

The McCarthy Family



History

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How To Write A Family History Book (Revised March 2026)
Kate McCarthy

Three Approaches To Writing Family History

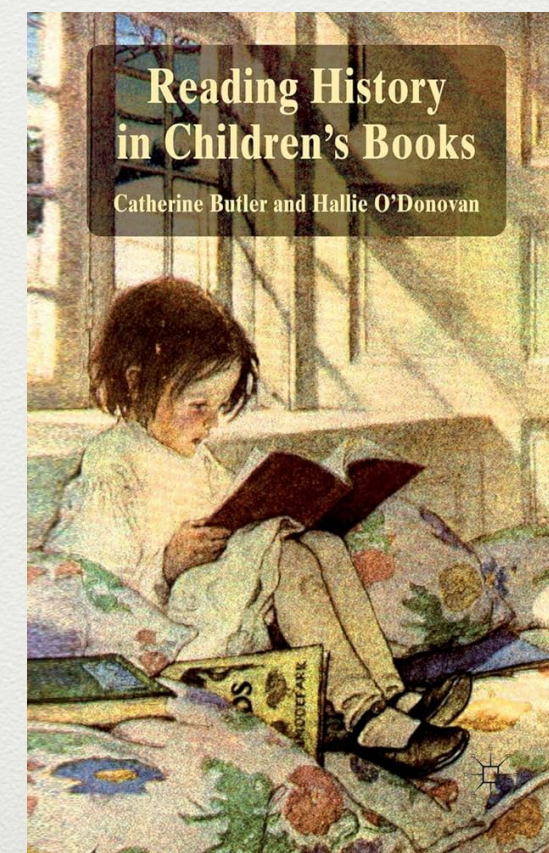
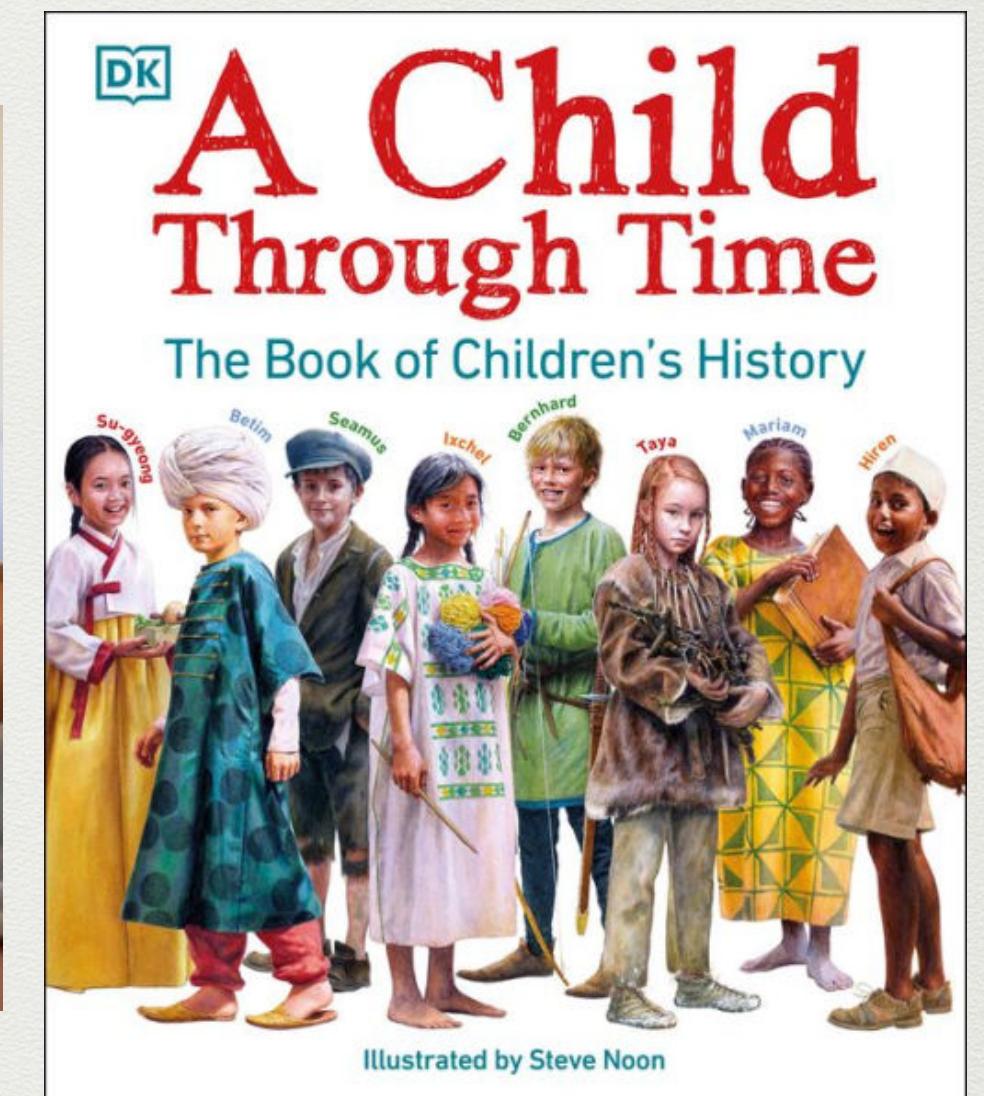
First Question: Who Will Read This?

