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DATABASES

Using a Filemaker Pro To Organize Your Information

Gerry Stoner

A database is ideal for controlling data describing your collection. Economical database applications are Microsoft Access (Windows) and Filemaker Pro (Macintosh). PastPerfect Museum is a widely used database in local history but the price is steep. You might want to talk with your county's historian about this or other databases.

Objective: *Record the data of your collection electronically.*

As discussed in [Whelming Operations](#) , there are 5 distinct categories of metadata that you should include:

1. A unique name for each item of your collection (I use a 6-digit number assigned sequentially to each item). 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!). Detailed information on *where the item is to be stored*. Detailed information on *where the item came from (establish provenance)*.
2. Detailed *description of the item and relevant details of the time in which it was created*.

This is a typical sheet from the database that we designed for northerncatskillshistory.com. As you see, it has five parts paralleling the items identified above:

1. The metadata ID is 100222, located in the upper left corner and used throughout the record. This number is supplied automatically for each new record and will remain constant and unique through the life of the database. The space for a digital picture of each item is on the top right, and the content can be inserted by a simple copy-and-paste. Current format and storage information is in the box below the ID and notes that the original picture was returned to the source. There are also boxes for value and validation of properties which are owned by the organization. Source information is in the first, full-width box and establishes the provenance of the item.
2. Content description is in the final box.


Collection of the GHS Newsletter

100222
Picture Scanned

Current Status of 100222

GHS Newsletter Archives
Picture appeared in Newsletter 9.3

2007
returned
1930±



Source of 100222

Borrowed from Shirley Kutzscher 2007

Information on 100222

Gilboa School Trip to Stamford's REXMERE Hotel (now the Cyr Center): left to right, Mildred Case King, Inabelle Hubbard, Marjorie DeWitt, Esther Richtmyer Tompkins, Prof. Hagadorn, Evelyn Young Haskin, Pauline Faulkner, Maude Bailey Haskin, Hilda Osborn, Evelyn Hubbard Taylor, and (possibly) Otto Vrontan. Photo courtesy of Shirley Kutzscher

Think of the flexibility this gives you:

- All boxes have a scrollbar feature and can hold an immense amount of information that you can print out on demand. For instance, this database includes all the articles that appear on this web site.
- The entire content of any box is available for searching even though it may not "appear" in the face of the box.
- You can search for individual descriptors—for instance, searching for "school trips" would lead you to this record, and seven others that are in the data base (some photographs, an artifact, and two articles).
- You can search using combination of descriptors—a search for "Faulkner" and the "Rexmere Hotel" would not identify this file, but would refer you to a news article about the Gilboa baseball team at the Rexmere.
- You can search for interfaces between these boxes of information—for instance "school trips" and a "1930±" source date.
- Likewise, you might want to identify the best sources for photographs—you can sort the list of people who have loaned you photos by number of entries in the past.
- Heavens forbid, but you might want to create a list of items that were lost catastrophically . . .



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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