

Putting Your Family History into Context:

Writing Your Family History as
Social History



Where Do I Start?

Review my class, "Putting Your Family History into Context: Social History and Genealogy - Jerroleen Sorensen (26 Jun 2022)"

Find it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKfOjZeMbog>

Or here:

<https://fh.lib.byu.edu/2022/06/28/putting-your-family-history-into-context-social-history-and-genealogy-jerroleen-sorensen-26-jun-2022/>

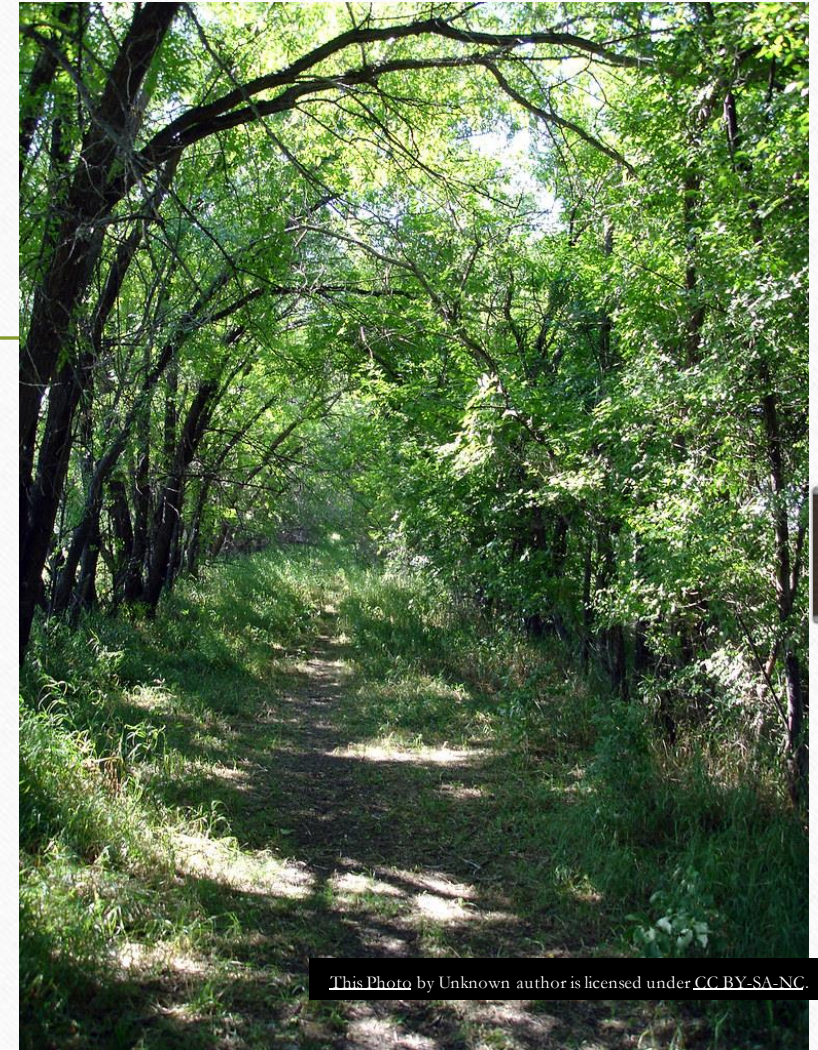


What Is Social History?

- History is the study of past events in human affairs.
- Social history delves underneath the big stuff of human affairs and looks at the collective lives of human beings rather than scrutinizing the great, powerful or elite individuals whose influence affects those lives for good or ill.
- Social historians study common people and how they lived, so it is much more inclusive and can enlighten their descendants concerning their lives and how the grand events of the day shaped them as well as the day-to-day living that everyone does.

Why write family history as social history?

- IT MAKES GENEALOGY FUN and INTERESTING!
- Readers (and writers) discover they are part of something larger than their present-day stories.
- Younger readers can feel more connected by sharing or learning stories from the past.
- New perspectives and understandings are discovered and passed on about history in general and about an ancestor's or ancestral family's life in particular.
- It's a great way to share your research and hard work!