- **Other Researchers:** You will need to source citation for each fact, provide evidence analysis and evaluation, explain your research methodology, acknowledge conflicting information, and document brick walls.
- **Adult Family Members:** You will need to provide engaging stories, personal details and provide historical context that brings ancestors to life. It needs a readable narrative without overwhelming citations. Provides lots of photos, maps, and timelines. Think of adding things like passenger lists, recipes, deeds, census records, letters, and naturalization forms. Try to connect to their own lives and identity to create empathy.



Family History For Children Under 18

- Consider the child's vocabulary level and attention span.
- Look at the books they love to read for hints. I found that my nieces and nephew like DK and Smithsonian history books so I use that format.
- You can use AI or Photoshop to create coloring books for those under 5 years.
- Consider a "Day in the Life" format for young school age students and start first with their day focusing on what they do for fun and school. Then do a similar format for their mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, etc. Put it together in a small book.
- What do they love? For example my nephew loves all things military so a book on family soldiers would be appropriate. A niece likes to make clothes so the story of her great aunt who was a seamstress would work plus pictures of fashions of the time.
- Consider what they are learning in school and do a small book on ancestors in that period. For example, my nephew will be studying California history next year so I'm creating a book on his ancestors in California who were pioneers in Tulare County, went through the San Francisco Earthquake, and were involved in the film industry. His teacher would love a book report like this. Here is a link to the California history standards to know what they are learning at each grade level. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/hssframework.asp>
- Consider using StoryCorps questions to structure a book interviewing the child first and then use the same questions for previous generations. <https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/>
- Once they become interested, they will take a peek at the adult family history book and albums.



Formal Genealogical Registry

Formal Genealogical Registry

1. Follow recognized genealogical standards so your work is seen as reliable.
2. The Register format begins with the earlier proven ancestor and works forward through generations, numbering each person systematically.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuX70a12NNA>
3. Strengths are it provides a clear framework, it is comprehensive and verifiable, and is highly valued by serious researchers.
4. Challenges are formatting takes time and it is very dry reading for the family.
5. Best for families with a strong research interest or as a foundational resource for later publications.
6. Resources: Elizabeth Shown Mills *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* and Board For The Certification of Genealogists *Genealogical Standards, 2nd Edition*.

