

CHAPTER 6



Organizing and Archiving Your Information



To succeed in family history, you need a simple, user-friendly system for organizing documents, notes, research aids, photographs, copies of family group records, pedigree charts, research logs, etc. And it needs to be in a readily-accessible form without digging through piles of papers. Staying organized makes your information more valuable to you, and allows you to use your limited family history time more efficiently.

You also need to learn about how to digitize and archive your precious photographs and documents to preserve them for posterity and share them with other family members. New technology can assist you and make it easier. This chapter provides tips and tools to help you get organized and archive your family treasures.

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Organizing Your Information



Computers work the best to help you organize your information into family group records and pedigree charts which can be searched by name, date, place, or relationship. They'll help keep track of your ancestors and descendants. Computers offer an important advantage because you only have to type the information once, then you can use it repeatedly in many different charts and forms, and easily share the information with others. Family histories and correspondence can be written and then edited easily. Photographs and documents can be scanned and archived for safe-keeping, easy retrieval, and sharing with others.



Computers are wonderful to help you organize your information and save lots of time, but you may still want to print out some family group sheets and pedigree charts and keep them in folders.

Try to keep yourself organized and your information readily accessible as your family tree grows.

It's usually better to choose a combination of computer files, filing cabinet folders and 3-ring binders.



Getting Started



For organizing paper copies of family records, first make sure you have the organizational supplies you will need, such as: file cabinet or boxes to store files in, file folders and index tabs, manila folders with assorted tabs, pre-printed forms to record data (you can print free forms

from your computer family history program), and 3-ring binders with index dividers. Your investment in a good file cabinet will reap many rewards over the years in well-organized and preserved documents, and it's the easiest way to keep track of your family history papers.

Consider setting up an organizational system as early in your research as possible. If you stay on top of filing your documents as you receive them, it's much easier and less time consuming than if you have to go back through over-flowing files.

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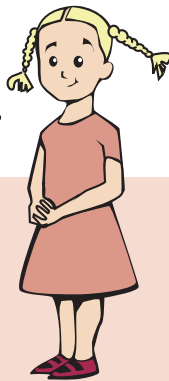


It doesn't take long once you have started your genealogy adventure to collect so much

Organizing & Maintaining Your Family Archive

You may want to establish guidelines for what you want to add to your archive in the future, and to keep it up-to-date. It's important to organize your documents, photos and other objects into an accessible and usable archive that can grow and adapt with your archive over time.

Here's some organizational category considerations for your family archive.



Each person

Eras (1940s, 1950s, 1960s, etc.)

Events (vacations, birthdays, graduations)

Activities (schools, jobs, organizations)

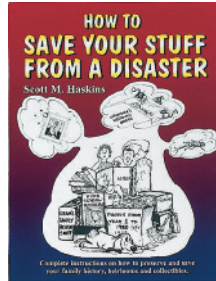
Collectibles (artworks, stamps, baseball cards)

Financial documents (mortgage, investment and retirement documents, insurance policies, bills or financial documents)

Personal documents (birth certificates, marriage certificates, passport and/or immigration documents, medical information, wills and other legal documents)

There are a lot of ways to arrange your family archive. The best way to get started is to look over the inventory of materials you've decided to keep and see where the natural groupings occur. Then, map out how things should be organized by setting a few high level categories and filling in the rest.

After your family archive is organized and safely stored, you can think about what to add to your family archive in the future. Soon you may collect new photographs, mementos, documents and digital files. You can establish collection priorities to determine what kind of items you want to add to your archive in the future and what kinds of items you don't want.



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Scott Haskins is *the* expert, providing essential information for preserving: family history, scrapbooking, collectibles, old letters, memorabilia, photos, books, etc. that have been

afflicted with mold, dirt, smoke, tears and water damage caused by fires, earthquakes, floods, Father Time...or even grandchildren! He works with historical societies, museums, private collectors, art galleries, and governments and has helped tens of thousands of people save their "stuff." His website offers free articles (which are available for free redistribution on your newsletter and blog), and an e-book which is available by chapter or complete book. \$19.95

Archival Tools

To protect your family archive, you may want to purchase boxes, folders, paper, etc. that are *acid-free* and *lignin-free*. Most archival materials will also have a neutral pH; meaning they don't contain acid or other chemicals that will cause harm or deterioration of your materials. You'll also need to know a few basic techniques for handling delicate archival materials. Keep in mind that the most important archival materials are those that touch the photos and documents in your archive every day and those that protect your archive from dust and moisture from the outside. Regular cardboard boxes and paper contain acid, which can lead to further deterioration and cause irreparable damage to your precious memories.

Archival Paper

Standard paper is made from wood-based pulp that has not had its lignin removed. It turns yellow and deteriorates over time, and can break down even faster if exposed to light and/or heat. Keep your materials away from outside influences, such as heat and humidity, which can cause changes and damage. The best archival paper has a life expectancy of over 1,000 years. Use only paper that is labeled "acid-free" and "buffered." Acid and other chemicals in paper, and other types of storage sleeves, folders and containers, can speed up the deterioration process.