

# Publish Your Own Family History Book

*By Bobbi Schirado*

Sharing Family History and genealogy is one of the best parts of learning about your ancestors. In the past, all family histories and stories were preserved on paper. Now, digital options abound, but many of us still want to read a printed page or create a touchable family keepsake. This article is going to focus printing, but any initial decisions are relevant to almost all methods distributing your family's history.

## **First, decide what you want to write.**

This is a pretty important step, so take some time and think about it. It's not a bad idea to start small and experiment with a more manageable project before creating a 600 page all-encompassing family history.

You may only want to share a printed version of your family tree. Today, this usually involves creating a word process-

ing file from a genealogy database. Far simpler than using a typewriter and White Out to make a clean copy. Most databases, like Family Tree Maker or Reunion allow you to export your genealogical information into more versatile and editable word processing programs such as Microsoft Word.

Genealogists tend to have boxes or even rooms full of documents related to family history. Finding the "right" John Jones is a story all by itself. It's a journey that when shared might help another researcher climb a stubborn brick wall. Members of the WMGS Writers Group have found that finding a possible topic is less of a problem then deciding which of a myriad of options is the best place to start.

## **Parameters, Tone, Style and Format**

How long do you want to work on this specific project? Writing and compiling information takes time. Limiting your first book to how your immigrant Irish family arrived, settled and prospered here in America is a big undertaking all by itself. You might want to wait until the second book to cover the three Revolutionary War ancestors in your family tree.

Some genealogical publications sound like an academic treatise. Others create a storytelling "voice" in the reader's head. Neither is a "bad" choice, and as the author, you get to choose your book's tone. However, it is helpful to be consistent, so decide before you start.

Having the ability to decide how your book will look is empowering. You get to choose the size and font used, the book's the width and height and the kind (dull or shiny) and color of the paper used. A number of helpful "how to" books or websites provide examples of Style Sheets. A Style Sheet includes any spelling rules you want to implement (especially for surnames), footnote and source formats, margin widths, photographic presentations, etc. Each Style Sheet can be unique to one project.

## **Editing and Proofreading**

I always know exactly what I mean to say, but it's not always clear to everyone else. Editing is a process and should never be done too quickly. It's helpful to read what you've written out loud to yourself before having others comment on the content. I tend to skip those pesky little words like "a" or "the," or forget

### ***Possible Topics***

Your Family Tree  
Photographs  
Farm History  
Business History  
History of a House  
Biography of One Ancestor's Life  
A Series of Family Stories  
War Experiences  
Autobiography  
Vacation (Camping/Cottage) Stories  
A Trip to the Old Country  
Personal Memoirs  
Reprint an Historical Diary

to keep my verb tenses in line with the subject of the sentence. Reading the copy makes these errors stand out so they can be fixed.

After you have your "final" copy, have at least two people read it. Have them note:

- Where they'd like more information;
- When there is too much information or it's repetitious;
- Any confusing or unclear statements or ideas;
- Where additional sources are needed; and,
- If the graphics used (maps, pictures, etc.) are helpful and appropriate.

Feedback can be a both a learning experience and a lot of fun. Talking about my family's history is one of my favorite things and hearing about new approaches or ways to improve my writing are always appreciated.

Producing a book your family can be proud of now and in the future is an exciting undertaking, and you want it to be as complete and error free as possible. Some writers work on one chapter and then have it read immediately rather than waiting until the entire book is complete. This can be very valuable as it may suggest new directions for later parts of the book, or it may indicate an entirely separate book might be in order.

New sources are appearing constantly, but at some point you will have to end all research activities or you'll simply never finish. It's helpful to have a checklist noting which sources you've found, those you've used and those that either didn't exist or remain in hiding. Make sure you do everything can to complete your research before beginning your book.

Proofreading is part of the ongoing writing process. Correcting errors as you write makes the final proof reading easier and faster. It's important to have another person carefully proofread your final version.

### **Print On Demand**

One of my most used and treasured genealogical sources is the story written by my husband's Grand Aunt Julie Filibeck Schirado describing her family's arrival in America in 1896. Unfortunately the purple mimeograph ink has faded almost to unreadability. Print quality matters. Also, be aware that many ink jet printers use ink that is water soluble, may fade and is not permanent.

Traditional book publishers require a minimum number of books to be printed. While there is a cost break when a greater number of books are printed,

most genealogists lack the upfront capital to do this. Most family history books are written for current relatives or future descendants. It's unlikely genealogists will want more than 200-300 copies, and many would prefer to print even fewer. Computers, Print On Demand, and digital files help lower and stretch out costs.

One option is to simply create a digital file and take it to any traditional printing company. As many printed copies can be made as you desire. Staples or spiral bindings are usually available. For an extra fee, some printers will also trim your book. This is a fairly inexpensive option, however a heavier cover or a glued binding are rarely available.

About five years ago a new option for printing a smaller number of high quality copies at a reasonable price appeared. In a few minutes the Espresso Book Machine can print, bind and trim a high-quality paperback book complete with a full-color cover. These books are indistinguishable from paperback books produced by major publishing companies. In 2009, Schular Books, located on 28th Street in Grand Rapids acquired one of only 20 Espresso Book Machines in the world at that time. Since then, Michigan State University and the University of Michigan added Espresso Book Machines to their publishing capabilities.

Adele Bradford Jones who wrote, *Lifetime Journey - Your Family Story*, and Claudette Darling, author of *Great-Grandma's Trunk*, both published their books using Schular's services. (Both books were reviewed in *Michigana* and both authors wrote about their experiences in writing and publishing.) They worked with Pierre Camy. Both appreciated Pierre's help in understanding the printing process and suggestions for making their books the best they

#### **Can't Find an Out of Print Book?**

Some out of print county histories on Ebay or Criag's List sell for pretty much an arm and a leg. If a researcher wants a reprint for a much lower price, the Espresso Book Machine, is able to print books from an ever-growing digital inventory of several million titles, including print-on-demand titles from many publishing companies (Harp-er Collins, Random House, Simon and Schuster, Saint Martin Press , Authorhouse, iUniverse, etc...) and out-of-print public domain Google books.

could be. Pierre can be contacted at 616-942-7330 or [printondemand@schulerbooks.com](mailto:printondemand@schulerbooks.com).

For those of us who are neophytes when it comes to publishing it's important to have a real, live person available to take calls, respond to emails, or meet in person to help you every step of the way. Schular's is also locally owned and operated and is therefore more responsive to those of us who live here. When possible it's almost always to a writer's benefit to be able to talk up close and personal with those who are will be helping to create lasting printed memories.

Print On Demand doesn't create a stockpile of unwanted books, and books can often be printed within minutes of the time an order is placed. As a result, publishing is relatively inexpensive for authors because, aside from

the initial set-up fee, they are only responsible for however many books they would like to purchase themselves. The basic fee of printing each book is very reasonable; it allows authors to set their own book price and receive a profit without making their books unreasonably priced for family members or researchers who wish to buy them.

For more information about the nuts and bolts of using an Espresso Book Machine to publish your writing go to <http://www.schulerbooks.com/schuler-books-presents-espresso-book-machine>

In future issues of *Michigana* we'll explore online printing options and digital formats.



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