MORGAN FAMILY

FIRST GENERATION

1. HENRY¹ MORGAN was born possibly at Thenglenogg, Monmouthshire, Wales, 24 September 1820, son of _____ and Mary (_____) Morgan. He died at Lewis Township, Cass County, Iowa, 7 July 1885.¹ He married at Columbus, Franklin County, Ohio, 11 May 1845, WINIFRED CATHERINE JONES. She was born at Thenglenogg, 29 December 1821. She died at Lewis Township, 9 December 1904.²

After moving from Wisconsin to Cass Township, Cass County, Henry Morgan, in addition to buying farmland, set up the Morgan Livery Stable with a delivery barn in the old town of Lewis next to a hotel. Several sons were most likely engaged in the operation of this stable.³

Children of Henry and Winifred Catherine (Jones) Morgan:⁴

- 2 i. WILLIAM HENRY² MORGAN, b. Dodgeville, Iowa Co., Wisc., 3 April 1846; m. NANCY ANN PICKERELL.⁵
- 3 ii. JOHN SAMUEL MORGAN, b. Dodgeville, 20 Feb. 1848; m. SARAH JANE CLARK.⁶

Narrative Family History

- **This is a storytelling blend to make the past readable and relatable. It is usually told from the 3rd person point of view. It includes description, detail, and sometimes dialogue. It includes conflict and obstacles. It has a beginning, middle, and end.**
- **Write chronologically following your family through time. Each generation or major event can be its own chapter or short book enriched by social history.**
- **Strengths are that this brings ancestors to life by connecting them to the historical context thus appealing to a wide audience.**
- **Challenges are that it takes care to balance accuracy and narrative flow. Citations must be used with care.**
- **Resources: Sharon Cormack's *You Can Write Your Family History* and Katherine Sturdevant's *Bring Your Family History to Life Through Social History*.**



The Ancestral Memoir or “Day in the Life”

This is creative nonfiction that focuses on a single ancestor or a pivotal period. It uses historical records to create a vivid reconstruction of the individual, time, and place allowing for imaginative empathy from the reader.

This can range from a book told from the ancestor’s point of view in the first person, to a short book with lots of illustrations, photos, and pictures, to use in AI like My Heritage’s Deep Story (currently pulled off the site and being reworked.)

Strengths: It is emotionally engaging, memorable, builds empathy and is ideal for public or family sharing.

Challenges: You must be strongly historically grounded, and clearly separate fact from fiction.

Resources: Bill Roorback’s *Writing Life Stories: How to Make Memories into Memoirs, Ideas into Essays, and Life into Literature*, Vivian Gornick’s *The Situation and the Story: The Art of the Personal Narrative*, Gill Blanchard’s *Writing Your Family’s History: A Guide for Family Historians*. *I liked to listen to the Audible version of Gornick’s book because she has samples of powerful narratives.



Getting Started

- **Start small and create a list of stories and profiles.**
- **Use the sources you have collected.**
- **Create an organization system.**
- **Research the historical context.**
- **Write one story at a time.**
- **Create a writing schedule.**
- **Set target dates and deadlines.**



Historical Context Resources

- **Historical context is very interesting to readers, especially if your ancestors lived through key moments in history. I have ancestors at Pearl Harbor, part of the Homestead movement in California, and many that survived the Irish Famine.**
- **Research historical narratives and photos on sites like the Library of Congress, National Archives, and historical libraries in other counties, states, and countries. Call and talk to the resource librarian or check their website.**
- **You can use ChatGPT or Perplexity to research; however always check the source material at the top for accuracy.**
- **Ancestry, Family Search, My Heritage, Find My Past, and other sites have historical information on them.**
- **HistoryLines is a subscription I use all the time. I put in my ancestor's information and get several pages telling me what happened during their lifetime. For example, my father was a child living in the Central Valley when Roosevelt's Depression programs brought electricity to their home. <https://historylines.com/>**

Patrick F. McCarthy
1854 - 1916

Patrick born, 1854
Patrick was born on 22 April 1854, in County Kerry, Ireland. His mother was Johanna Enright. His father was Thomas McCarthy and was 24 years old at the time. Patrick was the second of three children. His older sibling John was 2 years old when he was born.

Ireland, 1854
Ireland is known for its green landscapes, full of hills and fertile land. This lush setting was perfect for farming and raising livestock, two of the main industries in the region at the time. Along with agriculture, the textile industry was also essential to the economy. The climate where Patrick lived was relatively cool, so he likely spent many days under the clouds.

