

# **HOW IN THE WORLD CAN I POSSIBLY WRITE A FAMILY HISTORY BOOK?**

**“GCSGA” Meeting, July  
11, 2015  
Presented by Bob Volz**

## **A QUESTION FOR THE GROUP**

**HOW MANY OF YOU HAVE  
THOUGHT ABOUT WRITING  
SOME OF YOUR LIFE OR  
FAMILY STORIES AND  
EXPERIENCES AND DON'T  
KNOW WHERE TO START?**

**A SHOW OF HANDS**

THINKING about WRITING your  
FAMILY HISTORY in a “some” FORMAT

**You have to start  
somewhere! Start with  
the**

**information from your  
tree. How many of you  
here today are**

# THINKING about WRITING your FAMILY HISTORY in a “some” FORMAT

- ▶ Consider how much money you are willing to spend if any.
- ▶ I am personally a big fan of **Ancestry**. However, **Ancestry** is an investment in your genealogy. If you do not wish to make that kind of investment then you may want to consider **Family Search**, a free database.
- ▶ There are also plenty of smaller databases, specializing in specific countries.
- ▶ Take them for a trial run. Many databases offer free 7 day subscriptions, which will provide you an opportunity to get into the documents and make sure they are the right fit for you.

# THINKING about WRITING your FAMILY HISTORY in a “some” FORMAT

- ▶ However, you do not have to make a long-term commitment to any database. Depending on the database, you can subscribe for a limited time. Some other databases will charge you by the document.
- ▶ There are many smaller databases, they offer you records that are more specific, such as newspaper databases, cemetery databases and passenger lists, and they are great as an add-on to a main database. However, you should make yourself familiar with the major **online genealogy** databases if you are new to doing family research. Here are the bigger players to investigate to get you started. Keeping in mind, the above tips to determine which database is the best fit for your **genealogy** research.

BEST EXAMPLES: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) & Family Search.org

# BEFORE I START, NOW WHAT????

## THINK OF WRITING “THE STORY” AS A LIFE STORY.

- ▶ IF IT IS MY LIFE, THEN I NEED TO START WITH MY BIRTH AND GO FORWARD.
- ▶ THE BEST HELPFUL TOOL WOULD BE A LISTING OF YEARLY EVENTS, INCLUDING TIME LINES OF EVENTS.
- ▶ WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT MYSELF, FAMILY LIFE AND HISTORY THAT FITS INTO EACH YEAR? IS IT ORGANIZED?
- ▶ DON'T MANUFACTURE BUT LIST ONLY FACTUAL EVENTS AS BEST YOU CAN RECALL OR FIND THROUGH RESEARCH.
- ▶ BE ACCURATE BY OBSERVING THE NATURAL ORDER OF EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE TO PRESENT DAY!
- ▶ BE DECISIVE, QUOTE EXACTLY, AVOID CLICHES.
- ▶ EACH PARAGRAPH SHOULD HAVE MATERIAL RELATING TO THAT SPECIFIC TIME PERIOD.

# HOW DO I DO IT? WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER?

## ▶ KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

- ❖ Determine the **SCOPE** of **WORK**. It would be impossible to write one book that covered everything you know from your research. Instead, decide on a specific scope of work for your project. The more clearly you determine what you're trying to accomplish, the easier it will be to write out your narrative. Keep it simple and stay organized!
- ❖ Some examples to ask yourself: Who will be my target audience? Is this book for me, my immediate family or for the public, i.e., for a historical society or a library? Remember, you are the storyteller.
- ❖ Your **FAMILY HISTORY** should be **INFORMATIVE**, **ENGAGING** and **ENTERTAINING**.

# HOW DO I DO IT? WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER?

1. Do I want to trace one surname completely or several connected families in that line? Or do I want to try to do multiple family lines?
  - ❖ Tracing one surname fully will mean researching all branches or one branch from a particular ancestor to the present (or a time frame you choose).
  - ❖ If your choice is to do many connected lines, you will probably limit how many descendants to include. **This is not recommended by our group.** A book dedicated to all related surnames will be the most limited in what is included as to descendants.



