a 20 minute videotape on the origins of the
Martini family in Italy and their immigration to the United States.

Grandfather and Grandmother will celebrate their fiftieth (golden) wedding anniversary. You and your brothers are asked to prepare a large collage of photographs from the family scrapbooks to serve as a backdrop for the reception.

Father retires from the office after thirty years. You prepare a scrapbook of his years with the company to be presented at a banquet in his honor.

These examples are actual situations that have confronted students and other persons who have completed research on family history that demonstrate how your accumulated materials and research on your family can be used beyond simply writing a research paper. But for most people, doing a written family history is the cornerstone for these other methods of disseminating what you have learned. We will, therefore, discuss ways of distributing your written history first, and then consider ways of using alternative formats.

Distributing Your Family History

Every author is ultimately faced with the question: What steps do I take to ensure my manuscript will be read by other people? The most natural solution for most authors is to send their manuscript to a publisher or a historical journal—which is reasonable if you have written a short story or historical sketch of a local political hero. But in all fairness, every writer must ask the question: Who wants to read what I have written?

For the family historian there are several answers to that question. First (and the best answer) is that other members of the family are the most likely prospects. For some, that may mean only members of the immediate nuclear family; but for others, it may include uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, and other relatives, totalling up
to a fairly respectable number of copies. I had one student several years ago who was commissioned by his grandfather to work on a four-generation history of the family. The student spent the entire summer after the college term working on the project and decided to photocopy ten copies. I later received word that his study, which was about sixty pages with some photographs, was now in great demand by more distant members of the family and that he was going to reprint fifty copies.

A second answer to the question of who wants to read your family's history is that there may be organizations or institutions in the community interested in the history of your family. Consider your public library—it may have a special facility for collecting family histories which tell about the local area and its people. Consider the local historical society or museum, which are both specifically designed to serve as a repository for community-related historical materials. Contact a heritage or national origins society that may be particularly relevant to your family's past; often they keep small libraries or circulate newsletters in which they might print excerpts about your family. If you live in a smaller community, sometimes the local newspaper is interested in printing parts of family histories, especially if they shed light on the early days of the town. Many churches or other religious institutions are interested in keeping records on their members and might want to possess a copy of the family's history.

I have not exhausted all the possibilities, but it should be apparent that the potential audience for family history is much larger than only you and your parents and a brother or sister. Naturally, if you write a history of your father and he has no siblings, then there
will probably be less demand than if you wrote a history of Grandfather, who had nine children. Future project might be chosen with potential readers in mind. If you plan something that you hope will be widely read, then choose an ancestor further back in your lineage who has a fair number of descendants. If your goal is to do a history of the nuclear family, then a smaller project is recommended.

Potential audience should be a major consideration in planning how to distribute your research. As a general rule, smaller projects are best printed on what is called "quick copy" rather than attempting to do offset press work. This means that your printer will use a high speed photocopy machine to print your "camera-ready" material. If you want five, ten, or twenty copies of your family history that runs forty pages, this would be your most economical option. This assumes you have been able to get the material nicely typed, preferably on a word processor or an electric typewriter for uniform copy, and that you have obtained proper layout for the cover and title pages. There are some examples of simple projects on the next few pages to give you an idea of what formats are possible for a modest cost. (See Figure ____.)

If on the other hand you believe you may be able to distribute (sell or give) more than several hundred copies of your history, then you might want to investigate the offset method of printing. There are a great number of so-called "instant" printing firms today which specialize in quick-copy printing and in doing offset work. In offset, a plate is made so that more copies can be made more economically than in quick-copy. Most smaller printing houses have posted scales of prices so that you can figure your costs fairly easily. Such items as covers, the kind of cover stock you may need (and the color), and the type of
binding you select are matters of bargaining with some printers. The wisest course to follow, if you decide to print your own work, is to obtain bids from several places.

There is a wide variety of paper stock in different colors for covers. Setting up type for headlines and titles is always charged extra, but some printers will negotiate on a fee; some do the work themselves on "composer" machines, while others send them out to professional typesetting agencies. If you are proficient in lettering or have a friend who is, you might save by utilizing attractive hand or transfer lettering. Binding is a way you can save money or add costs—it depends on what you want. "Saddle stitching" is putting a staple through the middle of the publication and can be used rather inexpensively if the work is not too thick. One can also use plastic spiral (cerlox) binding which enables the book to be opened and lie flat. For more professional work and for a greater number of copies, the "perfect" binding is recommended, which is the method most paperback books are bound with today.

