

Honor Our Veteran--Present & Past

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Helping Our Families Tell the Stories of Their Lives--Some Basics of Interviewing

[Reader Alert: lengthy article]

by Curt B. Witcher

Thoughts of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and other seasonal holidays and holy days race to our minds when November dawns. For many, this is the time of year when we look forward to family gatherings and sharing anew stories about our families and ancestors. Please use the time this year to interview relatives you may not see often, as well as those who may have known your relatives.

We know that many individuals in our families—from close family members to distant relatives—have important stories to share that could provide details about the lives of our ancestors. Neighbors, co-workers, and comrades that show up for some of our holiday gatherings may also be able to bring some light to our ancestors' lives. All of these stories may provide vital clues for finding more records and documents, and they may provide contexts for our ancestors' lives—contexts that enhance our understanding of these individuals and that make their lives more than a collection of dates and places.

Please make the time over the next two months (or more!) to interview individuals who have family stories you'd like to capture and preserve. You never know how many chances you will have to engage a particular person. Continually postponing the opportunity to interview someone typically is not a winning strategy.

While I am in no way an oral history or interviewing expert, I would like to share with you some very basic practices that should be a part of any interview. And many of us know that doing the basics well ensures some level of success with any endeavor. Please do not consider the following points a comprehensive list, but rather, a springboard for you to use in motivating yourself toward best practices and toward action.

First, be prepared—in every way. For me, this is the biggest and arguably the most important step. As with many things in life, it's all about the details. Some things for which you may want to prepare are listed in the following.

[A] Know the technology you are going to use. Almost nothing kills the conversational nature of an interview faster than one fumbling with a recorder--finding the "record" button, changing the batteries, getting the directional microphone pointed correctly, etc. If you are going to electronically record an interview (and I highly recommend this), always ask permission to do so first. Realize that recording may dampen spontaneity and cause some anxiety at first, so prepare to soften that with reassuring words, gestures, and facial expressions.

If your "technology" is a pen or pencil, make sure you bring two, that they have ink and lead respectively, and that you have enough paper upon which to write. I have witnessed more than a few interviews have the "air sucked out of them" by lack of preparedness to record the transaction.

[B] Be familiar with the type of place where you are going to conduct the interview. Is it going to be at the person's home, in a meeting room at the local library or hall, at a care facility, etc.? Having a general knowledge of the location of your interview will help you prepare for the types of distractions you may encounter. Not being surprised by levels of noise, or other people coming in and out of the immediate area is to your advantage.

[C] Arrive ahead of time so you can engage on time. If the location is unfamiliar to you, you may need to "scope it out" a day or two before the interview so that you know exactly where it is and how long it will take you to get there. One always wants to show respect for the individual and appreciation for his or her time by arriving on time or just a moment or two before. If you happen to arrive at a location five to ten minutes earlier than you thought you would, wait in a discrete location until the agreed upon time. We sometimes can forget that arriving considerably earlier than scheduled can be as disruptive for an interviewee as arriving late.

[D] Know as much as you can about the individual you are going to interview. In almost all instances you will be contacting the person before the actual interview to introduce yourself, establish a date and time for the interview, set some parameters for the interview, and determine the length of interview. Especially during the holiday season, it may be appropriate to bring a small gift to set a pleasant tone.

To the extent possible, determine if the interviewee may have any physical distractions that could derail a conversational interview. Does the person have ailments it would be good to know about ahead of time? Does the person tire easily or repeat phrases often? Is he or she prone to headaches, long-winded or have slurred speech due to a stroke or other injury? Does the person talk more freely in a group, or one-on-one? What are his or her likes and dislikes?

[E] Prepare yourself physically and mentally. Make sure your clothes are clean and "main stream." I have found that one doesn't want one's appearance to detract from the easy flow of information. We may be comfortable in a tie-dyed tee-shirt or fifteen-year-old comfortable sweatshirt, but that may be considered somewhat disrespectful by someone who was raised and lived in a more

conservative time period.

Increasing numbers of people are sensitive to smells and fragrances; hence, it is a good idea to be very minimalist with perfume, after-shave, and other fragrances—or not use them at all. If you have regular medications and seasonal treatments, make sure you take those before the interview. You want all your actions during the interview to support establishing rapport and respect.

I am sure you can add to this list. Just remember that a job well begun is a job half done. Being well prepared will lay the foundation for a great interview. Conversely, it is very hard to recover from being ill-prepared and getting off on the wrong foot.