# HOW DO I DO IT? WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER?

## OTHER QUESTIONS TO PONDER.....

1. **What about my time frame? On a given Sur Name, do I use from old country to present or from immigration, etc., or just a certain time period?**
2. **Do I want an entire history or just from where I found them in the States or the Old Country? I must make a decision on this!**
3. **You don't have to write a large narrative on each person. Short, sweet and to the point.**
4. **You can write even if you are still researching. Don't make a habit of this.**

# WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

- ✓ **Besides my family group records, what else should be included?** Remember we have been schooled many times that a family history doesn't become a "HISTORY" without **stories** which in essence make our ancestors come to life again. An example to get your thinking straight would be to ask yourself "What was the world or place like where my ancestor lived?" What did he/she do (occupation, religion, status-property owner). Can you tie in an historical event even though it didn't touch your ancestor? Do you have any letters that tie into this time period from an ancestor or a document? How about photos, maps of land ownership, descriptions of his/her homestead,

# WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

- ✓ Think about creating an ANCESTOR PROFILE on your most important relatives. A profile should be considered as a character sketch. By starting small you won't become overwhelmed. Just think of this type of profile as a snapshot in time of your ancestor's life.
- ✓ What ELEMENTS should be contained in this PROFILE? A GOOD STORY; A description with key details; Dialogue if available (a recording is best to gain incite); Showing what the person was like. REMEMBER, THIS PROFILE IS "SHOW", DON'T TELL! You can use documents, cemetery stone stories, interviews, newspaper articles, diaries and letters and of course your memories (stated as such). Also, use ACTION VERBS whenever possible.
- ✓ DO NOT EDIT AS YOU WRITE.

# THE LOGISTICS OF YOUR BOOK

## ▶ THINGS THAT MUST BE INCLUDED FOR YOUR BOOK TO BE USEFUL:

- 1) TABLE OF CONTENTS
- 2) INDEX (very important to list every person mentioned in your book. Also list on what page or pages they appear).
- 3) BIBLIOGRAPHY ( include the names of books and materials

# EXAMPLE OF FOOTNOTE USAGE FROM TERRY MANNING's "Genealogy Study Group", Lawrenceville, GA.

## Great-Grandfather

### Chapter Five

#### Edward William Francis Pyatt (1873 – 1923) (Reference No. 11<sup>1</sup>)

##### Birth and Early Youth

Edward William Francis Pyatt was born 16 February 1873<sup>2 3 4 5</sup>. He was born in Mason County, West Virginia<sup>6 7 8</sup>. His parents were John S. Pyatt<sup>9</sup> and Mary Margaret Katherine Snyder Pyatt.<sup>10</sup> [See Chapters 9 and 10 for further information on his parents.]

Edward is first listed in the U.S. Census in 1880 at age 5 as Edward Peyatt living with his parents in Union District of Mason County, West Virginia.<sup>11</sup> The 1890 population census was destroyed therefore no data at age 15 is available.



<sup>1</sup> "11" refers to his relationship as my male great-grandfather, i.e. my paternal grandfather's father using the author's personal identification system.

<sup>2</sup> Edward William Pyatt death certificate no. 8184 (1923), West Virginia State Department of Health – Division of Vital Statistics. On line at [www.wvculture.org](http://www.wvculture.org) 26 February 2006.

<sup>3</sup> 1900 Census and WWI draft card.

<sup>4</sup> Photographs of Edward William Pyatt headstone at Mt. Hope Church of God Cemetery, Sandyville, Jackson County, West Virginia. Photographs are 4" x 6" color by great-grandson in 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Ancestry.com. *West Virginia Births Index, 1853-1969*. Edward F. Peyatt, 1873.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson County Marriage Book, entry for Edward W. Pyatt and Amy Thogmartin (1898), County Clerk's Office, Ripley, West Virginia.

