

Put Some Meat on Them Bones: Telling the Stories

Presenter: Rosemary Cantrell

rosicantrell@bellsouth.net

Genealogists love to find the big “bones” (birth, marriage, death). As many smaller “bones” as possible are then added (military, land, newspapers, etc.). These all help to answer the questions: **who? what? when? where?**

If all the research has been done right, all the “bones” fit.
If an arm is coming from the top of the head, there is a problem!
When the “bones” all fit just right, we are still **not** finished!

They were more than skeletons. They were real people who lived real lives. Telling the stories adds the **why** and **how** to the who, what, where and when.

Why do the stories even matter?

- 1 – “Define the dash.”
- 2 – Stories make the ancestors come to life.
- 3 – Stories help us understand their lives.
- 4 – Stories teach about their joys and struggles and how they coped.
- 5 – Knowing their stories helps us understand who we are
- 6 – Charts and graphs lack interest for non-genealogists.
- 7 – Children need to know their history and stories speak to them.

Two types of stories:

- 1 – Biographical Narrative – A Factual account of all the events in a person’s life.
- 2 – Stories of Individual Events – Details of a single event put into the context of the time and place that the event happened

Biographical Narrative:

- 1 – Research the ancestor, making the information as complete as possible.
- 2 – Make a detailed timeline, showing all events in his life. Add births and deaths of other family members, as well as any other events that seem important.
- 3 – Review all the sources used to complete the research, looking for details to enhance the story.
- 4 – Use the internet, books, histories, newspapers, etc., to learn the background for the events that occurred during his lifetime.
- 5 – Using the timeline and the details from the sources, write the story in narrative form.

Stories of Individual Events:

- 1 – Choose the event.
- 2 – Review all the personal research about the ancestor for that event.
- 3 – Use the internet, books, histories, newspapers, etc., to learn the background for that event.
- 4 – Write the story, using the background information to put the event in the context of the location and time.

Hints for Writing Good Genealogical Stories:

- 1 – Write in the third person.
- 2 – Write in the past tense.
- 3 – Use only the facts.
- 4 – When speculating, indicate clearly that it is an opinion – “perhaps,” “possibly,” “probably,” “might have.”
- 5 – Use good writing techniques – sentence variety, descriptive adjectives, etc.
- 6 – Make stories easily readable for middle elementary school children.
- 7 – Proofread, edit, have another person give critique.
- 8 – Share with family, as well as local genealogical and historical groups and local library.

Some stories that need to be told:

- 1 – Occupations – “He was a blacksmith.” “She was a telephone operator in 1940.”
- 2 – Tragedies – “He was killed in a tornado.”
- 3 – Migration – “Why did they move?” “They didn’t follow the normal migratory path.”
- 4 – Education – “She was the first to go to college.”
- 5 – Lifestyle – “He lived on a farm.” “They lived in a sod house.”
- 6 – Achievements – “He received the Congressional Medal of Honor.”
- 7 – Family Lore – “Was he really a horse thief?” “The big family feud.”
- 8 – Geography – “What was life like on the Ohio frontier?” “They lived on the Mississippi.”

Some Free Websites for Searching Social History

Library of Congress:

Chronicling America

Digital Collections

Library Catalogs

First Person Narratives of the America South

Manuscripts from the Federal Writers’ Project

Digital Library of Georgia

New York Public Library Digital Collections

New Deal Network (covers the Depression Era)

The Plymouth Colony Archive

Some of my stories:

<http://www.putmeatonbonesstoriesofancestors.blogspot.com>