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Narrative Styles of Importance for the Genealogist

- Journal and Diary Writing
- Memoirs
- Autobiography
- Historical Fiction
- Biography
- **Social History Narratives and Narrative Essays**



Constructing a Narrative within a Social History Context

- Use both genealogical and historical sources as the basis for the narrative.
- Research meticulously and utilize historical background and cultural information in the context of your genealogical research.
- Don't make inferences that are not grounded in provable genealogical or historical truth.
- Hold yourself to historical and genealogical standards, i. e., all factual statements are grounded in evidence and proofs.
- Extraneous description and details are based in historical fact.
- Make it interesting, entertaining and lively within the bounds of truth.

Nitty Gritty

- Title
- Theme
- Choose an appropriate structure and organization
- Narrative written in 3rd person, past tense, as non-fiction
- Include a bibliography or references section

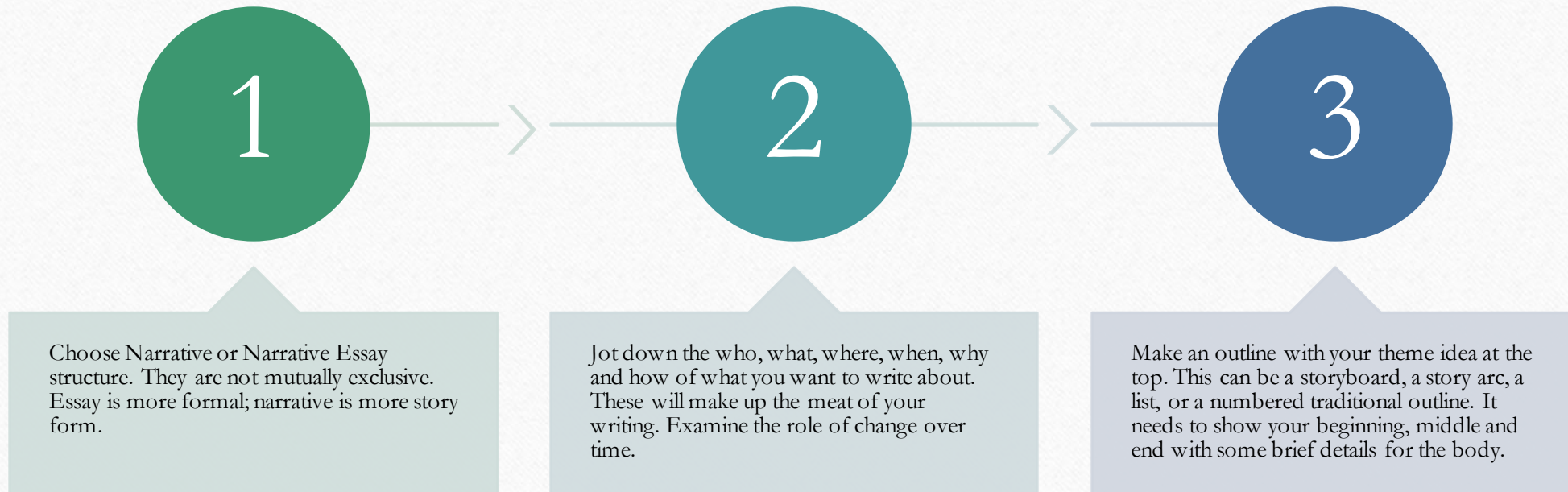
Title

- Reflects the theme, the plot or personal identity(ies) within the essay or narrative
- Creative and catchy but not sensational; draws the reader in
- Thinking of titles for incidents or family history can inspire ideas for a narrative!
- Examples: Diapers and Bicycles; Why Grandpa Never Ate Turkey; The Train Whistle; Who Was Walter Cox?; Who Stole the Pony?: The Saga of the Skis: The Great Coal Mine Explosion of 1856; Losing Papa (and Finding Him Again); A Heart's Desire Granted; The Back Forty; Claiming Wasatch County: The Earliest Settlers.