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Pyatt household, 1910 U.S. census, Jackson County, West Virginia, population schedule, Ravenswood District, ED 47, dwelling 72, family 74; National Archives micropublication T624, roll 1681.

<sup>8</sup> Edward William Pyatt death certificate no. 8184 (1923), West Virginia State Department of Health – Division of Vital Statistics. On line at [www.wvculture.org](http://www.wvculture.org) 26 February 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Pyatt, death certificate (1923), Book A-Z, page 30, Clerk's Office, City Hall, Ripley, Jackson County, West Virginia.

<sup>10</sup> As shown in the 1870 & 1880 census records for John & Mary Pyatt [see Chapters 9-10].

<sup>11</sup> John S. Peyatt household, 1880 U.S. census, Mason County, West Virginia, population schedule, Union District, ED 98, sheet 48, family 312; National Archives micropublication T9, roll 1408.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

- ▶ **A REMINDER: GENEALOGY IS A NEVER ENDING HISTORY OF FAMILIES AND THEIR LIVES. **NEW INFORMATION IS BEING ADDED DAILY TO THE MAJOR WEB SITES. YOU MUST CHECK THEM OFTEN!****
- ❖ Facts must be documented.
- ❖ Suppositions and guesses are just that and can't be documented. If you use any of these, be sure to say it was a guess.
- ❖ A family story is just a story until there is proof to back it up, so be sure you differentiate the difference clearly.
- ❖ Edit your work at the end to prevent future embarrassment. Expect to spend as much

# FINAL THOUGHTS CONTINUED

- ❖ Writing your FAMILY HISTORY can be a great way to capture all the information that you've worked on in your genealogical research. It is also a way to convey the story of your family's development over time in an easy way for all to understand.
- ❖ Consider working with a PROFESSIONAL (budget permitting). Writing is a major undertaking. Consulting with a professional genealogist might help you make important choices about what to cover. An EDITOR can proofread the document to insure the work is error free.
- ❖ Publish (Appearance and quality will depend on your budget). Selection of a publisher also is determined by the quality of your work and budget. For assistance, GOOGLE "Book Publishers

# OTHER THINGS TO CONTEMPLATE AND LEARN

## FROM!

- ▶ How about taking a course in Family History Writing. Check to see if you can find a writer's online workshop or check with your local adult education or community colleges to see if they offer courses.
- ▶ Suggested Writing Guidebooks:
  - “Bringing Your Family History to Life through Social History” by Katherine Scott Sturdevant (Betterway Books)
  - Writing Family Histories and Memories by Kirk Polking (Writer's Digest Books)
  - Writing the Family Narrative by Lawrence P. Goldrup (Ancestry)
  - For All Time: A Complete Guide to Writing Your Family History (Heinemann)
  - Authentic Ancestors workbook by Lynn Palermo - site - <http://genealogyalacarte.ca/?p=7225>



# OTHER THINGS TO CONTEMPLATE AND LEARN FROM!

## ARTICLES:

- ▶ Writing Tips: How to Come Up With 50 Topic Ideas in 30 Minutes. <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/234238>
- ▶ Writing Routines that Work.  
<http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents/7-writing>
- ▶ Creating Dialogue in Nonfiction About the Past  
<http://www.storiestotellbooks.com/blog/2012/7/10/creating-dialogue-in-nonf>

# WHAT SOFTWARE SHOULD YOU USE FOR YOUR BOOK?

- ▶ This is NOT A COP OUT, but we cannot suggest one brand over another. The choice is really a personal one (cost, ease of use, etc.). Again, we suggest that you GOOGLE “Best Software to Use in Book Writing”. You will get lots of suggestions. Then ask around as there are blogs that will give you their opinion on their use of certain softwares.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION AND GOOD  
WRITING TO ALL  
GOING FORWARD

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Bob Volz, July 11,