

Organizing Your Digital Genealogy Files

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Finding all your digital files is the first step to creating your Digital Family History Archive.

Check all that apply, and fill in the blank with the possible location(s).

- Where do you keep your:
 - Family Tree: _____
 - Digital photos: _____
 - Photos of family grave sites or buildings: _____
 - Recent photos you've taken with family: _____
 - Scanned family photos: _____
 - Downloaded records from genealogy databases: _____

 - Digital correspondence with relatives: _____
 - Digitized video or films: _____
 - Other: _____
 - Other: _____
- Look for genealogy files and/or information in:
 - Computers (current and old) _____
 - Genealogy software programs (Family Tree Maker, RootsMagic, or _____)
 - Tablets (current and old) _____
 - Phones (current and old) _____
 - External hard drives (current and old) _____
 - Flash drives, Zip drives, floppy discs _____
 - DVDs, CDs, SD cards _____
 - Cassettes, VHS, film _____
 - Email accounts _____
 - Online file storage accounts (Dropbox, GoogleDrive, OneDrive, or _____)
 - Online genealogy databases/accounts (Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, Geni.com, WikiTree, or _____)
 - Online photo storage accounts (Flickr, Adobe Creative Cloud, Google Photos, _____)
 - Online social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, _____)
 - Other: _____

Organizing, or creating the framework of your Digital Family History Archive is the second step.

- Where will your Digital Family History Archive live? (choose one)
 - Your computer or laptop
 - External hard drive
 - Solid state hard drive
 - DVD-R
 - Cloud Storage
 - Other: _____
- How will the files be organized? (choose one or develop your own)
 - By generation
 - By surname
 - By geographical location
 - By type of files

Preserving your individual files is the third step.

- Gather all your files and move them to a central location.
- Evaluate and decide if you need to keep it.
- Migrate to a new file format if needed.
- Use a consistent file naming convention.

<i>File type</i>	<i>Common file extensions</i>	<i>Preferred archival format</i>
Family Tree	.GED, .FTM, .FTW, .FDB, .PAF, .RMG	.GED
Images	.JPEG/.JPG, .TIFF/.TIF, .PNG, .GIF, .PSD, .BMP	.JPEG or .TIFF
Text documents	.DOC/.DOCX, .PDF, .TXT, .HTML	.TXT or .DOCX or .PDF
Videos	.MOV, .MP4, .WMV, .QT	.MOV, or .MP4
Audio files	.MP3, .AIFF, .WAV, .WMA	.MP3, or .AIFF
Compressed files	.ZIP	Original format

Protecting your Digital Family History Archive is the final step.

- Back up your files using a 3-2-1 model: 3 total copies of your data (original and two backups), 2 different media types, and 1 copy off-site.
- Create a long-term maintenance plan for your files.

More Resources

- My blog series about Digital Archiving:
<https://thefamilyhistorylibrarian.com/2019/04/22/digital-archiving-intro/>
- *Planning a future for your family's past* by Marian Burk Wood
- Library of Congress Recommended Formats Resource Page:
<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs/>
- Family Search "Preserving Family History Records Digitally"
<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/preserving-family-history-records-digitallypart-1/>
- Look up File Extensions: <https://fileinfo.com/>
- Helpful comparisons of GoogleDrive, DropBox, and OneDrive:
<https://www.cloudwards.net/dropbox-vs-google-drive-vs-onedrive/>
- Cyndi's List - Organizing and Filing Systems: <https://cyndislist.com/organizing/filing/>
- Digital Preservation Coalition - Digital Preservation Handbook:
<https://www.dpconline.org/handbook>
- Potential Lifetimes of various media:
<https://coolinfographics.com/blog/2012/8/14/the-lifespan-of-storage-media.html>

Glossary

Analog	Analog refers to all materials that do not encode information digitally, such as books, cassettes, printed photographs, and handwritten letters.
Backup	To make a copy of your digital files for short-term retrieval. Usually no further efforts are taken to maintain access to the backed-up files.
Digital	Digital items are made up of tiny pieces of information called bits. These bits are essentially 1 or 0, in a long sequence that tell the computer, tablet, smartphone, or another electronic device how to use and display that item. Digital files require a device to read them and access them.
Digital archive	To actively preserve copies of your files and migrate them to new media and file formats to ensure future access. Also an archive is what we'll call our grouping of digital files that we are going to preserve long-term.
Digitization	The process of creating digital files by scanning or otherwise converting analog materials.
Digital Preservation	Refers to the series of managed activities necessary to ensure continued access to digital materials for as long as necessary.
File Format	A file format is a standard way that information is encoded for storage in a computer file. It tells the computer how to display, print, and process, and save the information.
Hardware	All the physical parts of a computer or device such as the case, screen, keyboard, mouse, hard disk drive, motherboard, etc.
“In the cloud”	Files are stored remotely on a company’s servers and are accessed through the internet. It is maintained, operated and managed by a cloud storage service provider such as GoogleDrive, DropBox, OneDrive, or iCloud.
Uncompressed/Compressed	Compressed files are file formats in which some information was taken out of the file when it was saved to make it a smaller size. They are slightly lower quality but it is usually not noticeable unless you need to edit, enlarge, or use the file on high-quality equipment. Files that are to be saved in an archive are preferably uncompressed and lossless, which means that all parts of the file are saved, which will usually result in a larger, but usually higher quality, file.
Metadata	Information that describes an item. For example, metadata about a digital photograph would include file name, date taken, type of camera used, location that photo was taken, date modified, etc.