Theme

- Should be applicable to any reader's experience or ability to comprehend
- Should attempt to enhance the reader's understanding of one or more of the following: a process; a philosophical, intellectual or moral/ethical concept; a personal or historical event; the character or behavior of an individual or group of individuals
- Can be spelled out (as in an essay) or implied through the narrative itself
- All details should in one way or another further the theme

Structure and Organization



Language and Format

- Use third-person historical tense (past tense) in narratives.
- Use description as needed and desirable to make the historical context and background clear. Do describe known family artifacts or sites. However, don't make things up or state as fact anything you do not or cannot know. This is NON-fiction. That means no dialogue or attributions of mental states (unless you have them stated by the person in a source). Details that are personal must be factual; facts must be sourced; conclusions must be evidence based. Indicate uncertainty about facts when appropriate (can be footnoted).
- Footnotes and/or endnotes are not only appropriate, but necessary. Add pictures and illustrations. Make sure that you attribute quotes or illustrations from copyrighted material and get permissions for the use of others' images, photos of living persons, and drawings.
- Don't be a bore. Use source quotes sparingly; don't get mired in unimportant details; let the story tell itself, that is, avoid commentary; don't just summarize your research or give a recitation of a person's vitals and life events (we have familysearch.org and ancestry.com for that).

Bibliography and Attribution

- Depending on how formal you want to be, use footnotes or endnotes in your essay or narrative to cite the sources of your information. Either way, it is **very** important that you attribute the sources of information that you include in your writing.
- Bibliographies include books, websites and other documents that contain the citations you cite in your footnotes/endnotes.
- See style manuals for information: The Chicago Manual of Style is the standard for many publishers. See the article, "Top 8 Free Online Style Guides in English (thoughtco.com)." This article has good suggestions for free online manuals.

Publishing Your Work

Here are some online articles about publishing works:

[How to Publish a Book in 2022: 10 Steps to Success \(reedsy.com\)](#)

[How to publish your book - Microsoft 365](#)

[How to Publish a Book in 2022: A Step-by-Step Guide \(self-publishingschool.com\)](#)

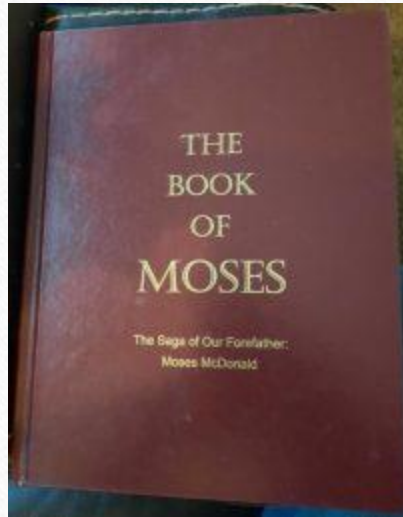
[How to Publish an Article in a Newspaper or Online | Step-by-Step \(inquirer.net\)](#)

[25 Best Places to Get Published Online - Writer's Digest \(writersdigest.com\)](#)

Bottom line: Find a place that would be interested in your subject and submit it!

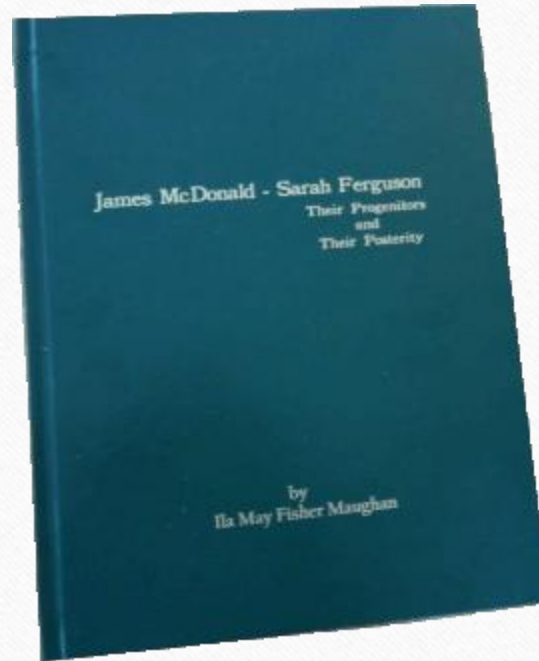
Sharing Your Work

- Most family tree sites have ways to upload "stories" into your tree. FamilySearch has one of the best memories platforms and because it is a shared tree, your work will be available for anyone who is interested to read it!
- You can submit longer efforts up to book-length to FamilySearch for inclusion in their digital library. See <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>
- You can start a blog or website and share your work online. See <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/best-blogging-platform> for a list of platforms.
- You can read your work on video and upload it to youtube.com or other similar platforms. Make sure the title reflects the subject so it can be easily searched.
- You can self-publish with a company like familyheritagepublishers.com and then sell or distribute your work to friends and family. There are lots to choose from, so find one that fits your needs.