The least expensive method for having your material set up in type is to employ an electric typewriter, preferably with a carbon or film ribbon which gives a sharply etched image. Today, many families have access to an electric typewriter. Since the quick copy or offset will be taken directly from the sheet you type, great care should be given to keeping the sheets neat and clean. Probably the most versatile system to use for this purpose is a typewriter which has a typing element (ball) or a daisy wheel, to give "letter quality." This typing element or daisy wheel can be changed to give contrasts (each element can have a different typeface).
Many families now have access to personal computers which immensely simplify creating a professional looking text. Word processing programs such as Wordperfect, Wordstar, or Word by Microsoft, and others, make possible producing a right justified margin. However, to get a "bookface look" the essential equipment of your home computer is a printer which does letter quality work. Especially desirable are printers which do proportional spacing. Dot-matrix printers have been improved so that many of the more advanced models do proportional spacing and even italic type. For those who want to make a long term investment in quality, the new laser printers are "top of the line" with both proportional spacing and changeable type fonts for different type styles. All of this has created a veritable revolution for the family historian, who can (through the personal computer and high quality printer) do what an entire print shop used to do. The goal here is to produce a high quality "master" that can then be taken to a printer to be run on high speed xerox or photocopy equipment; or, if there will be several hundred copies, offset printing should be investigated. If you do not own or have access to such computer and word processing equipment, there are firms which specialize in doing this type of work. There are great savings to be realized in creating the "master" for your family history book following these procedures as opposed to going to a commercial printery, which would set type for your publication on a professional type composer. If however funding is no object, or you have a family organization that wants the very best, then consulting a commercial printing house is the best solution.

Some large or extended families may want to sponsor a history of a common ancestor, especially if that person were the first family member
to emigrate to the United States. Let's assume, for example, that Great-Grandfather O'Riley came to the United States from Ireland in 1890 and has about 148 descendants in this country as of now; many of these persons (those still alive) might be interested in subscribing to a privately printed family history of John O'Riley and his descendants. In some instances, money can be collected in advance (a prepaid subscription) by a family committee; in other instances, pledges can be made and collected when the publication appears. If you decide to follow this method, get a firm printing bid (in writing) before collecting the money or pledges.

Slide/Tape Presentations

Today for a small expense you can convert family photographs into 35 mm color slides. With the development of the 35 mm single lens reflex camera, millions of American families have shifted to this format which allows taking both prints and slides. Using a macro close-up lens (as discussed in Chapter 9), it is possible to convert photos into color slides to illustrate your family's history. Such lenses are not expensive; for those who do not have access to a 35 mm camera with a macro close-up lens, many colleges and universities maintain a photo lab, instructional learning facility, or audio-visual office which can do this at nominal cost. In fact, many university facilities now allow students themselves to come in and use the equipment for producing slides.

In addition to the close-up lenses needed, a stand with lights is also recommended. We recommend using color film even though you may be photographing black and white photos; many old photos were finished in a sepia color and actually have more browns or grays than
modern black and white photos would reveal; using the color film helps to convey this sense of an older photograph. With the development of such fast speed films as Kodak's Ektachrome, which comes in 200 and 400 ASA, it is actually possible to take copies of photos without using a copy stand.

Once you decide upon reproducing family photos on slides for a special illustrated presentation to all the family, then you should write a basic outline or script of what you hope to accomplish. You will be limited by the number of photographs available and subject matter included. If you are like many families, there will be many photos of vacations, holidays, special celebrations, birthdays, and special events, such as entry into the armed services. The first step is to survey what is available, then to work it up into an outline, giving some balance to the project—that is, do not to make 75 percent of your slides from the vacations and ignore other subjects. If your family possesses a great number of photos, produce several slide shows: at the beach, birthdays of the family, weddings, etc. A sample outline might look like this:

Slide Show of Uncle Thomas: The Early Years

1. Photos of parents at marriage
2. Baby photos
3. Learning to ride tricycle
4. Standing in food line during depression with parents
5. Thomas at his 10th birthday with Grandfather James
6. Thomas as runner on junior high track team
7. Vacation at mountain cabin during junior year
8. Thomas and best friend Randolph
9. Broken leg cast after skiing accident
10. Winning mile run in track meet, senior year
11. Graduation portrait

Special techniques. Once you have a general outline of what you are going to attempt, keep in mind some of the special techniques for adding color and interest such as making a close-up from a photo—or if there are several people in the group photograph, making several close-ups. Let's assume that you have an excellent group picture of Grandfather and family in about 1921, showing everyone in full figure. Take your close-up lens and adjust it to take separate photos of only the head and shoulders of individuals in the photo. Often photos which seem remote "come to life" when close-ups are made of each individual in them; moreover, projecting a close-up on the screen makes you more aware of expressions, clothing, bearing, mood, and reactions. (See the examples of this procedure in Photos .) When you show these photos as slides, vary the procedure: show the large picture first, followed by close-ups, or reverse the order. This lends variety and interest to the presentation of your slides.

