

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

ReclaimingKin.com



## Making Sense of the All the Research You've Done

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### ORGANIZATION TIPS

- ❖ The goal is to: (1) reduce the number of printed documents, (2) digitize your sources, and (3) organize your digital files.
- ❖ Questions to ask yourself: What information do I already have? How do I tell others what I have? What else do I want to know?
- ❖ Create and follow a backup strategy that [uses the 3-2-1 Backup philosophy](#). You'll need your information stored in at least three places. Do not skip this step! Hard drives and computers fail *all the time*. I use [Backblaze as my cloud backup](#) and it gives me additional peace of mind. I also save plenty of files on Dropbox.
- ❖ If you have a digitized copy of a census, death certificate, marriage record, etc., is it really necessary to keep them all printed out? If you can easily access the document again, consider tossing it. I throw all of them out! Multiply those record types by the number of people you are researching, and that's hundreds of pages. Having all those records printed out contributes to the feeling of overwhelm which can hinder our

research. I keep one copy of these records in the binder for that family. I also keep any document that isn't easily accessible online, such as pension records. And I keep any family artifacts, such as funeral programs and letters.

- ❖ *Don't rely solely Ancestry for your family tree!* Many genealogists are making this mistake. Your only family tree shouldn't live behind a paywall. You should have your research and your tree primarily on your own computer using family tree software. I use RootsMagic, but there are other programs like Family Tree Maker, Legacy Family Tree, and others. You don't have to retype your entire tree: you can download your GEDCOM from Ancestry and import it into the software. These software programs are powerful and have useful functionality that you will not find available at online sites.
- ❖ Get ideas that work for you from everywhere. Your organizing scheme should reflect how your mind naturally thinks. Googling "organize your genealogy" will bring up several free videos on You Tube, such as:
  - [Organizing Your Family Papers](#), free webinar by American Ancestors
  - [How to Organize All This Stuff](#), free webinar by Lisa Louise Cooke
- ❖ When organizing digital files, consider how your mind naturally categorizes information and use that as your guide. You might organize by surname, by geographical location, or by couples, or some mixture of these types. I have surname folders, but also separate folders for major sources, such as deeds, obituaries, death certificates, and funeral programs. Within my surname folders are more folders for sources such as court records, probate records, historical reference, etc. My guidepost is this: How fast can you find something that you know you already have? I also have folders for what I call "special topics," such as DNA, Slavery Research, Interviews and Transcripts, etc. My photographs are stored on a completely separate drive.
- ❖ I use tables to organize, cite, and analyze all of my research. There are videos online at YouTube to easily create your own blank tables, but you can also [purchase source tables at Reclaiming Kin \(Microsoft Word\)](#). I use Microsoft Word (or the free Google Docs), but many genealogists prefer Microsoft Excel. I also have some research in Excel tables.
- ❖ Book Recommendation: *Organize Your Genealogy: Strategies and Solutions for Every Researcher* by Drew Smith.

## ORGANIZING TOOLS

- ❖ Purchase a scanner that can scan double-sided documents (duplex). I use a Brother model, but [here is a similar scanner](#). Take your time and work to ensure that every important source has been digitized. For example, I have many copies of records and book pages from libraries and archives; they were not digitized.
- ❖ I also have a full-size flatbed scanner for photographs and other larger items, similar to [the model shown here](#).
- ❖ Learn how to scan documents and photographs in the proper resolution. I try to scan at a minimum of 600 DPI. Printed documents with text only can be scanned at about 200 or 300 DPI. This matters. In my early years, I didn't know anything about resolutions, and there are many pictures I copied at far too small a resolution to reproduce well. I also don't have access to those pictures to rescan them, so take the time to learn about this topic.
- ❖ I use colored file folders to store related documents that I have decided to keep. I especially like the [folders where the tab can be adjusted](#) into three different positions (left, center, right). There are also [folders with wide bottoms](#) to hold larger numbers of documents.
- ❖ I still use three-ring binders. Believe it or not, printed-out material is more likely to survive across generations, so I make sure I have a binder for each of my family lines. These tell my family what I have discovered on each line.
- ❖ I swear by using a labeler. I use it for my file folders and it contributes to visual neatness and organization. I [use the Dymo LetraTag labeller](#).
- ❖ See examples of Charting Companion's [gorgeous family tree charts](#). No family tree software makes charts as varied as Charting Companion. It accepts a GEDCOM file as input, so you do not have to retype your entire family tree.

## SOURCE CITATION & WRITING

- ❖ Book Recommendation: *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) by Elizabeth Shown Mills.
- ❖ Book Recommendation: *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case* (4<sup>th</sup> edition)

revised) by Christine Rose.

- ❖ Book Recommendation: *Mastering Genealogical Documentation* by Thomas W. Jones.
- ❖ [Citing Your Sources](#), article at BCG Genealogy website by Elizabeth Shown Mills
- ❖ Class (\$): [Guide to Documentation and Source Citation](#) (American Genealogical Studies)
- ❖ [Thinking Through Ancestry Source Citations](#), by Elizabeth Shown Mills
- ❖ [Layered Citations Work Like Layered Clothing](#), by Elizabeth Shown Mills
- ❖ [ARKs, PALs, Paths, and Waypoints: Citing Online providers of Digital Images](#), by E.S. Mills
- ❖ [Building Citations While Writing](#), by Michael Hait
- ❖ Legacy Family Tree's posts on sources, information and evidence ([Part 1](#) , [Part 2](#) , [Part 3](#))
- ❖ [Family History Articles](#), at Reclaiming Kin (examples of writing)

## DATA ANALYSIS

- ❖ [Do You Use a Census Tracker?](#) By Robyn Smith
- ❖ [Creating a Table in Word](#) by Skillsoft (video)
- ❖ [Using Charts in Your Genealogy Research](#), by Robyn Smith
- ❖ [Tracing Enslaved Ancestors Through Probate](#), by Robyn Smith
- ❖ [A Valuable Strategy for Pension Research](#), by Robyn Smith
- ❖ [Put It In A Table: Understanding and Organizing Research Findings](#), by Diana Elder
- ❖ [Using Excel Tables for Genealogy](#), by Lisa Stokes (Video)

- ✓ Visit me at [www.ReclaimingKin.com](http://www.ReclaimingKin.com) for more genealogical skillbuilding posts!
- ✓ Join my free mailing list to receive new posts and information about scheduled webinars.

**"Clutter is delayed decisions."**

**-Barbara Hemphill**