Brother Thomas born, 1855
Patrick's brother, Thomas, was born when Patrick was 1 years old.

Childbirth
Giving birth presented a number of risks to the lives of women and their babies during Patrick's era. With limited medical technology, complications occurred frequently, such as the child becoming stuck in the birth canal or the mother hemorrhaging to life-threatening levels. A midwife was sometimes called to the home when a woman began labor, though very often the woman's own mother or other female relatives were the only ones present to assist. These relatives or neighbors were called "handywomen" and received no formal training, typically learning by observation and word of mouth.

By the time of Patrick's birth, male midwives and formally trained medical doctors

Book Options

One Ancestor,
One Story

Married Couple

Heirloom Book

Series of Short
Stories

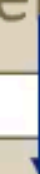
Series of Books

One Surname
Several
Generations

Epic Family
History Novel

Novella Length

Two Surnames
Several
Generations



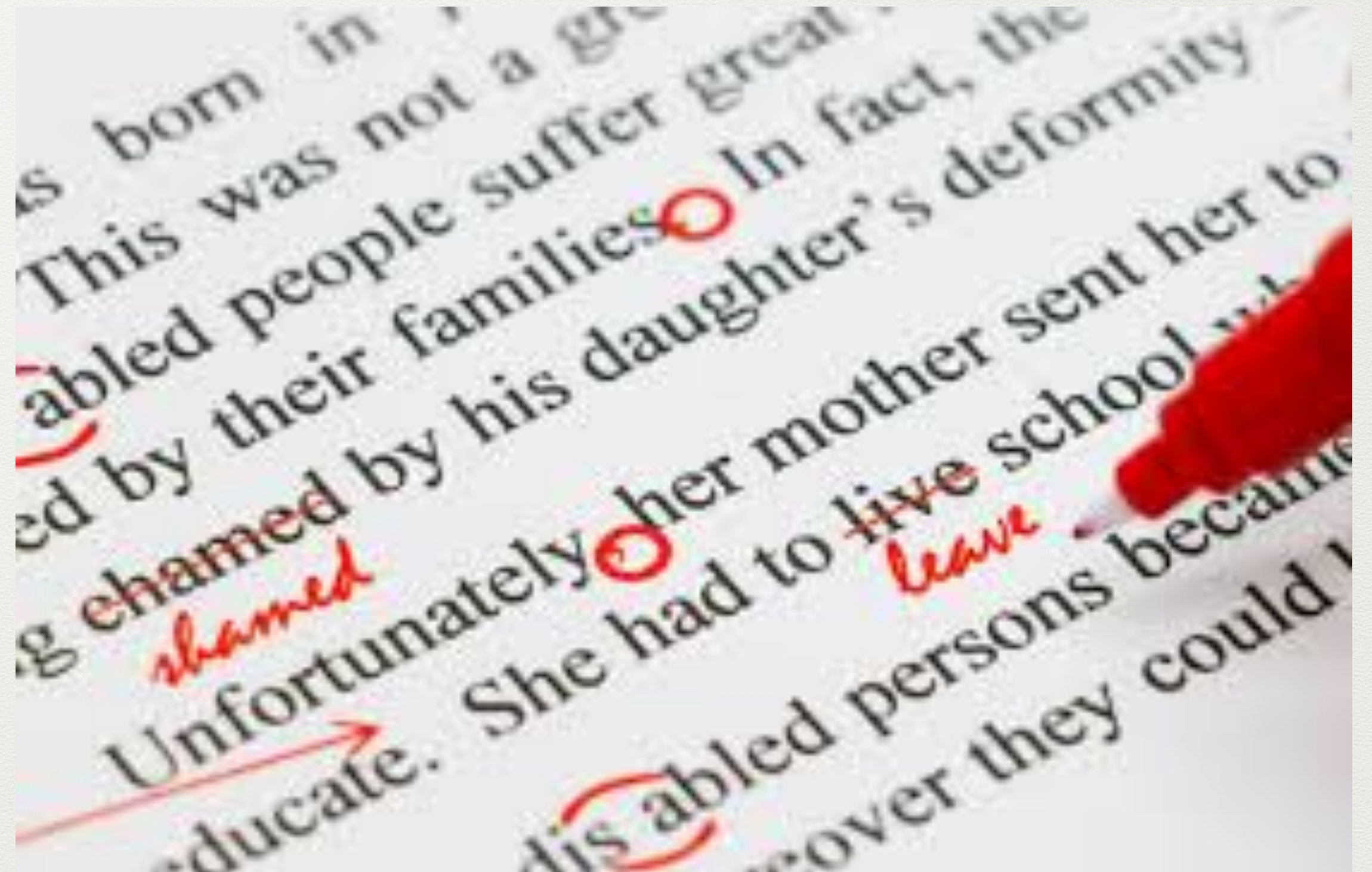
What is an Ancestor Profile?

