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WHO CAN SPEAK TO AN EARLIER TIME?

Organizing People Resources

First Draft
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A most useful resource for local history are the families of the area who have studied, lived, and recorded events in the town and may have documents, pictures, and artifacts dating back 70 –80 years of their own lives and an additional 20 – 50 years from their parents and grandparents. One friend of mine has very sharp recollections and can recount details from three generations that span over 100 years.

***Objective:* Identify people who can provide you with personal oral histories, documents, pictures, and artifacts from the Northern Catskills.**

Where can I find these people?

Elders in your neighborhood

The chances are high that you are living near a senior. Ask friends and neighbors about these individuals, and then drop by to introduce yourself. Mention your interest in local history, and ask about their interests and background. Jot notes to yourself as to their specific interests and background. When you find someone with unique insight into the area's local history, make an effort to ask about their contemporaries as well. A visit with a senior (even better, a *couple*) will often identify topics of interest and other people with whom you should talk. After you leave and while the memories are still fresh, take out your notepad and make sure that your experience is clear, understandable, and that you have all the information that you need to follow-up with these people.

Historians

County, town, and village historians have a wealth of information not only about the seniors of the area, but also (naturally) the history and mores of the community. Ask your historians about names of the elders in your neighborhood, but also ask about

- their own personal interests and areas of passion;
- trends within the community that either are typical of the Northern Catskills, or that differentiate it from neighboring towns;
- information and insights about historic events in the town;

- newspaper articles, microfiche, and other publications that are in their keeping
- validation of any work that you might be doing.

Other sources of names

Town supervisors, road superintendents, board members, library staff, members of the area historical or genealogical societies, and even Post Office, UPS, or FedEx personnel will also be familiar with old-timers.

Approaching these people

- Make habit to carry a small notepad and pen at all times, and ask for complete information whenever you hear of someone specialized knowledge and a great memory;
- When a name is mentioned, try to get as much information as possible at that time and before going on to another topic;
- When you are finished, reread your notes while the conversation is still fresh in your mind to make sure the notes in your recollections are clear and complete;
- One of your best tactics is to remain quiet—in any type of conversation, a person might stop talking about that topic but will still be thinking about it, and add a named or an insight after it appears that they have finished;
- Ask about their participation in any seniors activities—this might remind them of names from a slightly different perspective;
- Be aware of the mood of your conversation, and try to end the session on a high note. End the conversation with their agreement to meet you at another time if you see fatigue or impatience set in;
- Sum of your meetings with elders will be formally arranged: make sure that you have your thoughts in order and notes made as to what you wish to cover. It is not a bad idea to have this typed out and, if the situation is right, share it with the senior;
- On the other hand, the conversation might occur at random, but don't let this deter you from making it as productive as possible.



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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