



Will Your Work Survive the Digital Age?

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The Digital Age has done amazing things:

- Historically, family history has been the luxury of nobility and the very rich. Digitizing, and especially the Internet, has democratized genealogy. Family History is now available to all. Now everyone is important, the most humble servant, the slave, the indentured servant, but the only ancestors that can be found are those whose records have survived.

We are creating a Digital Dark Age every day as our correspondence and records are lost.

Approximately 45% of people don't back up their files at all, and 43% of computer users lose important information each year.

Will you be in that 43% this year or next?

DIGITAL MATERIALS ARE MORE FRAGILE THAN PHYSICAL MATERIALS

When you have digitized something you have:

- Made it easier to share
- Made it easier to disseminate
- Made it easier to copy
- Made it easier to restore
- Made it easier to index

But you have not:

- Archived it
- Made it last for more than a couple of years.

Threats to Digital Data

- Hard to retrieve—buried with useless information.
- Physical Deterioration.
- Lapsed, Purposely destroyed.
- Un-useable format, Digital Obsolescence.

Solutions

- Dissemination
- Refreshing/Back Up
- Replication in different formats
- Migration to new systems
- Naming, Tagging and Filing

Dissemination

The Library of Alexandria Rule for Genealogists:

THE MORE COPIES THERE ARE OF SOMETHING, THE MORE LIKELY IT IS TO SURVIVE.

Share, Share Share--with relatives, databases and libraries and archives. Keep files in as many places as you can. Always have electronic and print copies. Never keep anything in only one format.

Refreshing/Back Up

- CD's—you get what you pay for.
- Travel Drives—depend on the viability of the USB port, not a long term storage option.
- External Hard Drives—great for backup, longer term (but not forever.)
- Online Back Up Services—Anywhere that will accept your files and keep them in a format where you can retrieve them. Services such as Carbonite.com

Don't rely on only one back up system.

Replication In Different Formats

- Make copies in the most common digital formats, .jpg, .tiff, .txt, .ged, .csv, .rtf, .pdf.
- Paper is still the most durable format
- If you print with the wrong ink and paper, your new copy may go bad faster than the original. Look for pigment inks and archival papers.
- Store larger files, and smaller stripped down files of the same data when possible (such as different sized scans). Who knows what you might want to do with the information in the future?
- Consider donations to physical archives such as an historical society or library.

More formats will ensure that there is a file that will be useable in the future.

Migration to new systems.

- New Computer Systems--Plan time to migrate all files to the next computer.
- New Computer Software—Make sure all files are updated.
- New File Formats—Make sure all files are migrated to the new format.
- New Storage Systems—Make sure everything gets moved to the new system.

Plan and Budget to spend the time and money to migrate. If possible, make saving for technology advancement part of your regular budget.

Naming, Tagging and Filing

- Being able to find the file may be as important in the future as making sure the file survives.
- Name files well and keep them organized.
- Use descriptive titles, full names, and dates if you can, such as `hovorkajanet_birthday_8_13_94.jpg`
- Always go back through and name digital photo files as they come off the camera.
- Computer filing systems are like any filing system—like keeping a house or office clean.

Just set a scheduled time to file—everyday or even quarterly.

When the worst happens—Data Recovery

- Be careful not to write over the lost files.
- Programs such as File Scavenger can help you recover lost data.
- New operating systems such as Windows XP or Windows Vista have built in back up if you have enabled them.
- Data Recovery Professionals can be lifesavers but sometimes cost a lot.
- Many archives try to support emulation—re-establishing old programs and computer systems. FHC's usually have a computer that serves a wonderful purpose with old versions of PAF and old floppy disk drives.

You can make a difference in your family.

- To avoid a Digital Dark Age in this generation, we must ensure that our digital records are accessible and useable for the future.
- The way we manage the records we create has to keep pace with digital record creation.
- You can make a difference in your family by doing your best to preserve your own documents.
- With attention and a plan, we can preserve our records and not become the Digital Dark Age generation.

Further Reading:

<http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/you/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_preservation

<http://www.loc.gov/preserv/familytreasures/>