- A snapshot of a life
- Focus on something unique or an achievement of the ancestor
- Use description, detail, quotes, dialogue, setting and characterization



Revising and Editing

- Take a break.
- Print it out a paper copy and read it out loud.
- Red pen revision.
- Second draft.
- Have a friend read it.
- Proofread it.



Scanning Guidelines

Item	Scanner Type	DPI	Format	Colour
Letters, Documents	Flat-bed or Digital Camera	300	TIFF or JPG	24-bit colour
Photographs	Flat-bed	600	TIFF	24-bit colour
Album Pages	Flat-bed or Digital Camera	600	TIFF	24-bit colour
Tintypes, Daguerreotypes	Flat-bed	1200	TIF	24-bit colour
Negatives, Slides	Flat-bed with carrier or special scanner	2400 to 3200	TIFF	Transparency
Maps , Large Documents	Digital Camera		JPG	

Editing

- Consider family or friend
(teachers make great editors)
- Printing commercially invest in an editor
(www.reedsy.com)
- Investing editing software – Prowriting Aid
(www.prowritingaid.com)

Formatting Elements

- Font Style, Size, Colour
- Line Spacing
- Page Arrangement
- Table of Contents and Index
- Pictures and Documents
- Citations and Bibliography
- Cover Design

Options for Formatting and Printing

Heirloom Templates are available from Lynn Palermo's website and connected with Canva. It saves me a lot of time and since I am doing several books, worth the cost. She also does workshops and retreats in writing family history. : <https://lynnpalermo.kartra.com/page/heirloomtemplates2>

Canva: canva.com is my personal favorite. There is a free version and a paid version. I have the paid version in which I can invite relatives to help me review and edit the book. When I am ready to print, I can use their printer, or use the PDF version to send the book to my family for free. They can print it in several format. You can also bring the PDFs to print at Staples and other printers.

5 Ways to Make Family History Books (That are not BORING!) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi_M_qFoSqo

Family Search Guide to Printing Your Family History: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/A_Guide_to_Printing_Your_Family_History