If the first important step in interviewing is being prepared, the second important step must certainly be how we present ourselves during the interview and how we ask our questions. Engage with sincerity, reacting, but not over-reacting, to things you may hear. Be warm and engaging without going "overboard." Be totally present to the interviewee by maintaining excellent eye-contact throughout the interview. If you need to be concerned about the time, locate a clock in the same area or field of view as the interviewee, or bring your own small timepiece to discretely place. Try not to continuously look at a time piece. It sends a message of disinterest and non-engagement to the interviewee.

Commit to asking the majority of your questions as open-ended questions—questions that cannot be easily answered with a "yes" or "no." It's okay to follow-up with additional questions based on the answers you receive, as long as you are tuned-in to the body language of the interviewee. If she or he indicates reluctance or discomfort with the line of questioning, be prepared to calmly and smoothly move on. The flow of questions may be enhanced by grouping the questions by time period, best-loved topics, seasonal topics, or contemporary topics.

There is no need to provide a list of sample questions here. There are so many books, articles and websites filled with excellent lists of open-ended questions. All one needs to do is look.

At third basic step for conducting interviews is to develop some strategies for enhancing the interviewee's experience. One can enhance an interview by bringing discussion starters. Such discussion starters may include pictures and online images; artifacts such as medals, rings, berets, pins, and the like; food; and even other individuals the interviewee may know and respect.

In conducting your interview, engage in active listening, and resist the all-too-frequent temptation to match the interviewee's story with a similar story of your own. Remember that the interview is **not** about you. It is about engaging the interviewee in telling his or her own story.

A reluctant interviewee can be a formidable challenge for any interviewer. Someone who agreed to be interviewed but then doesn't seem to want to answer many questions completely or fully can be unsettling. With such an interviewee, discussion starters are even more important. You may be able to draw more conversation out of such a person by quoting what an "interested party" said about him or her. You may also want to try deliberately providing incomplete or vague information about a subject which the interviewee knows well. The hope is that he or she will not be able to resist filling in the gaps.

After the interview, the work is not finished. Read your notes, and listen to the recording if made, within the first 24 hours. In that same 24-hour period, send a thank you to the interviewee. Make the thank you note personal (blank-inside cards are good for this), including something positive and specific about your time together. Create two separate copies of the interview and store each in a different location, again within the first 24 hours. All the while, enjoy the fruits of your labor.

I realize this list may seem like a lot. Engaging the process a few times will make it second nature for you. Recording, preserving, and sharing the stories of our families' lives is such an awesome and worthwhile activity.

German Immigrants in American Church Records

By Melissa Shimkus

For those seeking the hometown of Germanic ancestors, the search can quickly become frustrating as many records found will simply indicate the birthplace as Germany, and nothing more specific. However, many newly-arrived immigrants migrated to towns and neighborhoods populated by individuals of similar ethnicity, and a common meeting place for those acclimating to the new country often was the local church. Documents kept by the church can provide a broader view of the immigrant ancestor's socialization within the new community, and might also mention these ancestors' places of origin in new member lists and meeting minutes. Other official church documents that recorded vital statistics also could furnish specific details, including the town and province of birth in the "old country."

"German Immigrants in American Church Records" (929.13 M662g), edited by Roger Minert, provides these details in a ten volume set. Immigrants of Germanic descent who attended Protestant churches in Indiana, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois are documented within these volumes. Each volume focuses on an individual state and is organized alphabetically by city or township then alphabetically by the church's name. The entries follow the order of the original church books. Each volume includes an individualized bibliography and everyname index.

Details that might be found in an entry are birth date and place, parents' names, marriage date and place, spouse's name, year of immigration, death date and place, age at time of death, and burial date and place. Even if specific family members were not named in the immigrant's entry, perusing the other individuals within the church parish may yield familial results. The source for each entry is referenced so the researcher can locate the original documents.

Researching filmed and original church ledgers, the compilers of the set took special care with verifying the consistency of the spelling of an individual's name within these records. Reverse alphabetical indexes were used to properly spell place names as some locations were improperly spelled within the church documents.

With all of these details available, searching church records should be a definitive part of a research plan. And if one is seeking Germanic immigrants in the Midwest, the "German Immigrants in American Church Records" set is a resource worth examining.

Local Government Websites for Research

By Delia Bourne

We tend to think of vital records indexes and images as only held at the state level and, if available online, must be found at Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, or a state-level website. However, the vital record indexes of at least two major cities are available through the websites of county offices.

Indexes for births (75 years and older), marriages (50 years and older), and deaths (20 years and older) for Chicago are available at Historical Cook County, Illinois Vital Records <http://www.cookcountygenealogy.com/>. To access this database, it is necessary to create a free account to search. Then select your search and type in the names. As usual, names can be misspelled, and if you add a middle name where none appears, your search will fail. Results will show file number and event date. If you would like a copy, click the name and go to "Your Cart." The prices vary, and there is a \$1.75 credit card fee. Check the software requirements and download the file. Even if you decide not to obtain the file, the dates provided can open doors for your research.

