Fountain Square in Downtown Cincinnati in 1931.

Why and How to Create a Genealogy Timeline

We've researched where to find birth, baptismal and death certificates, census documents and other records. Now, let's organize the data into a genealogical timeline!

WHY A FAMILY HISTORY TIMELINE?

It is an important research tool that can aid in the *where*, *when* and *why* of our ancestors' lives. The timeline helps identify research inconsistencies, such as dates of birth, marriage and death. It enables one to step back and view the work with a new perspective. Creating a family history timeline for each ancestor deepens our understanding of each person and family branch researched.

THREE TIMELINE TYPES FOR GENEALOGY RESEARCH

Basic: The most common: It includes birth, marriage(s), death, spouse(s), residence(s), and land transactions. It can narrow down where events took place, identify discrepancies and evaluate large time gaps that require further research.

Comparative: Answers the questions of identity: There may be inconsistencies in name changes or spellings, use of an alias or a same-name individual appearing in an unlikely location. Tracing and comparing each identity help determine if it's the same person.

Historical: Incorporates historical events: It identifies additional research opportunities. For example, a mother and her children may have lived with her parents while her husband was away at war.

HOW TO CREATE A GENEALOGY TIMELINE

A well-constructed timeline organizes a chart of events to provide a valuable overview of your ancestor's life. It includes marriages, children's births, parents' deaths, military service and other important dates. Adding relevant historical events to the timeline reveals the impact of social, political and economical circumstances.

To create an effective timeline, expensive software and special skills are not needed, just curiosity and creative investigation. Handwritten timelines are beneficial for solving problems and summarizing research. Digital ancestral timelines are best for works in progress, particularly for inserting images into the document. Spreadsheet timelines help to sort and filter data.

MAKE A TIMELINE IN FOUR STEPS

1. Create a blank chart to use as a template for multiple timelines.

2. Fill in the ancestor's life events; the research notes are needed here.

- Record the person's name at the top of the document.
- Record the ancestor's date of birth (actual or estimated) in the chart's second or third row.
- List events chronologically, skipping one or several lines to allow room for future entries.

An individual's events include birth, baptism, census enumerations, marriage(s), land transfers, tax assessments, religious memberships (e.g., Catholic Life Insurance), military service, immigration, city directory listings, divorce(s), pensions, death and burial.

Perhaps, expand the family circle by beginning the timeline with the parents' names and marriage date. Since a parent's death may generate valuable records, include it in the timeline. For challenging research problems, add entries for court

SAMPLE TIMELINE

DATE	LOCATION	EVENT	NOTES	Need to do
abt 1830	Oldenburg, German	Birth	Alternate name:: Dina Hinsla	Compare other data sources
1849		Immigration		Research ship and date
27 Oct 1849	St. Jospeh Church West End, Cincinnati, Ohio	Marriage to Theodore (Dietrich) Kleineberg (1826-1889)	Witnesses: Gerhard Kleinberg and Elizabeth	Verified
1900	Cincinnati, Ohio	Residence	Listed in Census records and City Directories	
	7 Children*		*This is a Sample Timeline, Children information listed on Official Timeline	
17 Sep 1859	From a store balcony on the north side of Fifth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio	Abraham Lincoln Spoke		Verified
1860-1870		War and Peace years*	*This is a Sample Timeline; More events listed on Official Timeline	
25 Oct 1902	1041 Noble Ct., Cincinnati, Ohio	Death		Verified
26 Oct 1902	St. Joseph Cemetery (old), Cincinnati, Ohio	Burial		Verified

Ancestor: **Bernadine Hinschlage**

documents, deeds or newspaper notices with the names of neighhors or friends who were witnesses or hondsmen.

3. Discover how ancestors fit into the world around them and how that might have affected them. Choose events that seem most relevant to the ancestor's life and help define an era. This could include the War of 1812, the Civil War, pandemics, the discovery of gold in California and boundary changes, such as the proximity to their parish and schools and the construction of roads, canals and railroads throughout their state. (*Boundary changes could affect where records are found.*)

4. An immigrant ancestor's timeline includes events from both their homeland and new residence in America, such as religious persecution, crop failures, jobs and war.

It is recommended that after you save your digital timelines, print or upload them to a cloud-based service. This keeps them available while you continue filling in research gaps at libraries, archives, cemeteries and places where your ancestors lived.

NEXT UP: Using Newspapers to Find Your Ancestors

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