- **Microsoft Word Templates:** https://www.etsy.com/market/family_history_book_template_microsoft_word?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Search_US_DSA_GGL_ENG_General-Nonbrand_Catch-All_All&utm_ag=US_DSA-General&utm_custom1=k_EAIaIQobChMIwfiwgqKakAMVfjKDBx3pajFJEAAYASAAEgJU2_D_BwE_k_&utm_content=go_13830723579_124027385945_745353419999_dsa-19959388920_c_&utm_custom2=13830723579&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=13830723579&gbraid=0AAAAADtcfRKKDIIe47fqzKiOcsKpSEeNy&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIwfiwgqKakAMVfjKDBx3pajFJEAAYASAAEgJU2_D_BwE
- **Apple Pages Family History Book Templates:** https://www.etsy.com/market/family_history_book_template_apple_pages?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Search_US_DSA_GGL_ENG_General-Nonbrand_Catch-All_All&utm_ag=US_DSA-General&utm_custom1=k_EAIaIQobChMIIn5my7qKakAMVTKSDBx3CkADaEAAYASAAEgLa1fD_BwE_k_&utm_content=go_13830723579_124027385945_745353497690_dsa-19959388920_c_&utm_custom2=13830723579&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=13830723579&gbraid=0AAAAADtcfRKKDIIe47fqzKiOcsKpSEeNy&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIIn5my7qKakAMVTKSDBx3CkADaEAAYASAAEgLa1fD_BwE
- **Ancestry partners with My Canvas:** <https://www.mycanvas.com/>
- **My Heritage partners with My Stories:** https://www.mystories.com/?utm_source=ppc_google&tr_ag_id=179456807939&tr_device=c&tr_account=169-553-4148&coupon=earlybird10&matchtype=e&gad_campaignid=22534630231&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIs9nfj5-akAMV7watBh2o4iimEAAYASAAEgJt7fD_BwE&keyword=&gbraid=0AAAAADwjG2m75NK4821yW2Vc1lcDyy0rO&tr_camp_id=22534630231&tr_ad_group=mystories&utm_campaign=mh_search_us_en_all_mystories_all_generic&gad_source=1&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=mystories&lng=en
- **Storied:** https://storied.com/storiedbooks?utm_source=google&utm_medium=paid_search&utm_campaign=23053121991&utm_campaign_name=&utm_term=&utm_content=&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23097297061&gbraid=0AAAAA-XacPauAT2w-tDMA5QDC4hBvh6Rz&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIl8aaggJ2akAMVqyCtBh08OB4kEAAYASAAEgKhxPD_BwE
- **Legacy Books:** https://legacybooks.com/how-to-write-a-family-history-book/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22426915676&gbraid=0AAAAADqc3ngk8atpYVEB7uF7HIMn5d-QO&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIl8aaggJ2akAMVqyCtBh08OB4kEAAYAyAAEgKgTPD_BwE

Printing Options

Print on Demand	Offset Printing
KDP (Amazon) https://kdp.amazon.com/	Sure Print www.sureprintanddesign.ca
Vistaprint www.vistaprint.com	Vistaprint
Lulu www.lulu.com	First Choice Books www.firstchoicebooks.ca
Blurb www.blurb.com	
Mixbook www.mixbook.com	
Heirloom www.heirloomtemplates.com	