While in most cases it is advisable to copy the photo in question without attempting to make a border, in some instances you can "add color" to black and white photos by putting them on a sheet of colored construction paper to serve as a border, and then shoot the reproduction. The result is to give your slides more appeal and color when showing them. Titles also add interest. Titles can be typed or handlettered to introduce the slides; if there are a great number of slides, title slides could introduce sections. It is advisable to do your lettering on colored paper to add contrast and create interest.
While making slides of old photos is visually the most attractive option, don't forget that mixing in a few old documents can add further interest. For example, if Grandfather had invested in some mining stocks in his youth and some still survive, a photographic slide of the stock certificate would be interesting to see. Or if Grandmother tells a story about an old tea service handed down in the family, show a slide of the tea pitcher and cups.

Adding sound. While some people may prefer to narrate the slide show they have produced, others will want to increase its authenticity by interviewing on tape some of the persons shown in the photos. By bringing together several voices of persons interviewed who appear in the photos, you can improve a slide show, bringing it to life. The advantage of the tape is that once the comments have been made, the tape can be preserved and shown with the slides at any time. A simple yet effective device for giving instructions on the tape to the projectionist on when to advance the slide projector is to ring a small bell.

Adding sound requires an outline or rough script if the sound is to be done in a professional manner. Perhaps the simplest way of adding sound, especially if you are dealing with just one person, is to locate the photos to be copied, sit down and record your conversation with the subject as the two of you look over the photographs. Once the photos are made into slides, load them into the slide tray in precisely the same order used in the discussion, and you will have an easy, ready-made slide/tape program.

Having access to a large cassette tape recorder with special input plugs for microphone and external sources is advantageous for better
sound; even better is access to a sound laboratory for "mixing" sound properly. But for most family historians, sound can easily be added with an inexpensive cassette tape recorder. Just be certain that you buy a high quality tape that will bear repeated playing and will not jam. (The last thing the family historian wants is to have all members of the family assembled for a premiere performance and then have the cassette stop.) Slide/tape programs offer the easiest and least expensive way to combine audio and visual effects for presenting your family history. If you have access to 35 mm photo equipment and a cassette recorder, your research will take on new life; you will be able to reach members of your family who might never take time to read a written history.

"Radio" Dramatization

Some families find doing a radio-style dramatization of family history an enjoyable way of gaining the attention of family members. One possible format is a "This is Your Life" approach, where certain persons who had meaningful roles to play in the past life of the subject are contacted. For example, a high school teacher, a friend on Dad's first job, or a cousin who was close to Dad in the Navy could all be briefly interviewed. This approach would be particularly suitable for an anniversary, birthday, retirement, or some other life-cycle milestone. The radio dramatization (on tape) might be done in conjunction with a scrapbook, which could convey in photos and clippings a part of Dad's career and the impact of friends and associates on his life.

Such an enterprise is ambitious, however, and the beginner should first attempt to do a simple radio production—perhaps a topical sketch
of a relative's career or amusing anecdotes about a colorful family member. Or a documentary approach would yield good results, with a narrator and several members of the family being interviewed. Such approaches are advantageous for diffusion because copies of tapes can easily be made and sent to far away family members. If a dramatization is attempted, complete with sound effects and music, family members might be enlisted to help plan the program and produce it.

Videotape and Super 8 Film

For the more ambitious family historian, two formats today rival one another and are easily adapted to both preserving and producing family history. For about a half century, many families have taken "home movies"—(usually in 8 mm. format, now improved as Super 8). This is an economical way of preserving the history of family members, especially younger children during their growing years. But many families never edit their films or attempt to splice them into a meaningful narrative.

The key to doing a successful cinematic presentation of family history is to select a simple theme for your production. Do not try to give a life-cycle or full portrait of one or several families. Doing an 8 mm documentary can be both satisfying and time-consuming. You should only try this format if you have access to a camera and a projector for easy presentation of your materials once they are completed—if you need to constantly rent a projector, then Super 8 is less useful. Film makes a durable record and can be kept for many years; however, unless you have access to a viewer and splicer, film is difficult to edit. Only the most dedicated family historian should think about using Super 8; but if your family already owns movie equipment
and you enjoy a challenge, nothing could be more rewarding than seeing family history presented on film.