The Shelby County, Tennessee, Register of Deeds office has a website at <http://register.shelby.tn.us/index.php> that is rich with genealogical and historical data. Along with indexes for Tennessee deaths (1949-2009), divorces (1980-2009) and marriages (1980-2009), the site holds a vast array of records for Memphis and Shelby County, including birth records (1874-1912), death records (1848-1962), marriage records (1820-1970), marriage index or images (1920-1989) and the chancery court divorce index (1945-1997), as well as Memphis city directories (1849-1943), circuit court indexes (1893-2000), an index to probate court loose papers (1820-1900) and probate court will book indexes and images (1830-1980). Additionally, the site also has the Memphis census for 1865, naturalization records (1856-1906), the Memphis Police blotter (1858-1860) and Snowden High School yearbooks (1941-1995). A few of these databases are indexes only, with links to order a copy of the record, but many will link a researcher directly to a tiff or jpg image which can be downloaded. This was the case when I located the death record for an infant aunt, Catherine Holt, who died at 8 months in 1901 of inanition.

The Memphis Police blotter is fascinating reading, arranged by surname, crime, notes and date of arrest. Many of the arrests were for drunk and disorderly, fighting and careless driving. Slaves, most arrested for failure to produce a pass, are listed by first name and the owner is listed in the notes field. Some arrests seem unusual, such as that of Daniel McKay, listed as a "stranger from Nebraska," who was detained by officers McMurray and Carter on December 12, 1858, for being a "suspicious character." Some arrests have no name attached, such as that by Officers Miller and Myers, who took custody of "a little Irish boy, drunk again... third time" on January 30, 1859.

So whether a researcher is more likely to get lucky with vital records in Cook County, Illinois, or hit the mother lode in Memphis, Tennessee, local government office websites are worth checking for these hidden gold mines.

Technology Tip of the Month--Adobe Photoshop/Elements: A Look at TEXT
by Kay Spears

Let me start the exploration of text/fonts in Adobe Photoshop/Elements by saying that neither one of these programs supports vector-based tools, and in most cases, that is what text is. If you are going to print anything designed with text, I suggest you create that text in a vector-based program such as InDesign, Illustrator, Corel Draw, Inkscape, Serif DrawPlus or another design program. There is even some free design software out there, so do some online research if you do not have access to one of the programs named.

Adobe Photoshop and Elements are raster-based programs. They were created to work with images, so when you work with text in this environment and then try to print that work, you will notice that in many cases, your text is either fuzzy or pixelated. It will not appear clean, crisp or sharp. However, if you are going to create an image that you intend to use online, and that image includes text, then you should create the image in Photoshop or Elements. Just remember that Elements is limited as far as some of the bells and whistles you might be able to use when creating text with a design program.

In the Photoshop/Elements tool bar, click on the big T. This is the text tool. When you move your cursor over the work area, it will change from an arrow to a T with lines around it. Find the area where you want to put the text and, holding your left mouse button down, drag. As you drag, a box appears. When you release the left mouse button, a box with points on the corners and middle should appear. There will also be a blinking cursor located somewhere in this box. The location of this blinking cursor depends on what alignment is being used.

When you clicked on the Text tool, you also opened up a sub-menu. This menu varies depending on what version of Adobe you are using, but you should be able to use it to change the type, size and alignment of the text/font you are using. Next, type your desired text, and then click out of the box. Play with the settings in the sub-menu to see what is available. For those of you using a Creative Suite Adobe Photoshop, there is a Character dialogue box that can be opened. This box has a lot more settings available to you than the sub-menu in Elements. In both cases, play with the text; find out what you can do and what you can't do. When it comes to using text for posters, books, fliers, brochures or online postings, I have had better results if I create one image for printing and one for online.

Next month: A look at the Quick Selection Tool in Adobe Photoshop/Elements.

Quick-Tip of the Month for Preservation--25 Things You Can Do Right Now
by Dawne Slater-Putt, CG(sm)*

We all have genealogy projects that we hope to get to someday - when we are "empty nesters," when we retire, or when we downsize and no longer have so many yard work and home maintenance responsibilities. Yet time continues to pass and we never know just how much we have, do we? Here are some ways you can take little "bites" out of your family history preservation goals today.