An example of
competent amateur
social history writing

From *The Book of
Moses: The Saga of
Our
Forefather Moses Mc
Donald* by
Mary Ann Wilke
McDonald, 2017.



GENESIS



Crawfordsburr is a small village in northern County Down, Ireland. At present the town is a commuter haven for those who work in the city but wish to live in an idyllic country setting. A wonderful country park surrounds the north and east of town and visitors come from near and far to enjoy nature. Within the park and through the town a stream trips over rocks and rills. The name of the stream is the Crawford. Since it runs through a small village; the town came to be called Crawfordsbum, meaning Crawford's stream.^{2 3} Some elements of the quaint 17th century town remain. In this beautiful, lush place James McDonald was born to Moses and Mary in 1802.



Moses and Mery Glass McDonald lived in picturesque Crawfordsburn, but it was a hard scrabble life just as it was for all Irish peasants. Owning little and not apt to ever acquire much, the future oftentimes looked bleak. Though we don't know why Moses and Mary decided to migrate to Scotland it may have been because of political unrest and economic problems in Ireland. In 1800 the Irish Parliament and the Parliament of Great Britain passed the Act of Union which, in January 1801, abolished the Irish legislature, and merged the Kingdom of Ireland and the Kingdom of Great Britain to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain. England regained direct power over Ireland which brought major changes for the Irish people as decisions on the Irish economy would be made by people in London who had little understanding of Ireland and its needs. In addition, in the late 1700s there was a large increase in Irish population, which, coupled with the small size of their tenant holdings created an untenable situation where crops were so small they could not feed a family. Emigration became common during that time.



EXODUS

Whatever the cause, desperation or an adventurous spirit, the young family packed up their meager belongings, bundled up their wee babe and got transport on a seagoing vessel out of Bangor or Belfast. They travelled across the Irish Sea to the Scottish mainland, a distance of about 50 miles, then on into the Firth of the River Clyde and north to the port town of Greenock, a total journey of about 125 miles. Leaving friends and family behind they planned to have a better life for their little family.



View of Greenock, Scotland ⁴

Greenock and Crawfordsburn share some similarities; the climate is the same, with warmest temperatures in the 70s and coldest near freezing in the winter. Both towns are on the water; Crawfordsburn near the Irish coast at St. Helen's Bay and Greenock sits on the south bank of the River Clyde where the river expands into a firth or estuary. In contrast, Crawfordsburn was a small hamlet of a few hundred while Greenock had grown from a fishing community into a major port town with a population over 18,000 as the new century dawned. A significant difference between Crawfordsburn and Greenock was the scarcity of fresh water in Greenock. During the dry season water had to be carted quite a distance since there was not abundant fresh water running through town.⁵ You can imagine the difficulty of raising a growing family with limited access to water during the hottest months of the year. Little urchins with dusty bare feet and tracks of dirt on their faces was probably just how most of the

youngsters in Greenock looked. The lack of water would have turned women's biggest chore, wash day, into an even harder task.

There was nothing lazy and idyllic about Greenock; it was a vibrant, noisy place. Along the quays life and work flowed with the river and the large number of boats and ships that birthed at the docks every day. The wharfs or quays built along the bay were among the busiest in the British Isles and jobs were plentiful. Perhaps that vivid scene was what appealed to Moses. He supported his growing family as a laborer, working on the quays, among rough men whose strong arms and backs were the only qualifications needed. At the end of a long day the he and his workmates would have lifted a pint or two at a nearby grog shop. By 1811, he was employed loading ballast into sailing ships which traveled all over the world from the bustling port at Greenock.⁶ Imagine the back-breaking job of moving large quantities of rock, day in and day out, to balance the ships that left port emptied of freight.