During the past decade Super 8 with sound has been introduced by some manufacturers. Only a few family historians will have access to this kind of equipment; if you do, it is an effective tool for doing interviews with family members. A particularly useful combination is to do an extended oral history interview with family members on tape, then go back and have the family member in question tell one outstanding story or anecdote for the film. Most film cartridges do not last much more than three minutes, which is ample time for one uninterrupted story. Splicing together five or six simple interviews with an introductory title could be quite lively and preserve family reminiscences in both sight and sound for future family members.

Doing a documentary type of presentation in silent Super 8 film is quite feasible; you only need a small viewer and splicer to edit. But Super 8 sound is more difficult because the sound track (stripe on side of film) moves at a different pace from the visual image. Splicing can be done, but special equipment is needed. Photographic laboratories are usually the best solution for splicing together Super 8 film.

For this reason, videotaping, which can be edited more easily than film, has rapidly become the most popular home movie format for most American families. Its ease of operation and low cost and instant replay on a VCR (video tape recorder) means that many homes already possess the means to produce a family history documentary that could easily be shown on family members' television screens. By combining live interviews with family members or friends, with close-ups of snapshots, portraits, documents, and even slides, a varied visual mix can easily
and inexpensively be created. Either a VHS format camera or a so-called camcorder (similar to Super 8 mm. film) can be successfully used. An outline or narrative should always be used to give unity and structure to your presentation rather than presenting a "happening." This way you can take advantage of some of the original source materials that you may have collected--either by making reference to some original letters, diaries, will, etc. in interviewing a family member, or by making a closeup of the document itself. Videotapes can easily be stored and copied, so they are a popular and accessible format for doing family history that increasingly are within the reach of most families.

It should be noted that for Super 8 and video, your equipment should have the capability of doing close-up photography, since the essence of doing a family history documentary is to show a number of photos and documents by "zooming in" for emphasis and focus. (If your equipment can't do this, a photo laboratory could do it for you).

The aspiring family historian who wants to present a family history (or more likely selected segments of it) will have to go the extra mile to use film or videotape, but the effort is well rewarded when the family history appears in media which are the most popular in our time. Classes on using audio-visual aids are available at most colleges and universities or extension divisions; it is strongly recommended that attendance in such a class be the first step before attempting one of these forms of communication.

**Scrapbooks and Photo Albums**

Once a life cycle or family cycle study has been completed and the narrative sense of what a person or family has done over time is well
organized, then either a structured scrapbook or photo album could be used to communicate the family history. This suggestion should be differentiated from the ordinary scrapbook or photo album in which clippings or photos are stored, often on a random basis, over time, and without feeling for organization or topical development. I am proposing here fresh scrapbooks or photo albums which follow a well organized outline to present the history of a subject, whether that subject is a father, father and mother, or the entire nuclear family. These albums are accompanied by a text or commentary, so that the end result is a volume which tells a story by using photos, clippings, and other memorabilia.

For example, after written and visual sources have been collected and a basic family history narrative has been written, it would be possible to take these materials (using either originals or copies) and organize them into scrapbooks or photo albums on different topics. One family followed the scheme below:

Green Album: "Review of Jones family origins"
(Grandfather in Germany; immigration to New York; Jones branch origins in Britain; house in Connecticut)

Red Album: "Courtship of Fred and Emma Jones"
(Photos and memorabilia on Fred and Emma at State College, 1933-1937.)

Brown Album: "Jones Family on Vacation, 1945-1975"
(Photos and memorabilia of the family at the beach, mountains, motor trips, and the trip to Latin America.)

Yellow Album: "Bill Jones in Sports"
(Clippings and photos and short narrative on Bill Jones and his career in high school and college sports with memorabilia.)
While a time honored method is to use paste to affix clippings and photos, today there are other alternatives, especially the high quality plastic sheets (using vinyl) for three-ring albums now being produced. The better types of sheets are actually pockets of plastic (open only on top) in which can be inserted various types of source material. One can insert larger items and expect them to stay put; or one can lightly affix smaller items to a sheet of paper (colored paper lends more visual excitement) and have items on both sides of the paper to show through the plastic sheets.

To be sure, life cycle presentations are excellent subjects for this album approach. This is particularly true if the occasion is the celebration of a 50th wedding anniversary, retirement from work after a number of years, or some other special event. In some instances, after the death of a loved one, a memorial type of album could be prepared to honor that person.