POD – Print on Demand

Provided software

Set the price and order copies as needed

Publisher takes % of sales

Sell commercially

Sometimes reduce cost for author

Helpful website and templates. Added cost for design services

ISBN number

Price Calculator on Website

Often checks and balances in place

Offset Printing

Supply files according to specifications, May require Adobe InDesign

Order number of copies, price is based on number

The more you order the cheaper the price

Sell commercially

May be a minimum number to order

Provide design services at an added cost

ISBN number

Price Calculator on Website

Working with a human being

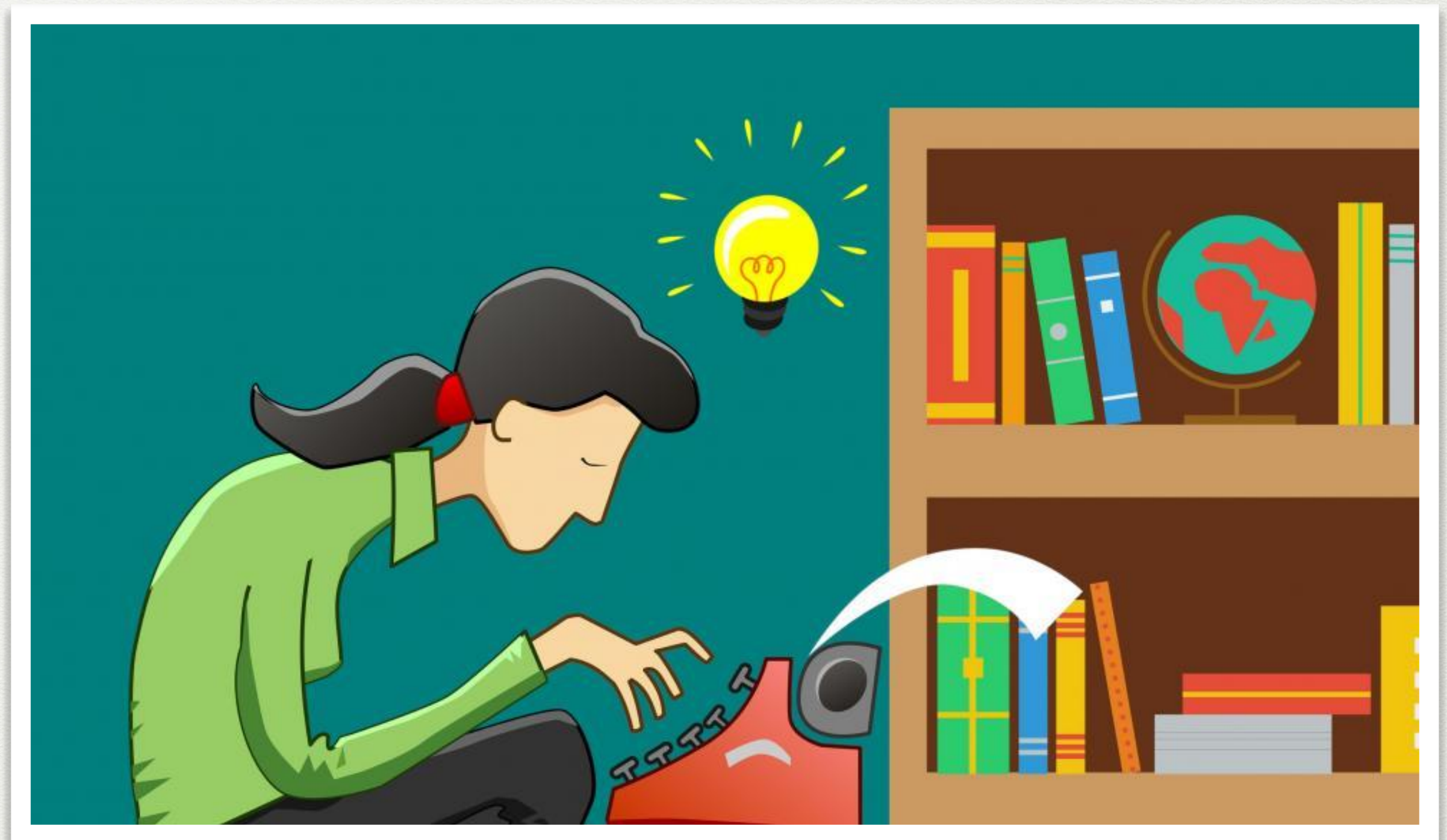


Books Costs



How I Wrote My Family Histories

- I looked at the history books my family actually read and found the Smithsonian and DK books were a favorite. I decided to use them as an inspiration which meant that I had a light narration with lots of pictures, documents, and timelines.
- I prepared my core documents ahead of time and uploaded them to Ancestry plus separate files under each ancestor's family and name.
- I purchased family history templates from Heirloom templates. I would buy just one that includes basic templates like cover, table of contents, and the templates in the style you like.
- I started with a free Canva account to start the first project. I later moved to a paid Canva account so that family members could see my work and suggest edits or improvements.



How I Finished Writing and Published My McCarthy Family History

- I did an outline of what I wanted to present, which templates I wanted to use, and when I wanted to be finished which was the end of summer 2025. It would start with the YDNA and go as far as I could up to 100 pages which was the limit for a large hardbound book in Canva. I discovered as I was going that it would only go up to my grandfather's generation and end in 1950. I will do the second volume of 1950 to the present in 2026-2027.
- I arranged the initial order of templates and blank pages, knowing I could easily rearrange them later.
- I wrote chronologically. Since I was using YDNA, I took the Big History approach following the migration of the genes using the charts from the McCarthy Project.
- I explained my YDNA methodology in a clear way for the average reader, then explained my genealogy methodology in the same way when I got to the documented historical portion. I added in my cousin who does genealogy as my editor as I wrote and developed the pages.
- I did this in two months and finished on time. It came out to 100 pages. The last section I edited was the Table of Contents. I corrected formatting problems, then first printed out a large format hard bound book as a gift for my brother, and then printed a 8x11 softbound spiral version for myself. Then I sent a PDF version to the rest of my family so that they could read it for free or print a copy for themselves. They liked the format and it was cost effective for me. I kept a copy that I could correct, edit and update later on. It was well received.



