Organizing Your Genealogy Using Computers

Introduction

You do not have to have a personal computer to keep genealogy records, but it helps! Computer note keeping offers an important advantage. After typing the information once into the computer, you can use it repeatedly in many different ways. The same information can be used in pedigrees, family group records, and descendancy charts, and is easily shared for other people to use. Reports and charts are easily updated without extensive retyping. A number of computer programs can help you organize your records on your home computer.

Uses of Computers

These programs have manuals and/or help screens that will explain how to use them.

Genealogical management program

Genealogy managment programs, such as PAF 4.0, organize family information into family group records and pedigree charts. These files can be searched by name, date, place, or relationship and show a person's ancestors and descendants. The GEDCOM feature of genealogical management programs allows you to share genealogical information with others.

When you create a new file in a genealogical management program, give it a name you will easily recognize again. Most often people name files by the surname or portions of the surnames they are tracking in that file, i.e.

- Jones.paf
- JonesSmith.paf (for 2 grandparents)

Be sure to back up your genealogical management program files every time you make changes to the file.

- Store at least one copy away from your home - in a bank vault, or at the home of a relative.
- Submit a GEDCOM of your genealogical management program file to Ancestral File, Pedigree Resource File, and place it on a web site to preserve your family information.

Word processor files of family history information

A word processor allows you to create several kinds of documents useful to the family historian:

- Family histories can be written and edited easily.
- Timelines show the chronology of a family's life events.
- Summary reports show your analysis of research progress on a specific family.
- Correspondence can be written and edited easily.

Make folders and subfolders which are named for the kind of document you are writing. Being careful about folder and subfolder organization will save you much frustration and time wasted looking for a document.

- Create folders by the surnames of families you are researching, such as "Jones" or "Smith."

- Within each folder, create subfolders by the kind of document you are writing such as family histories, short family stories, timelines, research logs, and research summaries. The subfolder could be named, "JonesFamHistories" or "JonesTimelines." Do this for each of the surnames you are working on.
- Within the subfolders, be sure to name your files so that you can easily identify them.

If you have files already set up which are poorly organized, you can think through how you would like to have them organized and then rename the files and reorganize them to create a useful system.

Scanned images of photographs and documents

Because scanned images use large amounts of space on your hard drive, it is best to invest in an external storage device on which to store scanned photographic images and documents. Make an index of the photographs. They can be named JonesGeorge1889, JonesLucinda1996, etc. if you identify carefully each photograph in your index, such as:

- JonesGeorge1889 = a photo of Uncle George Jones and Aunt Mary Greene Jones from Pulaski Co., Missouri. Dated 1889.
- JonesLucinda1996 = Lucinda Jones, dau. of John Jones of Hunter Beach, California. Born 3 Jun 1996.

E-mail correspondence

Your e-mail program should have a built-in filing folder system. Set up folders and drag and drop e-mails with important family information in them into these folders. Set up folders much as you do in the basic file folder system. That is, create folders for locations and folders for family names. Your folders might be named:

- Surnames: Jones; Jones, John; Jones, David; Smith; Smith, Thomas; etc.
- Localities: Kentucky; Kentucky, Cumberland Co.; Germany; England, Durham Co.; etc.
- Historical events: Civil War, Revolutionary War, French Revolution, French Huguenots, etc.
- Societies: County historical, state historical, DAR, etc.

Your e-mail program may also have features for address archiving, filtering, and searching e-mail correspondence.

Web site bookmarks

Web sites are valuable aids in family history research. It is not possible to remember where these sites are all located on the Internet. Therefore, use the "Bookmarks" or "Favorites" section on your browser. You can create sub-folders within "Bookmarks" or "Favorites" and name the sub-folders to meet your research interests. Your "Bookmarks" or "Favorites" should have a option to <Export> which allows you to keep a backup copy.

Under <Views> , <Toolbar>, activate the "Links" bar or "Personal Toolbar" option to place your most frequently used web links on a toolbar at the top of your browser.