Perhaps the most important item which separates an excellent album from an ordinary one is the quality of the textual explanatory material, whether it is a full narrative account that parallels the illustrations or explanatory captions accompanying the material. This calls for planning in advance, using an outline, and then integrating the visual and written materials.

**Family History on a Wall and in a Trunk**

Two more ideas for disseminating family history are easy to do and within the economic grasp of most family historians. First is the idea of creating a "history wall" in the home for display of photos, drawings, paintings, documents, certificates, diplomas, and other memorabilia that help tell a coherent story about the family or give an
impression of the family's past. Some history walls are located in a hallway; others are on a bedroom or living room wall. Some tell a story in pictures and certificates displayed; others simply give an impression of family members. One effective way to organize a wall is by generations—that is, photos of the great grandparents, followed by their children, and then each succeeding generation. In some instances, only partial representation of the family will be possible because of lack of photos; but having a visual representation of a family tree on the wall can be an effective way to display your family heritage.

Some families have several family walls—perhaps two are really ideal—one for father's side of the family, one for mother's side of the family. Such walls can be added to as you find more relevant family photos and documents worthy of display. Some items can be put up for temporary display until the right arrangement on the wall is made. (See Figure 16.4 for examples of family walls.)

Another advantage the family wall offers is getting members of the family involved in helping to search for the family's past heritage. It can also be a didactic device, teaching younger children to recognize their kin and relatives. This can be especially effective when young nuclear families reside far from the main family and need to have the identification of kin reinforced.

Subject matter for family walls can range from a large pictorial family tree of the nuclear family, tracing back several generations ascending the extended family, to specialized subjects such as hobbies, career in the service, years in high school, awards won in a hobby or talent area, vacations the family has taken together, weddings,
baptisms and confirmations, or pictorial representations of a person's working life (or career).

Another way of preserving family memories and yet keeping them available for viewing is the family history in a trunk idea. Photos and written materials, objects of clothing, plates or tea services, knicknacks, writing instruments, or any small object that may have some story connected with it that illustrates an aspect of family history can be put in a trunk. Perhaps Grandfather was a plumber; several of his tools would be prime candidates for inclusion in a family history trunk. Or perhaps Uncle John was a physician and Aunt Rachel a seamstress. By including interesting objects of historical value and perhaps labeling them with a tag that briefly tells the story or background of the object, you can create a trunk full of memories and family history.

Such a trunk can be taken out for the benefit of children and used as a teaching device or it can be opened up on special occasions or at extended family gatherings or parties. It insures that a special place has been set aside to keep representative samples of letters, photos, and objects that show the way the family lived in the past. One grandmother put together with loving care a family history trunk (without breakables) and then mailed (registered and insured) it to her children, asking each daughter or son to keep the trunk several months for the benefit of the grandchildren, and to send it on to the next family member. The trunk, therefore, became an inexpensive traveling exhibit showing the heritage of the larger family with authentic objects from the family's past.
Since such a trunk assumes handling of its contents, often by children, most breakable items should be avoided (unless the trunk does not travel). It is also a good idea to put original letters or documents and photographs in plastic folders or sheets. There should be a master list of all the contents of the trunk, so items can be kept track of. Each object or piece should have a number that corresponds to the master list. Perhaps most important of all, a tag should be attached to each object with a short description of why it is important in the family's history, or if the number system is used, then a short description can be put in a master notebook or log book to explain the objects and materials so numbered.

Whether you choose a family wall or a family trunk, both are inexpensive ways of presenting and communicating family history that you have already researched. If you aren't in a position to do either now, consider these ideas for later use.
THE ROBERT AND EMILY GREEN FAMILY OF FORT WORTH

by
Nancy Green

Published Privately
1981

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The Life of Blanche and Max Higgins
JOHN EMERSON DOE

A Biography of the Father of Susan, Lil, and Jack Doe, and the Husband of Mary Doe.

Written by
Jack Doe

Presented to "Dad" on the occasion of his 50th birthday, January 25, 1982.

Printed by the Family
1983

BE SS IE

A History of Grandmother Brown by her grandson James Brown

With a photographic essay on all her children and grandchildren, and a family tree tracing back six generations.

Chicago
1980

Printed by the Brown Family, Inc.
25 Sunset Way, Evanston, Ill.
CHAPTER 17
Conserving Your Family's Heritage

Once your family history materials, (papers, tapes, photos, documents, or objects) begin to accumulate, the question of what to do with these sources becomes crucial. "Crucial" is not an exaggeration because in many instances, the student of family history may have located the lion's share of a family's heritage in one place. This is a rare opportunity to consult with family members about the best way to conserve that precious heritage and linkage with the past that otherwise might be lost.