1. Send an image of a document that you have already scanned to The Genealogy Center for inclusion in one of the following:

*Our Military Heritage

*Family Bible Records

*Family Resources

2. Scan five family photos.

3. Email or write a letter to a distant cousin or genealogy correspondent - just to keep in touch, or to ask what's new with his or her research on the family line.

4. Take one document from your files and enter all of the information into your genealogy program.

5. Write about one family tradition that your family has or had in the past.

6. Tell a child or young adult relative a family story.

7. Write down some instructions about what should be done with your family history files after you die.

8. Send a message to one of your DNA matches or to someone on Ancestry or FamilySearch whose tree connects with yours.

9. File five documents, or put five documents in photo sleeves and put them in a binder.

10. Write complete source citations on the fronts of three of your documents.

11. If you have written a family history - short or long - send a copy to The Genealogy Center.

12. Using a photo-safe pen or pencil, label a handful of photos. These don't have to be heritage photos. Think about the studio or school portraits that you have received from relatives in Christmas cards during the past few decades.

13. Scan your own birth and marriage certificates and those of your children.

14. Spend 15 minutes organizing some of your digital files. You might:

*Label photos with names instead of the computer-generated numbers

*Create surname folders and group items

15. Back up your genealogy files.

16. Back up your digital photo files.

17. Write a childhood memory.

18. Pick up a photo of one of your deceased relatives - a parent, grandparent or an aunt or uncle - and write a few paragraphs about the person so that those who come after you will "know" that person. This doesn't have to be perfect. Stream-of-consciousness writing is fine.
19. Upload something to WeRelate.org, a site that can be used as a "virtual file cabinet" for your paper ephemera.
20. If you have large documents, call your local library and ask if it has scanning equipment that can accommodate your needs.
21. As you work with your files, begin compiling a list of records for which you need complete citations. You can work on getting the missing information when you have a larger block of time.
22. Scan five more photos.
23. Enter the information from another single document into your genealogy program.
24. Write another childhood memory.
25. Give yourself permission NOT to finish a task in one sitting. Just do something. A little something toward your goals accomplished each day adds up to a great deal as time passes.

*"CG" & "Certified Genealogist" are service marks of the Board for Certification of Genealogists, and are used by authorized associates following periodic, peer-reviewed competency evaluations. Certificate No. 386 awarded 4 July 1996; expires 4 July 2016.

It's WinterTech!

Hard on the heels of Family History Month comes our winter series: WinterTech, your opportunity to keep your family history research skills in shape through the long winter months. These programs are held every second Wednesday of the month (to coincide with the Allen County Genealogical Society of Indiana's monthly meeting), November through February, at 2:30 p.m. But this year, we are adding a "Basics of Adobe Elements Workshop," a four-part series on Monday evenings in February, 6 to 7 p.m. in the Computer Classroom. This hands-on class has limited seating, so register early.

The first WinterTech event is "Take it With You: How to Print or Save Records from Genealogy Databases," Wednesday, November 13, 2013, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. in the Globe Room. After you make a great family history discovery in one of The Genealogy Center's on-site databases, such as Ancestry or Heritage Quest, you will need to print or save the record for future reference. Sara Allen will lead you on a comprehensive tour through our databases, demonstrating how to take a copy of that exciting record with you when you leave.

Other WinterTech classes will include "Researching Indiana Digital Collections" on Wednesday December 11, 2013; "Net Treats" on Wednesday, January 8, 2014; and "Apps & Programs for

Genealogy" on Wednesday, February 12, 2014. For more information see the brochure at http://www.genealogycenter.org/Libraries/2013_Brochures/WinterTech.sflb.ashx .

Call 260-421-1225 or email Genealogy@ACPL.Info to register for any of these free classes.

Out and About

Curt Witcher

November 2, 2013 - San Mateo County Genealogical Society, Menlo Park LDS Church, 1105 Valparaiso, Menlo Park, CA. Topics:

*Mining the Mother Lode: Using Periodical Literature for Genealogical Research"

*Doing Effective Research In Libraries

*Doing the History Eliminates the Mystery

*Fingerprinting Our Families: Using Ancestral Origins As a Genealogical Research Key

November 9, 2013 - Hamilton County Genealogical Society & the Genealogy & Local History Department of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Huenfeld Tower Room, 800 Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio. Presentation: "From Bayonets to Bombshells: Sources for Documenting the Military Service of Our Families."

Area Calendar of Events

Allen County Genealogical Society

13 November 2013 - ACPL Meeting Room, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 6:30 p.m. Gathering time, followed by business meeting and presentation, "Using Google Docs and Google Drive for Genealogy," presented by Rex Bertram.

