

## Genealogy Timelines

*Lyn Gesch 1/10/18*

A genealogy timeline is a visual representation of an ancestor's life events put in chronological order. It helps us make sense of the data we have, and helps us build context into their life story as we look for patterns and add relevant historical events.

### Why use them?

1. A timeline helps us see what we have on an ancestor and analyze what we are missing and what we may have wrong.
2. We can look for patterns in the data (e.g., occupations over time, timing of children's births in farm families vs urban families, sorting out information from multiple marriages).
3. We can flesh out the data by researching in social histories (e.g., definitions of old occupations, reading about specific wars and the documents they left behind) and by mapping an ancestor's movements.
4. We can know where to look for records. Local histories and maps can help us determine jurisdictions where records are kept. Focusing on an ancestor's military service or the years spent in a particular location might lead us to new sources of information.

### How to get started:

- ☼ Select ancestor to plot on a timeline.
- ☼ Organize documents (print or virtual).
- ☼ Choose a tool (software? online form?).
- ☼ Select events to plot:
  - Vital stats (BMD)
  - What else? Migration, Occupation, Property, Military, etc. (don't forget the sources!)
  - Identify local, regional, and world events relevant to ancestor's life.
- ☼ Set time frame (life span or just one piece of his/her life?)

### ***Tips***

*For easier sorting in Word or Excel, keep date formats consistent and logical, e.g., "1862 07 21" for July 21, 1862.*

*At least one line per year of ancestor's life → best way to see gaps and look for specific records.*

*Find and read social histories.*

### Timeline Tools

- ☼ Look for the timeline feature on your genealogy software program (*Legacy, Roots Magic, Family Tree Maker, or Reunion*). The timeline feature in these programs will re-organize the information for your ancestor that you've entered on your family tree into a timeline format, and most will allow some customization of what's included.
- ☼ If you have uploaded (or created) your family tree to an online website, check to see if that site provides this feature. It will work with the information you have posted, so review what you might have on your ancestor in offline storage (i.e., copies of documents that are in file folders either in a cabinet or virtually on your computer) and decide how much of that you might want to upload and include.

- ☀ Use Word/Table or Excel spreadsheet to customize. We saw several examples of this today. These are the most flexible for creating a timeline that fits your particular research question, so don't be intimidated if you need to learn the basics of tabling or spreadsheets. There are many tutorials available for the Microsoft programs and other brands as well. Check out lynda.com on the Camarillo library's website. You can access the tutorials available there with your library card number and PIN.

#### Contributions from our class:

*From Beulah:* free online timeline template from Everton Publishing, "Individual Research Sheet." Try searching on Google for more free forms and charts and create your own customized timeline from the best of what you see. Usual suspects: FamilySearch and Ancestry.com. Family Tree Magazine also provides free genealogy forms.

*From Theresa:*

1. "How to Make a **Popplet**, a Mind Mapping Tool" Look for it on YouTube.
2. **Evidentia:** Organize, Analyze, Share. Website: <https://evidentiasoftware.com/>
3. **Timetoast** timeline maker. Website: <https://www.timetoast.com/>  
(Theresa also recommended the FamilyTreeWebinar by Thomas MacEntee, "Did I Get Everything? Creating a Checklist for Genealogy Research.")

#### Types of Charts We Saw Today:

1. *From Marilyn:* paragraphed listing of life events for one ancestor; event type is the lead information, in bold, followed by date, location, and source of information; using word processing software.
2. *Also from Marilyn (but somehow didn't get into the slides—eek!):* a table format in a word processing program with columns for date, place, event, other information, and evidence (sourcing/citation). Maybe Marilyn would be willing to post this to the group so we can see it? It's an attractive layout.
3. *From Don:* Using a spreadsheet program, Don created a format that compares census data for one household over time (census years 1850 to 1880). Rather than a chronology of a person's entire life, this type of format suggests that we can visualize our data differently depending on what kind of question we are trying to answer.
4. *Also from Don:* an example of how the software Reunion (Mac) creates a timeline showing the life spans of a three generations of a family line. This type of timeline can also be produce in the software Roots Magic (screenshot by Ken Gesch).
5. *From Gayle:* a spreadsheet timeline (using Microsoft Excel) customized and color-coded to show how family events were embedded into an ancestor's military service.
6. *From Lyn:* (1) an 'heirloom' timeline, created by the person of interest (in this case, my father-in-law) outlining his foreign service during World War II. The timeline he created about his experience is first-hand evidence, for one thing, and it helps me to fill in information that he couldn't share in his letters from that time. I also use a history of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division to understand those troop movements and battles. (2) An Excel spreadsheet to keep track of an individual with a complicated work history that involved several types of active businesses in two locations. I include a lot of description (direct quotes where possible) and full citations.