There are two basic options for the family historian: one is to collect materials and create a family records center or family archives housed in a residence or office controlled by the family. The other is to donate the collected materials to a historical society, museum, or library for safekeeping and preservation. Since most institutions will ordinarily accept only bigger collections or a collection that is in some way unique, for most people the family archives is really the best and most feasible solution. We will discuss both options below.

The Family Records Center

Winston Churchill was not always successful. The great British prime minister often lost political battles and retired to the sidelines from Parliament: during those times, often for several years at a stretch, he would rekindle his interest in family history and research some aspect of his family's illustrious past. Most of us do not have statesmen reaching back several centuries as Churchill did, from whom we can derive inspiration and meaning; but most of us do have family
members whose life and times are instructive and interesting for the
problems they met and resolved. You have a responsibility to future
generations of family members to make certain that all important and
relevant materials about the family's past are preserved. There are
several steps to follow in organizing a family records center.

1. Obtain the interest and backing of other family members.
Creating a family depository is easier if several members
of the nuclear family agree that the family needs one; in
some cases, several members of the larger extended
family might agree that one family residence be
designated as an "official" family center. The skill of
the family historian in convincing other relatives that
materials should be preserved will be enhanced if the
materials already collected can be displayed or shown.
To discuss such an idea in the abstract may not create
much interest; but if a family gathering to discuss these
ideas is shown old letters, vintage photos, and old
maps, and has several excerpts played from taped oral
history interviews, the chances will be greatly enhanced
for a favorable decision.

2. Discuss but don't necessarily agree where the materials
should be housed. There are many factors that go into
the decision of who should have responsibility for the
care and storing of such important materials:

Who has adequate storage space?

Who owns a home and is relatively stable?

(Or has an office that is fairly permanent?)
Is the place a central location?

Is there convenient access for family members who need to consult the materials?

3. Discuss who is the person to assume responsibility for such family materials, and what mandate should be given him or her. While making a contract is probably not called for, some families may feel it a wise idea to draw up a simple memorandum with copies for all relevant family members. An example might be as follows:

On July 4, 1986, members of the Robert Smith family met in St. Louis to discuss the creation of a central repository for family history materials, most of which have been collected by Bill Smith for his project on family history at the university. We have agreed that the materials collected, and other materials in the future, will be stored at the Robert Smith residence in Columbia, Missouri, in the facilities agreed upon. It is also agreed that a family committee composed of Robert Smith, Bill Smith, and Robert Smith Jenkins will review from time to time the materials and policies of the family repository; they are hereby empowered to make decisions on how the materials shall be stored and what will happen to them in the event of a change of status in the family. For the immediate future, Bill Smith will be in charge of the family repository.

4. Decide if the family wants to obtain copies of other family history materials that are known. One possibility is to invite other relatives to donate or lend their memorabilia to the family archives (if materials are lent, receipts should be issued). In many cases, family members will want to retain possession of some documents, but may allow you to copy them. In this case, your family committee may want to establish a small photocopying fund so the archives can be expanded.
These are some of the questions you need to consider with members of your family in the initial stages of creating a depository. The single most important factor is to reach agreement among several family members that an archives is a good idea and that they are willing to support it. Once agreement is reached, proceed to explore these problems:

**Space.** Storage of family records should be in a place that has a moderate temperature and is not too hot or cold. The records center should not be near a garage door where rain might leak in or near a furnace where excessive heat could damage photos. When you consider the value of your own heritage, a place that is free from moisture, excessive heat, dust, or humidity is a must. The center should probably be away from the daily life of the family, to prevent accidental disturbance; yet if a family records center is situated in a remote part of an attic, then its purpose of being an accessible repository has been ignored.

**Storage equipment.** A modest investment can yield rich dividends for the family archives. What price are you willing to pay to preserve your family's past heritage for you and future family members? Probably the easiest and least expensive way to store materials is to buy folding storage boxes that permit you to store all sizes of records. These boxes are also known as transfer boxes, bankers' boxes or temporary storage cases and generally sell for only a few dollars a box. Assuming you have classified your materials in file folders, the storage box is a good solution for the short term.

If you are able to spend more than a minimal amount and are concerned about preserving materials from further deterioration, take a
hint from professional archivists who store documentary materials in acid-free containers—these are both storage boxes and smaller storage containers and are popularly known by one brand name, "Hollinger boxes." Several companies make such boxes, which are specially treated to not contribute to the deterioration of important papers. The same observation should be made of file folders, which can also be procured in an acid-free format.

