

Bringing Family History to Life

When I entitled this class, “Bringing Family History to Life,” I had several people ask me what it was about. They wanted to know if I was going to talk about photo editors, or incorporating multi-media into PAF, or Internet research related to images, or what. I have had to answer, rather helplessly, that the class is simply about bringing family history to life!

Let me explain first, what I mean.

We often speak about genealogy as “Work for the Dead” as if “The Dead” were an enveloping phrase that could tell everything there was to know about someone. In today's world of Political Correctness, I am not about to suggest that we begin using “metabolically challenged” as a euphemism for “dead”, but I am saying that we often forget that the most important thing about someone is not that they are dead, but rather that they lived!

A few years ago, my mother suffered an illness that left her vague and confused. Conversations with her were frustrating, as she would say the same things and repeat the same stories over and over, and would not be able to remember important people or events. I felt for a time as if my mother had been taken from me – where was the brilliant conversationalist that I remembered? A turning point in my attitude came when I found a collection of newspaper articles that my mother wrote forty years ago. As I read through them, I was filled with memories of my mother as she had been, and I realized something: my mother is not lost, or gone – she is the same person she has always been, changed no more by her illness than if she had broken her leg. The essence of who we are is not defined by the impairments of our physical bodies. This was a very significant moment for me, as I felt the reality of immortality – both for my ancestors ... and for myself.

I strongly believe that there is more to “turning the hearts of the children to the fathers” than simply taking a name to the temple. How can I relate to someone if all I know of them is a name and a few dates? Certainly there is more to me than the day and place that I was born. In the following discussion I want to show some of the ways that I have gotten to know some of my ancestors, and perhaps give you some ideas of how you can do similarly.

Case Study I – From Ancient Ancestor to Web Wonder Woman.

My wife and I happen to have been blessed with many pioneer ancestors – between the two of us there were more than 40 people who accepted the gospel in England, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, and many places in the United States. There ought to be dozens of stories we could tell our children about how the missionaries found each one and taught them the gospel, and what they had to go through to come westward. Yet, we only know the stories of a bare handful. It's frustrating! One story that stands out is the autobiography of Drusilla Dorris Hendricks, the wife of James Hendricks, and one of the early members of the Church. She had a lot in common with the other people who lived in that day and time – but she stands out in my mind because she recorded her story. I remember hearing it told to me when I was little, and wondering about this person – feeling sorry for all the things she had to go through, and marveling at her courage. The original manuscript of her story has disappeared, but typed, mimeographed, and printed copies have been handed down through generations. Recently, one of my cousins took her story and brought it to life. Robert Raymond, who is teaching a series of classes on creating web pages here at the PAF User's Group, took her story and researched it extensively. He combined several different versions of the story into one copy, added background notes on many of the events that took place, and then he illustrated it. When he was done, he published it on the web for all the world to share. The text copy of Drusilla's story looks like [this](#). Robert Raymond's hypertext looks like [this](#). Through his efforts, we can read about the night the stars fell, and then see an illustration that was painted at the time it happened. The mobbings and persecutions are made vivid through C.C.A. Christiansen's illustrations. And finally, when we look at the photographs of Drusilla and her family, we see them as people, rather than just names and dates.

The lessons I draw from this example are:

1. We wouldn't know much about Drusilla if she hadn't written down her story in the first place. I have an obligation to do likewise.
2. Her story came to me through the diligent efforts of many people who copied it and preserved it. I have a duty to collect and publish the stories that I can find so that the next generation will have them.
3. Adding the background, detail, and illustrations makes the story come alive.
4. Modern methods of publishing can make the information available to a wider audience than was previously possible.

Case Study II– Grouchy Grandma becomes Teasing Teenager.

