



PLANNING A FUTURE FOR YOUR FAMILY'S PAST

By Marian Burk Wood

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Ancestors' photos, stories, documents, and heirlooms are part of your family's past, but there's no guarantee that they will outlive you. Get ideas for protecting your genealogy collection by: organizing and storing materials safely; curating your collection to focus on key items for your family tree; writing a "genealogical will" to safeguard your collection for the future; and sharing your family's history now. Includes suggested steps you can take today to preserve your family's legacy for tomorrow, even if there are no obvious heirs for your genealogy materials.

Introducing the **PASS process:**

- 1. *Prepare* by organizing, identifying, storing materials (photos, family documents, etc.)**
- 2. *Allocate* ownership (curate items now to focus your collection)**
- 3. *Set up* written instructions (for the future of your collection)**
- 4. *Share* family history now (for the sake of researchers and future generations)**

***Step 1: Prepare* by organizing, identifying, storing your materials**

- Organize, store, protect photos/documents with these ideas:
 - archival sleeves, boxes, or albums for original documents and photos
 - folders for documents and notes
 - binders for documents, diagrams, charts, more
- Identify photos (indicate names, dates, places, relationships where known)
- Digitize photos/documents over time, backup, share (digitally and/or physically).
- *Recommendation:* Don't go entirely paperless! Preserve key paper-based original materials (vital records, photos, scrapbooks, etc.).
- Document cousin connections so relatives will know who's who in the future.

***Step 2: Allocate ownership* by curating your collection**

- Not everything must remain in your possession; focus on what's important to *your* family tree.
- Sort collection into categories: (1) keep yourself, (2) keep in immediate or extended family, or (3) give away outside the family.
- Get expert advice if needed about value/age of items and how to distribute.

- Consult with family about possibly donating items to institutions.
- Understand donation process and legal aspects of donating items.
- Plan for key items related to ancestors who had no direct descendants.
- *No obvious heirs?* Consider cousins or other relatives, who might accept some items. Investigate institutions that may accept selected materials. Have a set of fine china/silver/jewelry/crystal? Offer one item to each relative.

Step 3: Set up written instructions to safeguard your collection

- Identify possible heirs to take possession of the collection in the future.
- Intrigue heirs with brief, interesting summary of family history (military ancestors, pioneer ancestors, involvement in historic events or trends, etc.).
- Ask permission to bequeath your collection (to relatives or repositories).
- Write down who gets what, and where the collection is located.
- Make decisions now about one-of-a-kind items, multiple heirs.
- *No obvious heirs?* Organize collection for donation to a suitable institution.

Step 4: Share your family history now

- Start now to get others interested in ancestors, artifacts, and family stories.
- Highlight unusual or dramatic aspects of family history so they aren't forgotten.
- Bequeath story with each heirloom or artifact—adds human dimension.
- Consider posting ancestor bios, some old photos, some genealogical info online.
- Consider privacy and copyright issues before posting anything.
- *No obvious heirs?* Share genealogy highlights with relatives and possibly post some info to appropriate websites to perpetuate your family's history.

WEBSITES MENTIONED DURING THIS PRESENTATION:

- Genealogical websites: Ancestry.com, MyHeritage.com, WikiTree.com, FamilySearch.org, Fold3.com, FindAGrave.com
- Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center: <https://acpl.lib.in.us>
- Encyclopedia of Cleveland History: <https://case.edu/ech/>
- US Army Women's Museum: <https://awm.army.mil/>
- MacArthur Memorial Museum: <https://www.macarthurmemorial.org/>
- FamilySearch Library donations: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/FamilySearch_Library_Donations

Marian's genealogy blog:

<https://ClimbingMyFamilyTree.blogspot.com>