Greenock Harbour, 1838⁷

POSTERITY NOT PROSPERITY

In spite of Moses' best efforts; working as a laborer would not have greatly improved their standard of living, since laborers usually earned around £25 a year. Since Scotland, as part of Great Britain, lived under a traditional landed gentry system, only gentlemen typically owned property. In Greenock, the Shaw, Stewart and Cathcart families were the land owners. Most Greenock merchants and farmers 'feued' or rented

End Notes. These are not necessarily to standard, but are accessible enough, since the book was not commercially published.

A bibliography could easily be made from these endnotes, but remember that the bibliography does not HAVE to include only works that are cited in the body of the paper.

- ¹ Bridge, Albert, The Crawfordsburn in Flood 2008: geography.ie
- ² Crawfordsburn: Wikipedia
- ³ Bridge, Albert, Autumn Leaves by the Crawfordsburn 2009: geography.ie
- ⁴ Salmon, Robert. View of Greenock, Scotland 1816. Wikimedia
- ⁵ Weir, Daniel. History of the Town of Greenock, Robertson & Atkinson, Glasgow; 1829. Page 99-101.
- ⁶ Greenock: Wikipedia.
- ⁷ Chambers, Robert. Greenock Harbour 1838. Gazetteer of Scotland.
- ⁸ Greenock "Old West Kirk:" Wikimedia.
- ⁹ Williamson, George; 1886 "Old Greenock in the Earliest of Times to the Early Part of the 19th Century"
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ National Archives of Scotland: Crown Office Precognitions, 1812: AD14/12/68
- ¹² Williamson, George; 1886 (paraphrased)
- ¹³ National Archives of Scotland: High Court of Justiciary Processes: J McDonald JC26/356 (transcription by Steve and Jack McDonald, 2009)
- ¹⁴ National Archives of Scotland: High Court of Justiciary Processes: J McDonald JC26/356 (transcription by Mary Ann McDonald, 2012)
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ National Archives of Scotland: High Court of Justiciary Processes: JC26/356 J. McDonald
- ¹⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/192239/greenock-293-eldon-street-tollhouse>
- ²⁰ <http://www.electricscotland.com> (Moses McDonald sites highlighted)
- ²¹ Wikipedia.com: Tolbooth
- ²² Glasgow Museum: Burgh of Glasgow
- ²³ Wikimedia
- ²⁴ Williamson, George; 1886 "Old Greenock in the Earliest of Times to the Early Part of the 19th Century." page 218
- ²⁵ Williamson, George; 1886; page 218 (paraphrased)
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Williamson, George; 1886 "Old Greenock in the Earliest of Times to the Early Part of the 19th Century." Page 219
- ²⁸ The Greenock Hangings: <https://www.scribd.com/document/100912695/The-Greenock-Hangings>
- ²⁹ Ayrshire Militia History book (1790s uniform)
- ³⁰ The Greenock Hangings.
- ³¹ Bird, William: J. T. Smith publisher. Edinburgh, 1812...To which is Added, Some Account and Reflections of Moses Macdonald..., page 40
- ³² Williamson, George; page 222
- ³³ Bird, William: page 44
- ³⁴ Williamson, George; page 220
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Scott, Sir Walter: Edinburgh Annual Register, 1812
- ³⁷ Coull, Dougie: 2012 http://dougie-coull-photography.blogspot.com/2012_09_09_archive.html
- ³⁸ Scott, Sir Walter.
- ³⁹ Identity @ The Dutch Gable House: Tuesday 5 June 2012. <http://identityinverclyde.blogspot.com/2012/06>
- ⁴⁰ Williamson, George.
- ⁴¹ Bird, William: page 48
- ⁴² ...

If you are a
genealogist/family
historian, you can
write social
history.

So try it!

It's fun.

It's worth the time and
trouble.

It's a tribute to those
who made you who
you are!

For more information about social history and writing it, see
Bringing Your Family History to Life by Katherine Scott
Sturdevant.