USING TIMELINES FOR ANALYSIS & CORRELATION

Jill Morelli, CG^SM

jkmorelli@gmail.com
http://genealogycertification.wordpress.com

Having difficulty understanding the life events of an ancestor? Or are you trying to parse out the events of multiple same-named individuals? Or, are you trying to see what your record gap is as you work towards element no. 1 of the Genealogical Proof Standard of reasonably exhaustive research?

All are excellent reasons to construct a timeline. As the adage says, "a picture can tell 1000 words." Building a timeline forces you to look at your evidence and simplify the complex events. That simplification can also bring clarity to your thinking so you identify those anomalies that are blocking the path to solution.

Genealogy timelines are:
1. events
2. shown in graphic form
3. which occurred over time

The Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) is composed of five elements.[1] The making of timelines, or the combining of multiple timelines to make tables for comparison purposes, address each element:

Genealogical Proof Standard	Why make timelines?
1. Reasonably exhaustive research	1. Identify additional resources needed
2. Informative citations	2. Clarify thought; aid us in identifying where we ought to obtain a better resource
3. Analysis & correlation	3. Analyze and correlate information
4. Resolution of conflicts	4. Identify the gaps and overlaps
5. Writing it up	5. Can provide a construct for your written narrative

Timelines are often used for analyzing and correlation of information. This presentation covered the multiple types and uses of timelines—including "working" tables and for presentation in articles and lectures.

Reasonably exhaustive research: Element no.1
A timeline can organize our evidence into a different format allowing us to see the data in relationship with other pieces of evidence. As genealogists we are trained to always ask ourselves "What is missing?" A table can assist us in answering that question.

Examples from presentation:
- Wong Ming Bow. Identified missing shipping and passenger manifests. (example 1)

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[1] Board for Certification of Genealogists, "The Genealogical Proof Standard" (http://www.bcgcertification.org/resources/standard.html : accessed 19 September 2017)

- The Swedish tax tables by individual and farm. In this case the table was of the sources of information, provincial and king's archive. (example 7)

Informative Citations: Element no. 2
Just as in our narrative work, it is necessary to also cite our sources for the data elements we are using in a table. We have the opportunity to ask ourselves questions about whether we have gathered our evidence from the best available source. If we are using indexes or databases we want to gather the original if it exists.

Examples from presentation:
- Swedish route of travel (map). The simple listing is informative, but the map is much more graphic and immediately understandable. There were no actual x- and y- axis associated with the information. (example 5)
- Jan Middents Cornelius Bode > C. Bad > John C. Bode comparison would not have been as effective without the family members associated with the head of household. (example 4)

Analysis & Correlation: Element no. 3
Analysis is to look at a single source, such as a deed. Correlation would be to assemble multiple sources, including that deed, and create a timeline of events, which can then be reviewed in a larger context. A table is multiple timelines assembled together for more complex correlation.

Tech Tip: X-axis runs horizontally and usually at the top of the table or timeline; y-axis runs vertically and is usually located on the left side. What is right for you and your table will vary as well.

Examples from presentation:
- A Swedish family's head tax history in one year compared across many years to see inconsistencies and gaps. Family members were noted on the x-axis and the 70 years of annual tax records spanning 3 generations were the y-axis. This table was done in Excel due to it's complexity. (example 7)
- The events of Eda Berg's life and comparing the small amount of known information of her second husband with the many possible candidates in an effort to establish identity. The many candidates were the x-axis (top) and the chronology of events was the y-axis. This example was constructed as a table in Word. (example 6)

Other common types of genealogical comparisons, which incorporate timelines for analysis and correlation, but not included in the presentation, include:
- Looking at one family's history in the 1880 agriculture schedule and then comparing it with the agricultural schedules of 1860 and 1870. Place census years on the x-axis and what you are comparing on the y-axis
- Using a family in the 1850 census (individuals named) and comparing that with the pre-1850 "tick mark" censuses to verify identity of the family over time. Place family members on the x-axis and the various censuses on the y-axis.

Conflict (Gap and Overlap) Analysis: Element no. 4
Sometime we fail to see the gaps in our research. Recognizing these gaps leads to obtaining additional records and further analysis (Element 1). This additional research can solidify our original opinion that the identity of the individual is the same or can lead us to another conclusion.

If you have a software program, the family page will be a timeline of events. Analyzing the content for what you have is one skill, but looking at that work and seeing what is missing is another skill. Always check to see what is missing!