When my wife married me, one of the elements that she brought to the marriage was a large collection of in-laws. One significant member of this group was Janet's grandmother, Verna Belnap Cottle. Grandma Cottle was no longer spry when I knew her – age had bent her over, taken most of her sight, and left her a little bit cranky. I remember her fretting over the details of our wedding, and when she would get frustrated at it all she would offer us an increasingly large sum of money if we would just elope. I was always just a little nervous around her, although it was obvious that she loved us very much. It wasn't until she passed away, however, that I really got to know her.

While going through a suitcase full of her genealogy, I found a life story she had written. She taught the Mia-Maids for three years, and I think that she wrote her own history because it was an assignment that she gave her girls. Whatever the reason, I am so glad that she wrote it down, because her life is preserved in its pages. As I went transcribed the [handwritten pages](#), I noticed that a lot of the things she wrote about were also recorded in her photograph album, which gave me the idea of combining text and pictures into an illustrated narrative. [This was the result](#):

The lessons I draw from this example are:

1. Appearances are deceiving – Grandma didn't always have a dowagers hump. Once she was a fun-loving teenager that hated school, loved dances, and got into mischief.
2. Through the stories we leave, we can share our testimonies with family members who haven't even been born.
3. Lots of things can help us remember details of our history – but photographs are a big help.
4. It really isn't all that hard to put together a document with mixed text and photographs, and web pages aren't too bad, either.

Case Study III – Converting Clippings to a Bound Book.

At the beginning I mentioned my Mother's newspaper clippings. This is my current project – to take what my mother wrote and make it more accessible to her children and grandchildren, so that they will know her as more than just the old lady with the cats. I am working on creating a book, so that they can read her words and find out what she is like. The steps I am following:

1. First find the material. It took some diligent searching to uncover the box of clippings hidden in a suitcase in a closet in the basement. I was able to find additional articles by searching microfilms of the newspaper – check with the BYU Library; Interlibrary Loan is free for Family History Research.
2. Scan the documents and save both the originals and the scans.
3. Convert the images to text with an OCR program or manually transcribe them. A program like Transcript can be useful, but a regular word processor can do the job.
4. Organize the material into your document. Get acquainted with your word processor. Learn how to use fonts, page layout, page numbering, footnotes, table of contents, index. I use OpenOffice because it's free and my employer mandates its use. I have also used Microsoft Word and WordPerfect; they all can do the job. You will like the one you use the most. Practice! Save the file in more than one format – PDF, RTF, DOC, WPD.
5. Photographs can really help make the people in the story come to life. Try to find pictures of the event, or else pictures of what they looked like at the time the event occurred, or pictures of the place where an event occurred, or something else that describes the situation.
6. Manipulate the photos to get them in the format you need. I use Irfanview; I have also used Microsoft Photo Editor. Whatever you use, there will be some training involved, and the more powerful tools take longer to learn.
7. Choose one or more final formats – web page, CDROM, paperback, hardback. If you really put a lot of time into it, the results should be appealing. Having a book bound is not expensive – Google for “On Demand Publishing”. A hardbound book with a CD inside may be the best of both worlds.

Transcript: <http://home.wanadoo.nl/jgboerema/en/Freeware.htm>

OpenOffice: <http://www.openoffice.org/>

Irfanview: <http://www.irfanview.com/>

Summary:

We have two responsibilities – both important. One is to leave a record of ourselves for our posterity; the other is to gather the records of our ancestors and pass them on.

Illustrations used in class.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF JAMES HENDRICKS AND DRUSILLA DORRIS HENDRICKS

(Dictated by Drusilla Dorris Hendricks after the death of her husband. Some deletions were made by the author from the original autobiography, but it has not been edited otherwise)

James Hendricks was born 23 June 1808 in the Country east about 8 or 10 miles from Franklin, Simpson County, Kentucky. Drusilla Dorris Hendricks was born February 8, 1810, Sumner County, Tennessee. A coincident is here manifest. James Hendricks and Drusilla Dorris were both the tenth child and the youngest of their fathers family. James Hendricks' father, Abraham, was too young to fight in the Revolutionary War but three of his brothers did engage. One for 7 years, one for 3 years, and one for 2 years while Abraham was left at home with his parents.

