

Preview: Creating an Ancestor Sketch

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Face it: most genealogists never get around to publishing that family history book based on their genealogy research. How about a different approach: producing short 3-5 page “sketches” about an ancestor. Decide which elements to include: cover, timeline, facts, family stories, photos, source citations and more! Once a few of these ancestor sketches are done, compile them together for one big book!

Basic Elements of an Ancestor Sketch

To summarize genealogical research for an ancestor, what elements would be included? Here are some to consider:

- **Cover or title page:** It helps to have a page listing the name of the ancestor, perhaps a descriptive subtitle listing birth date and death date, and if possible, a photo of the ancestor.
- **Brief life summary:** This narrative is based on the facts uncovered about the ancestor. Superior writing skills are not required. There are many helpful online tools that can “write” a summary based on facts.
- **Timeline of important life events:** Arrange the facts about an ancestor in chronological order. Some genealogy platforms like Ancestry will do this under an ancestor profile. Also use online tools that will create a timeline based on an uploaded list of facts.
- **Photos:** Add photos of the ancestor if available and include caption information describing the photo. If photos are not available, include photos of birth place, where the ancestor lived, etc.

Additional Elements of an Ancestor Sketch

- **Family tree:** A family tree chart provides a nice visual to understand how the reader is related to the ancestor in the sketch. Avoid large tree charts in small font sizes. Consider a simple 3-generation chart that can fit on one page and then use a larger chart when combining ancestor sketches into a larger book.
- **Family stories:** Family stories passed down from generation to generation can be sentimental and endearing but research their veracity just like any other element of genealogy research. Document the story in writing with a source, narrative text, and information on the people and places involved. Add a simplified version of the story to the sketch.

- **Social history:** Add information about how an ancestor lived. This includes what life was like in the town or country where and when they were born. Information about their occupation, their military service, their religious affiliation etc. Doing so can “fill in the dash” between an ancestor’s birth date and death date.
- **QR code:** When creating a print and a digital version of the ancestor sketch, consider creating a QR code so that readers can use their mobile device to scan the code and access the digital version.

Tips, Tricks, and Tools

Use these tips, tricks, and tools to save time when creating an ancestor sketch and to add a personal style to the finished product.

- **Create a template:** After creating the first ancestor sketch, create a template to be used for all future sketches to ensure consistency. This will help when compiling sketches into a larger book.
- **Use graphic and publishing platforms and software:** Platforms like **Canva** or software programs like **Adobe InDesign** to produce the ancestor sketch. These platforms allow adding images, creating unique layouts and more.
- **Use artificial intelligence:** There are many ways the popular AI platforms like **ChatGPT** can be used when creating a sketch.
 - Have AI generate graphics to use for a title page. Use the prompt “Create image of life in New York City in 1700” for a specific location and time period.
 - Use the prompt “Create timeline” and then paste in a list of facts.
 - Generate social history content using a prompt like “Tell me about life in New York City in 1920” or “Social history for San Antonio, Texas in the 1890s.”
 - Have AI rewrite the content in a specific style by using the prompt “Rewrite” then pasting the text then adding “style casual” or “style engaging.”
- **Self-publish in print and digital formats:** Leverage the power of self-publishing platforms like **Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing** or **Lulu.com** to publish a series of ancestor sketches in different formats including print, PDF, and digital.

Announcing AncestorSketch.com: Build a Modular Family History Book the Fun and Easy Way

This summer, the new Ancestor Sketch platform will launch at <https://ancestorsketch.com>.

Visit <https://genealogybargains.com/enews-signup> to sign up for my newsletter for the latest information on the launch!