Storage and "Hollinger" type boxes can be kept on shelves already built in the room designated for storage; or inexpensive shelving sold in hardware or home improvement stores can be purchased or else the old stand-by, bricks and boards could be used.

A more expensive but practical and highly recommended solution is to buy a steel filing cabinet. The best buy for the money is the standard four drawer model used in offices across the nation; if you have a lot to store, a five drawer model can be obtained for a little more money. Two drawer cabinets are less expensive, but they tend to be less value for the money than the larger models. The advantage of the steel cabinet is that it provides a fairly safe (some have locks) place to store precious materials, especially if you have classified your materials in file folders. One drawer could be devoted to odd size materials that could be placed horizontally in the file. American business has made the four drawer cabinet its standard equipment for storage; perhaps the family historian should learn from this example. Cost of filing cabinets could be reduced if several family members agree to share the expense.

Photographs. There are several possibilities for storing photos and other visual materials. The easiest way to store them is to collect
them in file folders and put them in a separate drawer or to put files with visuals next to relevant documentary materials. Many historians now take advantage of clear vinyl plastic sheets that can be easily placed in three-ring notebooks. These sheets have several formats: some take negatives, others take 35 mm color slides, and still others accept different size photo prints. The three-ring notebooks can then be stored on a shelf or in a filing cabinet, giving greater protection to photos and slides than would be possible in file folders.

Some families place photos in scrapbooks or photo albums after a vacation or at the end of a year. While this is an excellent practice, especially if photos are identified, one can also take the point of view that the original negative or an original photo (or copy) should be placed in the file. Scrapbooks are often heavily used and deteriorate or one member of the family may lay claim to them. If all photos are sorted out and copies made for the files, you will have a master repository that other members of the family can draw from.

Take for example the case of the Rollins family in New Mexico: Jake and Nancy Rollins and their four children took two-week vacation trips in different parts of the West for more than a decade, and Dad Rollins took more than two thousand photos in the process. Now, twenty years later, Dad has passed away, the four children are married, and there is a lively contest to see who gets which scrapbooks on the vacations in which all the children appear. Sue Haskell, one of the daughters, convinces the other family members that they should have a number of family photos duplicated to utilize in their family archive so that in future years if family members want copies they will know where to find them.
The same is true for slides and movies. Both of these photographic processes can easily be copied today by major photo laboratories. One possibility is to appoint a family committee to go through many photographs or slides and pick out those of interest to the nuclear family or members of the extended family and to arrange for reproduction. Transference to videotape is especially recommended. When the cost is distributed over several families, such a project costs less and might furnish some interesting materials for presentation at family parties, dinners, or other occasions.

Tapes. Oral history interviews pose a problem for the home archives, since most tape interviews are currently done on cassette tape recorders. The life of a cassette tape is as yet unproven. Generally, they cannot be expected to last as long as reel-to-reel varieties of tape. For some brands, life may be measured in terms of a few years; for more expensive brands, the expected life may be for a decade or longer. Ideally, at some point, all interviews done with family members should be typed up; but for most people, that is also an expensive process. Here are several practical suggestions:

- Let's assume you interviewed Grandfather last year and he just died this year. The interview is of great value to the family and members are anxious to have it preserved. One strategy is to make multiple copies of the interview (copying from one tape to another provided you have access to a second tape recorder and the proper "patch" cord to link them). With several cassettes in circulation, this would insure the possibility of preservation.

- Another possibility is to copy cassettes every several years onto new cassettes. If copying of key family tapes were carried out every four or five years, the life of an interview would be indefinite.

- If a family has the resources, all cassettes should be copied onto reel-to-reel tapes that have a thickness of at least 1 mil. This would be the best insurance over a long period of time.
Make certain that tapes are stored in a place that is free of humidity and extreme fluctuations in temperature.

Technical developments are constantly taking place in the audio field, and family historians are advised to consult with a reputable dealer before purchasing tapes, to make certain that the best quality tapes with the highest known longevity are procured. Most specialists also recommend playing a tape at least once every year rather than letting it sit unused for several years. This contributes (according to some experts) to the life expectancy of the tape, whether it is cassette or reel-to-reel.

Photocopying and microfilming original materials. The question on longevity is also a matter of concern when photocopying materials from other relatives. I have suggested that photocopying is a desirable way to build a family repository, especially when there are family members who are reluctant to part with valuable original documents but who will allow them to be copied. Simply taking documents of this type to the corner drugstore to be copied for a dime on a small copying machine might eventually create problems when in a few years the copies made begin to fade or crack.