Who Invented the Telephone?



Most people think that the telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922) in 1876. But nobody knows the amazing story behind the real inventor! In 1841, Italian inventor Antonio Meucci (1808–1889) had already designed a telephone. He applied to the government for recognition in 1871. But the officials stalled and ignored him.



◀ Bell's first telephone was called the Centennial Model because it was first seen by the public on 25 June 1876 at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, USA

▼ An old battery-operated phone

▲ A wooden telephone from the late 19th century

Isn't It Amazing!

The first words Bell ever spoke over the telephone were to his assistant. He said, 'Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you.'

▶ Early tall telephones were called candlesticks

The Full Story

Bell shared a lab with Meucci in 1870s. In 1876, Bell wrote to the government about the invention of telephone. It was a similar invention for which Meucci has earlier applied for but was ignored. This time, the officials responded, and he became rich and famous! A furious Meucci sued Bell for fraud. But Meucci was an old man by then. He died before he could win the case. In 2002, well over a century later, the US Congress acknowledged Meucci's contributions.

American professor Elisha Gray (1835–1901) also developed a telephone. It is suggested that he filed for government recognition on the same day as Alexander Graham Bell! The date was 14 February 1876. Records show that Bell was the fifth person to file a notice that day. Gray was the 39th. Rather than investigate Gray's claims, the Patent Office simply named Bell the inventor of the telephone.



▲ Elisha Gray also invented a musical telegraph

Battery-operated Phones

Early phones did not rely on the phone company for electricity. They had a built-in magneto, which used a coil and a magnet-generated electric current. To use these phones, you first "recharged" the battery by cranking up a lever on its right side. If you did not do this, the phone at the other end would not ring.

Incredible Individuals

The first phone book suggested a cheery 'hulloa' as a greeting. Bell thought 'Ahoy' was a better option. It was Thomas Edison who made 'Hello' the standard phone greeting. To end the call, the phone book suggested 'God be with you', which got shortened to 'goodbye' and 'bye-bye'.

◀ The first cordless phone was invented in 1962 for the World Fair in Seattle, USA

▼ Candlestick phones soon gave way to rotary-dial and push-button telephones



This is a sample of a DK or Smithsonian history book page layout.

This is a Canva Format using Heirloom templates. You can write directly in the text boxes or drag and drop. Photos are drag and drop. Note that I deal with where the information comes from on the page. Sometimes I add links to websites. Be mindful of the edges of the page before printing. When you go to print, there will be suggestions of correction and formatting. You can print a book from their print selections or use the PDF that is created to print your own books, or send it free to relatives to view on their computer devices or print it themselves.

Resources

- **Mike Collins's articles in The Green Room helped me finish my first family history book on my Irish side. He provided valuable historical resource sources, writing advice, and samples he wrote for his own family history.**
<https://youririshheritage.com/>
- **Lynn Palermo Family History Writing Studio is an excellent and supportive resource for family history writers. She provides everything from writing lessons, to templates to retreats so worth a look. : <https://www.familyhistorywritingstudio.com/?kuid=502c94dd-0e6e-4582-a004-d5ce7b9bb0a2-1761947479&kref=https://www.familyhistorywritingstudio.com/when-writers-need-to-pause-the-mindset-of-returning/>**
- **Lynn Palermo on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@LynnPalermo>**

Final Thoughts

- Don't wait to be “finished” researching. Just start writing. Start with ancestor profiles and know you can always refine them later. T
- If you are using Canva, know that if you keep the master, you can always update it later and do a 2nd edition.
- If you use Canva you can order a large coffee table book \$\$\$, but send it out as a free PDF to as many family members as you like. In that way they can take it to any printing shop like Office Depot, Staples, etc. and print it any size or quality they would like. You did the work, they can handle the cost or just view the PDF on their computer or tablet for free.

