Exchanging and Preserving Genealogical Data

File Formats

To be safe use only open-standard formats (not proprietary formats). This will ensure your files can be opened by anyone and at some distant time in the future. This list is not comprehensive, but these are the file types I try to stick to when exchanging with others or archiving my files for posterity.

Genealogy Databases

> GEDCOM format (.GED) - A GEDCOM is a text file that can be imported by any genealogy program.

Documents

> Text or Rich Text files (.TXT or .RTF) Do not share formats specific to a word processor (eg. MS WORD .DOC files) – the other person may not have the same word processing program that you do.

> Adobe Acrobat (.PDF)

> Web Pages (.HTML or .HTM)

> Spreadsheets (.CSV) – Comma Separated Values text file. .XLS usually works, but .CSV is safer.

Images

> .TIFF or .TIF or .PNG – can be <u>very</u> large files! Better for archival.

> .JPG or .JPEG (compressed) - smaller files but quality is degraded a little.

> .BMP and .GIF ok too but usually can be converted to one of the above formats.

Video

> Mpeg (.MPG) & .MP4

> .MOV (Apple QuickTime format) - .MPG is probably a little safer.

Audio

> .MP3 (there are others like .AU and .AIFF but I usually stick to .MP3).

Compressed Archive

> .ZIP (not for long-term archival but it's fine for sending things by email).

Sending Files to Another Genealogist

Email – keep total attachments under 5 MB usually. Archive compression software may help keep file sizes down and bundle a folder of files into a single file (.zip).

CD/DVD/BluRay disk – 650 MB, 4.7 GB, and 25 GB respectively (single layer), but be aware that not everyone has a DVD or BluRay drive on their computer. Most disk media is not good for long-term archival – sometimes only 3 years! (Exception, M-DISK DVD & BluRay disks – about $4 each.)

Thumb Drive (aka Jump Drive, Flash Drive, etc.) – requires USB port, various capacities, access speeds and prices. Thumb Drives are good for long-term archival if properly stored. Format them as FAT drive so they work on either Mac or Windows machines.

Cloud-based storage – eg. DropBox (2.5 GB free) or iCloud (5 GB free), ShutterFly.

Personal web site (with or without File Transfer Protocol – FTP).

Backup Strategies – Make Sure Your Genealogy Out-lives You!

"Belt & Suspenders" – If you really care about it, have multiple redundant backups with different schedules, on various media, and in different locations.

Local backups (frequent, incremental) and offsite backups (less frequent, clones).

Backup Software (eg. Apple: TimeMachine or Carbon Copy Cloner, Windows: Genie Backup Manager or Norton Ghost).

Cloud-based services (eg. Carbonite, iDrive, iCloud, DropBox).

Scan all of your paper & photos. Photograph heirlooms. Caption everything. Explain your organization in text files. Your target audience is someone who finds this long after you're gone.

Backup to paper (publish a book).

Give away your genealogy and photos and books to anyone who will take them!

> Public tree(s) – Ancestry, WikiTree, etc.

> CDs, DVDs or thumb drives to cousins in distributed parts of your family & the world.

> Local historical societies and libraries.

> LDS Church (Granite Mountain) – Pedigree Resource File: https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Pedigree_Resource_File