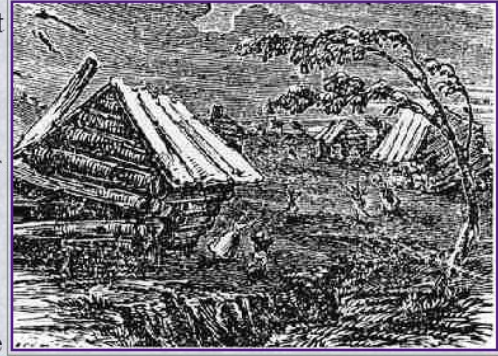
The first thing I can recollect was the earth shaking and my eldest brother and wife running with me to my father's house. (New Madrid Earthquake of 1811-12 which formed the Reelfoot Lake.) The next incident I can remember, I was saying Prayer after My Father. I was then about five years of age. He was a praying man. There was much talk concerning Religion. My parents were Baptists, our neighbors were Methodists and Presbyterians, so I heard much contention on religion. I was a child but continued to pray after my Father until I was 6 years of age. Then there were revivals among the different denominations and with them came the Jirks and dancing. My Father became disgusted but read and prayed the more until the king of exercise ceased. In my seventh year my Father sent me to school six months. I learned to read and write a very little. Then my reading was confined to the Bible and Hymn Book, until I could recite pages of it without looking at the book. In the year 1817 my Father moved a short distance to be nearer his married children but not out of the Country where I was born. Nothing of note happened to me until I was in my 10th year. Then there was some sickness in my Father's family. I was sent on an errand to three or four places and waded a stream of water and took cold. I still had my places of Prayer but dare pray after my Father no longer; I thought him to be a Christian while I was a sinner. And when I went to my Prayers I could say nothing but "Lord have mercy on me and save me from that awful place I have heard so much about."

**Drusilla's Story - this is the way it appears in "The Red Book"
The document is sixteen pages long, and has been part of
the Hendricks Family history for over a hundred years.**

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Childhood, Marriage and Family

The first thing I can recollect was the earth shaking¹ and my eldest brother and wife running with me to my father's house. The next incident I can remember, I was saying Prayer after My Father. I was then about five years of age. He was a praying man. There was much talk concerning Religion. My parents were Baptists, our neighbors were Methodists and Presbyterians, so I heard much contention on religion. I was a child but continued to pray after my Father until I was 6 years of age. Then there were revivals among the different denominations and with them came the Jirks and dancing. My Father became disgusted but read and prayed the more until the king of exercise ceased.



A woodcut portraying the damage of the New Madrid earthquake.

Courtesy [USGS](#).

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This is part of Drusilla's story as illustrated by Robert Raymond. Things that stand out are the details about the earthquake, both in the woodcut and in the footnote which tells us the name of the earthquake and when it occurred. Later in this document we find pictures of the individual family members and paintings by C.C.A. Christiansen illustrating relevant scenes from Church History. The additional research and information makes this version of the story much richer. A copy of the story has been published to the web at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~raymondfamily/ddorrisCover.html>

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My Life Story.

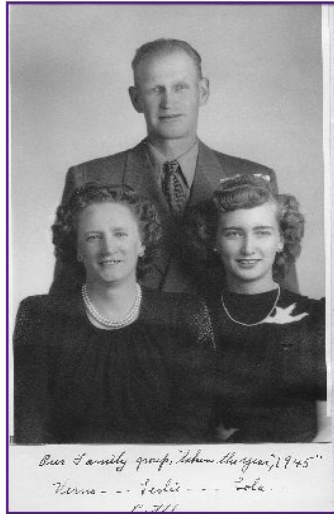
I hope I shall be ever grateful, & always thank my Heavenly Father for the names Belnap, Watts, Parker, & Cox. For these good people were ready & willing to accept the gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. They gave up family, Home, & friends to come to America. Never once in their minds was there question or doubt. Ready & willing to suffer the hardships of crossing the plains to the great Salt Lake Valley. Here they worshiped God, built their homes, raised their families & worked to build up that great Valley to leave to their posterity.

