Genealogy Do-Over – Step 7

Topics: 1) Reviewing Genealogy Database Software and 2) Digitizing Photos and Documents

Reviewing Genealogy Database Software

By now, many of The Genealogy Do-Over participants have been tracking their research and then evaluating the evidence to prove or disprove dates, names, relationships and more. The next step: enter proven data into a genealogy software program or on a genealogy website in order to share results and produce reports.

When I first started with genealogy, I purchased the latest version of Family Tree Maker from Banner Blue software (remember them?) and simply entered whatever I found (without evaluating evidence) into the program.

Then when I decided to pursue genealogy as a profession, in 2008, I opted to use a variety of programs, all at the same time. These included Legacy Family Tree, RootsMagic and Family Tree Maker. I also had my data in Ancestry.com on a public tree and on WikiTree. Why did I have my data in all these programs? Then, as now, I am often asked by vendors to beta test new versions and new features, so I had to keep my data in those programs.

Genealogy Database Programs – Are You Being Served?

I selected Legacy Family Tree which is now owned by MyHeritage since I have a MyHeritage subscription that I use and I like. MyHeritage is great for connecting with other European researchers and my German lines (Henneberg, Pressner, Herring) are where I need the most help. Currently there is no "sync" feature between Legacy and MyHeritage but given the past track record on technology advances, I know that this feature is on the short list of improvements to Legacy Family Tree.

I did a thorough review of available options and listed the features that were most important to me and my research. Every genealogist is different in terms of how they research so your choice should suit you and not work against you. Also, before moving to any new program, make sure you a) read the Terms of Services and b) understand how to import a GEDCOM file (that standard genealogy data file format. Some programs will not import notes, sources, and other items. Make sure you don't lose data when moving to a new program!

Wikipedia has an up-to-date Comparison of Genealogy Software chart listing specifications. In addition, check out GenSoftReviews which includes actual reviews, many by genealogists and actual users of the programs.

Digitizing Photos and Documents

Understanding the correct way to scan and digitize your family photos as well as your research documents is an important part of genealogy. I can't stress this enough and I knew I had to include the topic in The Genealogy Do-Over.

Photo Digitization Best Practices

- Set your scanner to a high resolution, such as 300 or 600 dpi.

- Use the TIFF format and then copy TIFF files to create JPG or PNG files.

- Clean the scanner with a microfiber cleaning cloth. Remove dust, lint and fingerprints so you can achieve the clearest possible scans.

- Make sure the photo is in contact with the scanning surface or as close as possible to the surface; however, often you can get a good scan right through a plastic sleeve, mat, or glass. Don't move the photo while scanning.

- Keep the photo lined up with the edges of the scanner to reduce editing later on.

- When transferring digital images to your computer, always save an original scan of the photo and then make copies of the file to be used for editing. Also, export to multiple file types.

- Use Photoshop Elements or your favorite graphic editing software to resize digital images for use with your favorite project.

- Remember to periodically backup your scans of photos and documents.

Photos: DIY or Use a Professional Service?

There are many different ways to handle digital preservation of family photos. You can take the DIY ("do it yourself") approach or use a service that will scan the images for you.

So what is the difference? The DIY approach may require you to purchase a scanner, learn the specifications and correct scanning settings, and then scan each photo. Once scanned, you'll need to rename the file, save it and then move on to the next one. The process can be time consuming to say the least. Using a service tends to be hassle free, usually guarantees a high-quality scan, but can be expensive if you have many items to scan.

If you decide to take the DIY approach, I highly recommend the book *How to Archive Family Photos: A Step-by-Step Guide to Organize and Share Your Photos Digitally* by Denise Levenick which is available in paperback as well as e-book format. It has excellent advice on how to select a scanner as well as the best way to scan all types of photos. I also recommend Denise's handout from her RootsTech 2014 presentation, *How to Scan an Elephant: Digitize Your Family History from Artifact to Zombie*. Click HERE for the free download.

If you decide to use a scanning service, please take my advice: **review their services and make sure they are using the best equipment and providing you with the best high-resolution scan**. Many of the services, including superstores like Costco and Wal-Mart, outsource their scanning to vendors who are more focused on speed and quick turn-around rather than quality. Do you really want to take shortcuts with your family memories?

That's why I use [Larsen Digital](#) for my scanning needs: I've been extremely happy with the results. By using Larsen, I know I get expert results AND spend that scanning time researching my ancestors. Click **[here](#)** to learn more about Larsen Digital and to get a 15% off coupon on scanning services!

Documents: How to Convert Image Text to Searchable Text

The digitization of documents is different than photos due to this challenge: how do you convert the text in an image to text that you can search, copy, and paste and use? The process employed to convert image text is called **OCR** or **Optical Character Recognition**.

Again, just like scanning photos, you can take the DIY approach or use a service. Keep in mind that the quality of the document will impact the OCR results. So if the document is old, faded and hard to read, the OCR process will certainly need review and correction. And, currently, handwriting OCR is basically unavailable.

If you have a flatbed scanner and it came with software, look to see if that software will OCR your scanned text documents. Another option is to purchase a program such as **Adobe Acrobat Standard** that can quickly OCR scanned documents.

Alternatively, consider using a service for scanning documents; a good local option is your closest [FedEx Office](#) store.

Step 7 To Do List – Full Do-Over Participants

- **Reviewing Genealogy Database Software**: Review all the different genealogy database possibilities, including software that stores data locally, and online programs such as WikiTree. Select a program that meets all your needs including source citations, linking to scanned photos and documents, etc.

- **Digitizing Photos and Documents**: Spend some time reviewing how you want to scan your photos and documents. If you decide to take the DIY route, research scanners that work within your budget and technical expertise. And remember to thoroughly check out any scanning service you decide to use if you don't want to scan items yourself.

Step 7 To Do List – Review or "Go-Over" Participants

- **Reviewing Genealogy Database Software**: Also, decide if your current method of recording your genealogy research results is working for you instead of against you. If you decide to stick with your current system, make sure you've downloaded the latest upgrade and understand any new features.

- **Digitizing Photos and Documents**: There is no real difference in practices from the "All-In" participants; however, if you are sitting on digital scans of photos and documents you've done previously, review the quality and consider instituting the best practices listed above and "re do" those scans!