

HOW TO WRITE YOUR FAMILY'S SOCIAL HISTORY

- **Start writing your ancestor's story:** that's sure to begin raising questions in your mind. What do you already know about their lives? What don't you know but wish you did?
- **Look at your genealogical records first:** wills, probate files, land records, court records, church records, immigration records, and official military records. Look for estate inventories, land record descriptions so you can locate it on a map, etc. Use these genealogical facts as a nucleus around which to build contextual history.
- **Analyze your old photos for clues** about an ancestor's cultural, religious, or political affiliations or where they lived or worked.
- **Write to local (county, town) historical societies and buy their little local history books.** Scour them for general information about the time period your ancestors lived there. Look for full-text 19th century local histories online. Google for state archives. Search in LA Public Library and UC libraries for history books.
- **Look for more sources in footnotes and reference lists** and use WorldCat to find more books on the subject.
- **Get maps of the areas where they lived that are contemporary to the period** (e.g. Library of Congress Map Collection) and label them to show exactly where your ancestors lived. Use Google Maps and Street View to take a virtual walk through your ancestors' neighborhood today. LAPL has the Sanborne Maps also.
- **Look for first-hand accounts from letters and diaries** written by contemporaries of your ancestors who lived in the same area that describe their life and the place they lived.
- **Look for information about your ancestor's occupation** (eg. Cooper, lawyer, shepherd, etc.) and find out how it differs from similar occupations today.
- **Look for articles from early newspapers and magazines** to see what they have to say about the people, events and locales where/when your ancestors lived.
- **Research historical events that might have influenced the actions of your ancestors** (eg. temperance movement, cholera epidemic, etc.). Was there a drought that forced them to move to new farm land? If they did migrate, what were the most probable routes they might have taken? Do you think they traveled overland or by boat?
- **Look on Google for clip art to illustrate your story.** Look for period photos and illustrations of the area where they lived. Look for modern photographs of the areas (and ask permission to use them). Find photos of their gravestones, historical artifacts, etc.

SOME INTERNET RESOURCES

Making of America, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/>

American Memory Collection, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

Internet Archive, <https://archive.org>

Library of Congress Maps, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html>

http://genealogy.about.com/od/history_research/tp/Social-History-Sources-For-Genealogists.htm

<http://philibertfamily.blogspot.com/2012/08/100-social-history-websites.html#.Uz38zVy1575>

BOOKS

- **Bringing Your Family History to Life Through Social History**, Katherine Scott Sturdevant, 2000
- **Only a Few Bones**, John Phillip Colletta, 2000
- **Family Photo Detective: Learn How to Find Genealogy Clues in Old Photos and Solve Family Photo Mysteries**, Maureen A. Taylor, 2013
- **You Can Write Your Family History**, Sharon Carmack, Warren, Carmack & Assocs., 2003
The Secret to Writing a Compelling Family History, Sharon Carmack, http://www.genealogy.com/74_sharon.html

EXAMPLES

For the most part, emigrants of the time were subsistence farmers, scarcely educated and, although considered middle-class for the day, quite modest of means. Most could not afford to hire a flatboat to carry their family and possessions to the western lands by way of the Ohio River. Consequently, they made the trip overland, with a variety of conveyances, following "roads" cut through the wilderness by pioneers who had gone before. One such route that might have been traveled by the Bishir family was Zane's Trace, named for Col. Ebenezer Zane who had lobbied congress to finance a more direct path to Kentucky and the Northwest Territory. The trace began at Wheeling in Virginia (now West Virginia), and traversed 230 miles across the southern part of Ohio, terminating at the Ohio River opposite Maysville, Kentucky.



Overland travel was extremely difficult. In many cases, families could not afford a wagon or the animals to pull it. Many carried what they could on their backs. A few contrived enormous barrels called "hogsheads", crammed with their possessions, and pulled by a mule or members of the family. Today, we can scarcely imagine the hardships such travel must have involved:

"I cannot omitt Noticeing the many Distressed families I passed in the Wilderness...to see women and children in the month of December. Travelling a Wilderness Through Ice and Snow passing large rivers and Creeks with out Shoe or Stocking..." Moses Austin

A "Christly Bysher" first appears in the census of 1810 in Campbell County, Kentucky, near the Ohio River nearly opposite Cincinnati. He is married and reports a family of from 9 to 12 persons (the count of the little girls under 5 is smudged and difficult to read). He is listed in the tax rolls of 1811 and 1812 for Campbell Co., tending 153 acres near Four Mile Creek. A Zachariah Bishare is listed in the same tax roll for 1812, although we do not know how, or if he was related. Jonathan Bishir, Christopher's youngest son, was born there in 1811. There were no more children that we know of born to Christopher, so it is possible his wife died in Kentucky (although we have not yet found any evidence of this.)

Life in Oregon Territory must have been a vast improvement over Missouri for Washington and Amanda. A letter home by one of their fellow travelers is typical:

Mr. Isaac Statts, in a letter to a friend, dated "Polk County, Oregon, April 8, 1847," says—

"I am highly pleased with this country, and so far as I can now say, shall spend the remainder of my days in it. It has assuredly the most healthy climate in the world. Many persons now here who have removed from State to State, in search of health and found it not, are now hearty and robust, capable of performing any kind of labor. — Grass has been very fine and abundant for the last six weeks. When wheat is well put in, you can safely count on 30 bushels an acre. Hemp, tobacco and flax do well here. It is a good country for sheep. There is sufficient water power to carry on manufacturing to any extent. I have built my house in a commanding situation, and have a fine view of the country for ten miles around, and it is quite refreshing on a warm summer's day to feel the invigorating breeze from the Cascade mountains. — We have a most excellent spring within sixty yards of our house, near which we have made our garden. I am convinced that this is as fine a country as can be found. Any man disposed to be industrious and who would be satisfied any where, would be satisfied in this country."



OREGON CITY.

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