This is the first page of Grandma Cottle's life story – her handwriting is very readable, and lends a certain charm to the narrative, but text is a little more convenient.

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My Life Story

by Verna Belnap Cottle



I hope I shall be ever grateful, and always thank my Heavenly Father for the names Belnap, Watts, Parker, and Cox. For these good people were ready and willing to accept the gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They gave up family, home, and friends to come to America. Never once in their minds was there question or doubt. Ready and willing to suffer the hardships of crossing the plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Here they worshiped God, built their homes, raised their families and worked to build up that great valley to leave to their posterity.

This is the first page of Grandma Cottle's life story, formatted in text with illustrations. The pictures were taken from her photograph album, and where possible I left her own captions in place identifying the individuals in the picture.

One of the parts of her story that I enjoy very much lacks an illustration, but is told very vividly so that you can see it in your mind's eye:

One event in my life, that was thrilling, but I'm not proud of it. To all young girls I'll say, "don't try it." It was on a beautiful full moon light Sunday night. Mom and Dad were on vacation. Leaving three teenage daughters on the loose. We did the chores, the housework and walked to church. My second sister, Fawn, being more popular than Anne and I landed a boyfriend from a neighboring town. The Deluxe type -- fancy horse, top buggy, with rubber-tired wheels. He, a returned missionary, was wearing a light grey suit, white shoes and white Panama hat. They went for a ride. We -- walked home alone.

Have you ever walked home on a lonely country road? A house about every half-mile? Have you ever heard the coyotes howl and it seemed they were right there beside you? And all the dogs were barking back. An owl on the fence post to hoot out at you. You can cover a lot of ground in a few minutes. And think of a lot of things to do.

We arrived home first. Carried the old tin tub upstairs and buckets of water to fill it. Why we put clothes bluing in the water, I'll never know, but we did. Now when Prince Charming brought my Sis to the door; the upstairs window being just above it. Out went the bluing water. Ah, we were punished in more ways than one. But the boyfriend never came back.

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I mentioned our neighbors; we always had time to visit back and forth with evening's entertainments in one another's homes. It was at one of these house parties that a trip to Yellowstone Park was planned. One of the fellows owned a '29 Chevy truck with a flat bed. The men put up corner posts and fixed a canvas over the top. On a Wednesday morning in August 1932, we piled on two tents, our beds, food, a few personal things, and twelve of us in and on the truck and took off for the park. (What a time we had!)



"Home road bound from Park. Out of Gas."

*Ran out of gas in Swan Valley Idaho,
pushed the truck a half day.
The ones in the party.*

*Thorald & Eva Cox
Feslie & Verma Cottle
Henry & Alta Johnston
C. L. (Hol) & Lea Johnston
Howard & Evelyn Wadsworth
Ted & Grace Parker.*

When we got hungry, we stopped and cooked our own food. When we got sleepy, we made camp, rolled out our beds, got in, but no sleep. There was a guitar, several mouth organs, and a 'juice harp' so we had our own evening's entertainment. Saw everything in the Park, including a timber wolf. On the way home we had very little money for gas. We decided to go as far as possible before buying gas as we thought it would be cheaper along the way. When we got to the station where we really needed to buy some, we were able to get only about three gallon (all they had). We had a lot of hills to go up and down. We pushed the truck as far up as we could, then started the motor

to get on to the top. At that time the women piled onto the truck, the men got the truck rolling, then jumped on and coasted as far as possible. This got us into Star Valley where we were able to buy gas, camp for the night and drive home the next day. We were gone 10 days; the cost for the trip was \$4.95 a couple. This trip I'd like to take over again, or one just like it.

This story of the trip to Yellowstone is very vividly illustrated by Grandma Cottle's picture, showing the folks pushing the old truck and listing the names of each participant.

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