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WHELMING OPERATIONS

Use Organization So They Don't Become Overwhelming

Gerry Stoner

You will deal with personal interviews, documents, photographs, and artifacts: keeping track of all these items is going to be a challenge, but organization can reduce your anxiety and increase productivity.

Objective: *Organize your materials so that you can quickly lay your hands on any particular item.*

When dealing with items about your local history, you will want to have these five types of information. If you think about it, this is the information traditionally kept on a Library of Congress card in the library (in modern parlance, it is called *metadata*).

1. A unique name for each item of your collection (I use a 6-digit number assigned sequentially to each item).
2. A digital picture of each item (a picture of a book is not essential for historiography, but is a great help in finding the volume on your shelves!).
3. Detailed information on *where the item is to be stored*.
4. Detailed information on *where the item came from (establish provenance)*.
5. Detailed *description of the item and relevant details of the time in which it was created*.

You will be able to set up shortcuts for this information, and you can always add to a record than any time. Nevertheless, enter the most complete information that you know at the time of setting up the entry so that you never have to say "Duh, I forgot that!"

- Most women will be married at some time in their lives, and history will remember them by various maiden or married names. Include both names when identifying women in pictures.
- When listing names of people, record any uncertainty so that this information might be filled in later.
- Include alternate names for artifacts so that a "splitting gun" will not fall between the slats when searching for "dynamite wedge."
- Use alternative media that you might be comfortable with to record conversations with elders. A complete set of notes is great, but you might want to enlarge it by making an audio- or videotape. Taking a photograph of your source .

Recording this information

I hope you that you realize there will be a great deal of information that you will want to access, but I also hope you don't think that the effort is overwhelming. The following links describe record-keeping tools. No matter what your decision is, spend time planning your record-keeping system. You don't a zillion items in your collection and *then* realize your record-keeping needs to be redone.

Looseleaf notebooks : You can keep all of your information in looseleaf notebooks, entering the information on these five points as you go through your pictures, documents, etc. The disadvantage of scrapbooking is that you are limited to a single set of volumes: you cannot easily make an extra copy for a friend.

Spread sheets: You can lay out this information in Microsoft Office (either Word or Excel), and the benefit would be that you can search for any single item throughout your entire set of records. You can print additional copies as necessary, or share your file with others.

Database applications: You can store this information in a database application (Microsoft Office's Access [Windows] or Filemaker Pro [Macintosh]), with the benefit would be that you can search for any combination of items throughout your entire set of records. You can print additional copies as necessary, or share your file with others. Putin

PastPerfect Museum is designed specifically for local history, and offers a number of relevant templates. The disadvantage is that it is somewhat pricey.



This article is one of several to help you document local history. Other articles will help you convert your interviews, documents, pictures, and artifacts into documentation of your local history that can be shared with your community.

Analyzing Your Own Resources

[Organizing your information](#)
[Organizing the people of your area](#)
[Organizing the documents of your area](#)
[Organizing the pictures of your area](#)
[Organizing the artifacts of your area](#)

Creating Your Own Local History

[Developing documentation from your resources](#)
[Genealogical work](#)
[Validating local history](#)
[Presenting and publishing local history](#)
[Courses and Support](#)

Assignment: Most historical societies close down for the winter, and non-migratory neighbors tend to fight cabin fever by going to the Saturday or Sunday afternoon movies in Hunter, at the Power Authority, or another venue. While these may be fun, I hope you set up this alternative: host a series of workshops using this article as a focus and start to document your own local history.

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