ACGSI Genealogy Technology Group

20 November 2013 - ACPL Meeting Room, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 7 p.m.

Chief Richardville House, 5705 Bluffton Road

2-3 November 2013—5705 Bluffton Road, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 10 a.m. to 5 Saturday and noon to 4 Sunday. Traders Days - Vendors, craftsmen and artists sell quality Native American items including fine art, gourd work, beading, carved wood pieces, corn husk dolls, Christmas ornaments, Native American shields, jewelry, clothing, feather work, homemade baked goods and more.

Allen County History Center

Opening November 29 - 302 E. Berry St., Fort Wayne, Indiana, is the 28th Festival of Gingerbread featuring gingerbread houses and structures.

Historic Fort Wayne

30 November 2013—1201 Spy Run Avenue, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. "Christmas at the Fort."

Driving Directions to the Library

Wondering how to get to the library? Our location is 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the block bordered on the south by Washington Boulevard, the west by Ewing Street, the north by Wayne Street, and the east by the Library Plaza, formerly Webster Street. We would enjoy having you visit the *Genealogy Center*.

To get directions from your exact location to 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, visit this link at MapQuest:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?formtype=address&addtohistory=&address=900%20Webster%20St&city=Fort%20Wayne&state=IN&zipcode=46802%2d3602&country=US&geodiff=1>

>From the South

Exit Interstate 69 at exit 102. Drive east on Jefferson Boulevard into downtown. Turn left on Ewing Street. The Library is one block north, at Ewing Street and Washington Boulevard.

Using US 27:

US 27 turns into Lafayette Street. Drive north into downtown. Turn left at Washington Boulevard and go five blocks. The Library will be on the right.

>From the North

Exit Interstate 69 at exit 112. Drive south on Coldwater Road, which merges into Clinton Street. Continue south on Clinton to Washington Boulevard. Turn right on Washington and go three blocks. The Library will be on the right.

>From the West

Using US 30:

Drive into town on US 30. US 30 turns into Goshen Ave. which dead-ends at West State Blvd. Make an angled left turn onto West State Blvd. Turn right on Wells Street. Go south on Wells to Wayne Street. Turn left on Wayne Street. The Library will be in the second block on the right.

Using US 24:

After crossing under Interstate 69, follow the same directions as from the South.

>From the East

Follow US 30/then 930 into and through New Haven, under an overpass into downtown Fort Wayne. You will be on Washington Blvd. when you get into downtown. Library Plaza will be on the right.

Parking at the Library

At the Library, underground parking can be accessed from Wayne Street. Other library parking lots are at Washington and Webster, and Wayne and Webster. Hourly parking is \$1 per hour with a \$7 maximum. ACPL library card holders may use their cards to validate the parking ticket at the west end of the *Great Hall* of the Library. Out of county residents may purchase a subscription

card with proof of identification and residence. The current fee for an Individual Subscription Card is \$70.

Public lots are located at the corner of Ewing and Wayne Streets (\$1 each for the first two half-hours, \$1 per hour after, with a \$4 per day maximum) and the corner of Jefferson Boulevard and Harrison Street (\$3 per day).

Street (metered) parking on Ewing and Wayne Streets. On the street you plug the meters 8am - 5pm, weekdays only. It is free to park on the street after 5pm and on the weekends.

Visitor center/Grand Wayne Center garage at Washington and Clinton Streets. This is the Hilton Hotel parking lot that also serves as a day parking garage. For hourly parking, 7am - 11 pm, charges are .50 for the first 45 minutes, then \$1.00 per hour. There is a flat \$2.00 fee between 5pm and 11pm.

Genealogy Center Queries

The Genealogy Center hopes you find this newsletter interesting. Thank you for subscribing. We cannot, however, answer personal research emails written to the e-zine address. The department houses a Research Center that makes photocopies and conducts research for a fee.

If you have a general question about our collection, or are interested in the Research Center, please telephone the library and speak to a librarian who will be glad to answer your general questions or send you a research center form. Our telephone number is 260-421-1225. If you'd like to email a general information question about the department, please email: Genealogy@ACPL.Info.

Publishing Note:

This electronic newsletter is published by the Allen County Public Library's Genealogy Center, and is intended to enlighten readers about genealogical research methods as well as inform them about the vast resources of the Allen County Public Library. We welcome the wide distribution of this newsletter and encourage readers to forward it to their friends and societies. All precautions have been made to avoid errors. However, the publisher does not assume any liability to any party for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions, no matter the cause.

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If you do not want to receive this e-zine, please follow the link at the very bottom of the issue of Genealogy Gems you just received or send an email to kspears@acpl.lib.in.us with "unsubscribe e-zine" in the subject line.

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