Facebook and Twitter for Genealogy
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Believe it or not, Facebook is for more than just posting photos of what you eat and letting people know when it's snowing out. In fact, Facebook is a fabulous resource for anyone researching their family history.

The important thing to be aware of with Facebook is ensuring your privacy settings are what you want them to be.

Privacy levels are: Public, Friends, Friends of Friends and Just Me. These can be set for your posts, who can find you, who can send you a friend request, who can see who your friends are and who can tag you in a post. Note that your cover photos is set to public as a default. This can't be changed.

You also need to make decisions about apps being able to access your information, whether Facebook can tell where you are located and what notifications you want to receive. Once all of this is out of the way, you can start using Facebook as a genealogy resource.

Using the search bar at the top of your home page, enter words for things that are of interest to you. "German Genealogy, Hispanic Genealogy, DNA, Civil War" etc. Take time to read through the results. You will see pages and groups on the subject as well as friends who have posted on the subject, events that are taking place on the subject and even the chance to do a wider web search – away from Facebook.

Once you find a page or group you want to follow or be part of, simply hit the "like" button – generally a thumbs up. Some groups want to ensure that you are a real person so will ask you two or three questions to determine that you are not a robot. Generally speaking, if you don't allow your profile picture to be public, group administrators will be leery and may not approve of your request to join.

Read the rules for any group that accepts you. This is a key part of social media etiquette. After you choose to like a page or group, Facebook will suggest others that are of similar interest. You can ignore these or take a closer look at them.

Often groups are good places to pose questions when you are looking for a little bit of help. Be polite and don't hog the group and always say thank you. Don't expect the group to take the place of professional help. One or two questions are great every few months, but you shouldn't be asking someone to basically do your research for you.

Here's a fabulous tool, updated regularly to help you get started on who to follow and what groups to consider belonging to: https://socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list/

Enjoy your newsfeeds tomorrow morning!

Becoming Twitterific

Twitter is a social media venue that allows access to instant information. Most people roll their eyes at the thought of another social media platform. The old adage was "find one you are good at and make it work for you." That seemed to give people the ability to relax and ignore anything other than FaceBook.

Twitter, once you get the hang of it, is super. It is less conversational than Facebook but can be far more engaging. Twitter has nicely come into its own and increased the character count to 280 from 140 which makes for more sensible tweets. The addition of photos and the ability to tag photos allows a wider reach. Twitter can be a valuable resource to genealogists of any calibre.

Twitter is a great way to get information on newly released genealogy records, connect with genealogists all over the world, discovering new resources (who is digitizing records and making them available, who is creating new research facilities, who is holding conferences or workshops).

Here's how you can get started:

First, you need to create an account. To do this, go to the Twitter website: https://twitter.com/. Here, you will find the sign up box. Next, select a username. Choose something that is unique to you and that will make it easy for others to identify you. Mine is @genealogytours because my business arranges genealogy tours to Scotland.

Once you have your account set up, you can begin to "follow" tweeters who might be of interest to you as you research your family history. You can do this in the search bar at the top of your homepage. Simply type in the things you are looking for "genealogy", "German genealogy", "Civil War Genealogy", "Jewish genealogy" etc. You can also look for people you think might be able to provide information that will be helpful to you as you research. Type in their names and a list will be generated. You do not need to know their Twitter username for this part. Twitter will show them via their first names. Make sure you click on the "people" tab at the top of the page so you aren't just getting posts that mention them. Once you find who you are looking for, click on their user name, and once on their homepage, you can choose to "follow" them. This means that you will be able to see their tweets. You can follow as many people as you want. If you are more interested in learning than in communicating, you don't ever have to tweet. The real benefit of Twitter lies in being able to access real-time information that matters to you.

Using Hashtags

Using hashtags This is particularly helpful if you want to follow along on "as it happens" events like #GenChat, #WDYTYA, #RR (Relative Race) or #LLF (Long Lost Family) episodes. Using these hashtags will give a whole new dimension to the Twitter experience.

You can also follow along during conferences you can't attend by searching for and following along on their hashtag #FGS for instance.

There are regular genealogy "tweet-ups" These are generally rapid paced, one hour conversations among a large group with an interest in genealogy. Two particularly helpful ones are #Ancestryhour –

every Tuesday at 2pm EST and #Genchat which takes place on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of every month at 10pm Eastern. These are fantastic ways to connect with other genealogists.

When you find a tweet you like or are in agreement with, simply click on the little heart at the bottom. This works on the same premise as the thumbs up in Facebook. To share the tweet with others, use the re-tweet symbol. You can simply re-tweet, or you can re-tweet with a comment. You can tag other people in the re-tweet to make them aware, you can use a hashtag so others who are following the hashtag can see it, or you can simply add your own two cents worth on the subject.

When you post your own tweet, you can do the same. Tag others, especially if you are making your followers aware of something that person is or has done – a talk, a book, a webinar etc. You can also use hashtags in your tweet, but don't clog up the tweets with hashtags. That isn't good Twitter etiquette. Two or three hashtags maximum. One is even better.

You can add a photo and also tag people in the photo. You can tag up to 10 people in the photo. But be aware that it can get annoying if everyone listed re-tweets and likes. It tends to get overwhelming with notifications. If you find yourself tagged and getting annoyed with the re-tweet notifications, simply click on the drop down arrow at the top of the tweet and using the drop down menu, click "Mute this conversation" This gives you exposure but stops the notifications. I tend not to mute the conversations but wanted to give you the option.

You can tweet to ask for assistance, but please make it a "does anyone know where I can find newspapers for 1899" or "can anyone tell me what the word beside the name MacCallum says" rather than using Twitter as a way to consult with professionals on your personal genealogy. That one will get you unfollowed pretty quickly and shows a lack of respect for the people who you are hoping to get assistance from.

Give Twitter a try. Ask for opinions on a new (or new to you) resource or product. Watch for opportunities to present or write for newsletters. Follow other genealogists, historians, hobbyists (hobbies you also enjoy). Learn about new resources, upcoming events, current trends and interests and connect to a whole new world of information.