Microblogging: Share Your Family History Online Without a Blog
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Sharing your family history online is the best way to find potential cousins, but you don’t necessarily need a blog to do it. Family historians are “microblogging” their genealogy content every day using social media, video, audio, and other platforms.

WHAT IS MICROBLOGGING?

- Short snippets of information, memories, stories, or photos, most often shared on popular social media platforms.
- Well known examples include past RootsTech keynote speakers Humans of New York (http://www.humansofnewyork.com) and Love Taza (http://lovetaza.com).

WHY MICROBLOG?

- Platforms are free to use and easy to set up (much easier than a blog).
- Creating content isn’t too time-consuming.
- You can post more frequently than with blogs.
- It’s easy to interact with followers (readers).
- You can quickly share time-sensitive information.
- Platforms provide a good experience for mobile users.

POPULAR MICROBLOGGING PLATFORMS

- Facebook
  - Perhaps the best-known social network with the most users.
  - There are 3 ways to share on Facebook:
    - Personal Profile - posts can be public or for “friends only.”
    - Public Page - share content publicly as a business or entity
    - Group - can be private for specific people or public for anyone to join

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You can create groups for family members or others interested in a particular research topic (i.e., “California Genealogy” or “Smith Family”).

- Allows hashtags, but too many hashtags lowers engagement. Use 1 or 2 only.
- Use the URL facebook.com/hashtag/{topic} to search for a specific hashtag.

**You Tube**
- The most popular video hosting site.
- Owned by Google; it is the 2nd largest search engine in the world.
- Has the biggest online audience after Facebook.
- Recently began allowing hashtags in the video title or description.

**Twitter**
- Allows posts of up to 280 characters (including spaces, punctuation, and hashtags), but you can post in threads.
- Hashtags that are very popular can become “Trending Topics.”

**Instagram**
- The preferred social network for millennials and young people.
- Very photo friendly; uses interesting layouts and filters.
- Accepts up to 30 hashtags in the photo description; more can be added in comments.

**LinkedIn**
- Lends itself to how-to and sharing expertise.
- Users come from an educated demographic.

**WHO MICROBLOGS?**

- Researchers (such as David Allen Lambert and Debbie Kennett)
- Archives and libraries (such as Library of Congress and the British Library)
- Historical and genealogical societies (such as Minnesota Historical Society)
- Storytellers (such as Photo Detective Maureen Taylor and genealogical mystery author Nathan Dylan Goodwin).
- Vendors and marketers (such as Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, and Living DNA)
- Event planners and managers (such as RootsTech and The Genealogy Show)

**HOW TO MAKE MICROBLOGGING WORK FOR YOU**

- Try to leverage platform-specific hashtags (see section below) or live videos to gain visibility.
- Provide good visuals.
  - Use high-quality photographs and images.
  - Use photos that elicit curiosity or an emotional response.
• Use photos with sensory details.
• Be yourself and be approachable as you write stories.
• When using old family photos or records:
  o Think about the “who, what, when, and where.”
  o Include important socio-historical context.
  o Express what the photo means to you.
• Stories can be momentous events or sweet moments.
• To grow your following, focus on curating content of interest to your target audience.
• To encourage interaction, write posts that invite conversation.
• Re-share and comment on the content of others.
• Reminders:
  o Respect your followers’ time—microblogging can help you build a platform of expertise, but frequent self-promotion can be annoying and counter-productive
  o Remember to keep your genealogist hat on— attribution and accuracy still matter.

HASHTAGS AND HOW TO USE THEM

• Per Dictionary.com, hashtags are words or phrases “preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic.” Doing this makes the words function as a search term.
• A hashtag must be written as a single word, without any spaces, punctuation, or special characters.
• Popular hashtags (#) for family history include
  #adoption #ancestry #archives #cemetery #dna #family #familyhistory #familystory #familytree #genealogy #GenealogyBlogParty #genealogyphotoaday #genealogyresearch #heritage #history #home #househistory #memoir #nostalgia #oldphotos #photos #rememberwhen #research #shortstories #storytelling #tbt
• Use relevant keywords. Tools like Hashtagify.me (https://hashtagify.me) will help you find trending hashtags related to your specific topic.
• You can create your own hashtags to brand yourself or to help family find your posts.
  (Examples: #shareamemory #Crymesfamilyreunion)
• #Don’t #overdo #it #with #hashtags.
CONTENT IDEAS

- Share old family photos with the stories behind them.
- Share scans of documents with information about archives and data sets.
- Remember a day in history; share your personal experience or an ancestor’s.
- Celebrate a current family moment with a new photo or an old one.
- Post photos of ancestors and explain why they matter.
- Share historical photos with the insight you have into that point in history.
- Post about what you are working on now. “Today I’m researching ________.”
- Ask for help with a research problem.

OTHER WAYS TO SHARE ONLINE

- Apps such as JoyFlips (http://joyflips.com) let you share photos and videos online. Family members can leave notes, audio, comments, etc.
- Famicity (http://famicity.com) allows you to create a private place for your family to share current events and episodes of the past.
- Storyworth (http://storyworth.com) subscriptions send family members prompts; stories are posted on a private website.

RECOMMENDED READING