Happily today great improvements have been made in photocopying and most machines even accept "plain bond." This is the most desirable type of copier since it means that you can purchase a high quality bond paper (bond means the paper is of rag content rather than paper only) for copying which will preserve your family documents for many decades. If you were visiting your relatives in a rural area and you found valuable papers that you feared might be lost and not taken care of, you would be advised to copy these papers on whatever
equipment you could find. At a later time, you could recopy these valuable papers on bond paper.

If for some reason your family has accumulated many materials and there is a lack of space for keeping them, another possibility is to have the materials microfilmed. This is what many American businesses do today when they are faced with serious space problems. Microfilm can be stored in a fraction of the space ordinary documents take, but it offers some disadvantages. Microfilm life expectancy is also a matter of speculation; in recent years, materials used for microfilm have been improved, and longevity of thirty or forty years or better is a strong possibility. Another consideration on microfilm is that it cannot be used easily unless one has access to a microfilm reader. Such readers are usually found in most libraries, but how convenient would that be for someone doing family history? If the materials you wish to copy are not too bulky or numerous, it would be better to photocopy them for ease of access by family members; if your materials represent an enormous number of records that you feel need to be preserved, and only occasional access is desired, then microfilming is recommended. Machines now exist at major research libraries where you can obtain a photocopy on paper taken from a microfilm. This process tends to be rather expensive, but if the family did decide to opt for preservation on microfilm, photocopies could be obtained afterwards.

Common sense should be the general rule in building up family archives. It probably is not necessary to take all the precautions of research libraries in preserving papers, tapes, photos, and other materials. But family historians should be aware of these problems,
and may want to benefit from developments that could help preserve their family's heritage.

**Legal ownership.** Hopefully this will never become a problem, but it might be recommended for some families to draw up a memorandum specifying which original documents contained in the family depository belong to whom. Museums are often organized from collections of materials lent to them for safekeeping, and it is a routine matter to set up a guidebook or a file indicating what belongs to whom. Some families won't raise this question and will be pleased to have some place to store old papers and photographs. Other families may want their individual rights of ownership protected. If you as the family's historian are placed in charge of the archives, make certain that you keep materials from different family members or locations together and intact—don't split up collections.

This also points up the necessity of the two essential functions served by the family archivist: someone needs to be in charge of it and someone needs to know how to use the materials. Ideally this should be one and the same person. For example, Aunt Leonore has done much family genealogy and by common consent is considered to be the family's historian; she has a spacious house and is willing to accept responsibility for the family archives. She keeps track of all materials that come in and draws up a simple handwritten list of materials for others who may wish to use it.

Another possibility could be Uncle Jonathan, who has a large business with plenty of excellent storage space for family papers in a fireproof vault. He is willing to take on the responsibility of storing the papers, but he wants someone else to serve as their custodian.
Cousin Bill agrees and he draws up an index to the family records and takes over all duties associated with classifying materials, finding new acquisitions, and seeing that the files are kept in order so that other family members can use them. After two years of serving in this position, he compiles an inventory of what has been collected and sends it out to all members of the extended family and suggests that he will be available one evening a month to help people who want to use the family archive. Such arrangements are increasingly being made by families in this day of "Roots" and heritage interest. If your family is open to this type of activity, it should be given serious consideration.

**Depositing in a Library or a Historical Society**

A note should be added here for the occasional family that may have extremely old or valuable documents that might be of value beyond the immediate family. Sometimes family members find letters preserved from the Civil War or memorabilia dating from the Revolutionary War. Or perhaps a family member was mayor of the town fifty years ago and left behind several boxes of materials that would add to the history of the community. In such instances, a visit to the local library, museum, or historical society is called for to determine whether or not such materials would be better preserved in a professionally managed environment. Many universities and colleges also have excellent libraries and manuscript rooms that might be interested in personal family histories. In fact, many institutions of this type were formerly little interested in family history but have now changed their policies, as historians and researchers have demonstrated the immense value of family-oriented materials for community and social history. Today,
directors of libraries and historical societies generally welcome these types of materials.

One word of caution. If you do possess valuable sources, you might want to consult with other members of the family before a gift is made of such material, since gifts are often irrevocable. Deposit in a specialized institution is highly recommended; family members debating a course of action should be reminded that a professional institution can be counted upon to manage and preserve such materials in a way that will relieve the family of the burden of caring for them. Most institutions arrange for easy access for family members who donate materials so that they are not really put out of circulation. Family members could consult the valuable papers at the library or historical society when needed.