Examples from presentation:
- The family sheet of Elizabeth Harrington. Software generated report illustrated that the censuses were well covered but other sources, including deeds, vital records, etc. were missing. (example 1)
- Jan Middents Cornelius Bode and John C. Bode in Ostfriesland and Illinois. A little more complex timeline for a family. The gap that must be filled is emigration/immigration. (example 4)

Written narrative: Consistent with Element no. 5
In this case I am defining "story writing" broadly. There are many styles of story writing, Here are two:
1. A narrative suitable for family reading
2. A formally constructed proof of kinship.

Both require suitable citations and thorough research, but the first may consist of many proof statements and very few proof summaries or proof arguments. The latter may be more complex and is formally written. Whether written for family or publication, don't they both deserve your best work? A guide to good genealogical writing is the eleven questions asked in *Mastering Genealogical Proof*.[2] These questions are suitable for our work as well as that of others.

Examples from presentation:
- The travel route of Bengt Andersson and his family from Sweden to New York (example 5)
- Comparison of the two Friedrich Eiler families to verify they are the same family identified in two different documents. (example 3)
- Pedigree chart with a time component[3] (example presented at the end)

While not presented in the webinar, you might seek historical context that informs the narrative. In the family narrative type of writing you might incorporate events, which are contemporary with your story to provide a sense of grounded-ness for your readers. In contrast, the formally constructed proof might use historical events or conditions if it directly supports or refutes the research question.

In the family narrative consider inclusion of some of the background events that your ancestors may have experienced (without making it appear they did, of course). For example, how could you not investigate and include the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco if your relative lived in the Bay area at that time; or the "children's blizzard" of 1888 if your ancestor lived in the Midwest? How did the dissemination of a smallpox vaccine affect the survivability of future generations of your family? Did your family escape the Tulsa riots of 1922? Could your ancestors have attended the any of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of the late 1850s?

Think about each person and how they might have experienced significant national, regional and local events of their time. Newspapers will give you the local reaction to such events. Journal

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[2] Thomas W. Jones, Mastering Genealogical Proof (Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013), p.95.
[3] Thanks to J. Paul Hawthorne who gave me permission to use his pedigree concept.

articles may broaden the perspective and focus on the historical event in a different way. Each should be consulted as they may provide answers to the questions of motivations for immigration or land purchase.

But this historical context is not just about the events of the day, but can also take on the "homely arts" as well. What was cooking in the kitchen, how were funerals celebrated, what was the clothing like-- are all topics one can research to provide additional background to your story narrative.

Making Timelines
I use Microsoft Word tables for simple timelines and use Microsoft Excel for complex ones or when I need arithmetic or sorting capability. The commercial timeline programs provide a product that is most suitable for the family narrative approach to writing or websites.

The first step is always to plan your table. While new information may require you to modify your approach, a good plan is a great start.

To create a timeline in Word, use the table function to create rows and columns. Adjust the width of the rows and columns to your needs, fill in the header titles and insert your data. To create a timeline in Excel, the framework is already established, so insert your headers, adjust the width and height of your columns and rows and insert your data. In both cases make sure to title and date your work. You can certainly do similar analysis and correlation using grid paper.

RESOURCES

- Ancestry Anne, "Creating Timelines to Better Understand Records & Families," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K80_sQShhNg
- Camarata, Janet. Using Timelines & Chronologies http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~waskcgs/files/Timelines-and-Chronologies.pdf This is the slide deck but there is a Legacy Software webinar ($) on this topic as well. This presentation focuses on writing a family narrative.
- *Do History*. "How to make a timeline, maintained by Film Study Center, Harvard University. http://dohistory.org > On your own > History Tool Kit > How to make a timeline. Along the way you can get some great information about Martha Ballard!
- Family Search "Timeline Grids," https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Timeline_Grids
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- Phillibert-Ortega, Gena."Genealogy Timelines: Helpful Research Tools. *Genealogy Bank*, blog. https://blog.genealogybank.com/genealogy-timelines-helpful-research-tools.html
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- Powell, Kimberly. "Genealogy Research Timelines: Timelines as a Tool for Analysis and Correlation." *About.com*, 10 August 2015. http://genealogy.about.com/od/timelines/a/genealogy-research-timelines.htm (This blog post has been rewritten and it is now published under *Thoughtco.com (https://www.thoughtco.com/genealogy-research-timelines-1422730)*
- Price, Joy. "Timelines," UGA's How to's: News of the Utah Genealogical Association, Jan./Feb. 2003.
- Timelines of History, http://timelines.ws/ Various historical timelines clickable by century. There are many of these types of websites providing historical timelines.
- Tufte, Edward R. *Envisioning Information*. Unknown location: Graphics Press, 2008.Any of his books or classes are excellent.
- *Wikipedia*, "Timelines" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline

All websites active as of 1 October 2017.

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