

Fresh Start to a New Year - 2024

Laurice Johnson – lauriceaj@yahoo.com

CLEAN UP YOUR MESS

I know. It's daunting. Stacks of files and books, unfiled 'finds'. But it's a new year. Time to put your finds into those files, shelve those books, clear off your desk (or the dining room table)!! After everything is filed, pull out all those files and take a look at what's there. Do you really NEED 6 copies of that marriage certificate? Do you have 4 files for the same family? (I did). It's time to *eliminate* and *consolidate*. You **could** concentrate on cleaning up one line only...but if you don't look in all the other folders you may never find that critical document that was mis-filed 8 years ago!

While you have it all 'apart' you should maybe get new file folders/notebooks. New labels. Reorganize the entire mess. Some suggestions for HOW to do that. First decide if you are a 'binder' person or a 'file' person. There are plusses and minuses to both and both are the 'right' one – if *you* keep up with it. Only you know which system works best for you. I use the 'file' system and it works for me. BUT if you prefer 'binders', then great.

ORGANIZING THE CHAOS

I would start with 8 binders – one for each of your great grandparents' surname. I would put a pedigree chart in the front of each one and highlight the line that is in THAT binder. I suggest that YOU should be in your paternal binder (your dad's line). That's because your surname (the one you started out with) is the same as your dad's. SO, you will be in the front of that binder. Your mom (as will each female in your direct line) will be the first section in her father's surname book. There may be some duplication in the first section of some of the binders, and that's okay. There should be a divider tab for each generation.

The FIRST page in each generation should be a Family Group Sheet. This is followed by birth, marriage, death certificates for each member of the family. You can then add information/documentation for military service, education, etc. Then you can add stories/anecdotes about that family. And photos, and other ephemera from their lives.

IF you use a file system (I do) I still would start with surname files – but make each of the eight surnames a different color file. Label each with the Surname and generation number (back from you) or first name. Put the same information into each file as you would into the binders. There are some benefits to files. When you are going on a research trip, files are much easier to transport than binders. But you may find that when researching, you won't want to take your original documents, etc. with you. I generally just take the information from the file that I am needing to add to or confirm (a copy of it). But it's up to you.

The key here is that whatever system for organizing your genealogy stuff (and it's a LOT of stuff!), YOU have to keep it up. Put those 'new' finds away where they belong as soon as you find them! Don't put it into a stack on the desk for "I'll file that later". What I've found is that pretty soon, that piece of vital information that I put on the top of the pile is buried under a couple inches of 'really important papers' and I might never find it again.

Think about how you use these resources – do you work on one family at a time or do you jump back and forth? Are you 'finished' with one line? Going to concentrate ONLY on one branch this year? Set up your system so that it works best with your plans going forward. AND always remember that simple is best. Will your grandson be able to make heads or tails out of your filing system – or will he toss his hands in the air and

throw the entire mess out? Clear labels - alphabetical - maybe a directory? - all these will make it easier to manage going forward.

FOR 2024 - MAKE A PLAN

Figure out what your question is. WHAT do you want to know? Be specific. HOW and WHERE will you find that answer? WHO can you ask that you haven't already asked? If you have been at it a while, you should now be able to narrow down your questions to get to the answer you are looking for. What libraries, archives, historical societies *haven't* you contacted yet? Now that you know the correct question to ask, maybe you can contact someone you've talked to in the past once more.

Maybe your plan for the year is to update your research logs (and maintain them religiously). There might be a website that you REALLY want to learn how to use more effectively or maybe you've decided to go totally digital. Maybe you're finally going to ID and scan those photos. Or perhaps it's time to decide what will happen to your research after you're gone and put that plan on paper. Maybe 2024 is the year that you will FINALLY write that family history for your kids and grandkids.

Or maybe, it's time to just write down all those stories - the ones you heard from *your* grandparents or parents. And don't forget to include your own story as well. Think about just how different the world was when you were growing up - no internet, party-lines, a phone that was attached to the wall, one TV (black and white) with less than a dozen channels, etc.

Whatever your plan/goal might be, write it down and follow through step by step until you complete it.

I've realized that my ancestors did NOT always tell the truth - only the truth that they knew or were comfortable with. That I can (and should) let someone else look at my research to see what I've missed. That sometimes paying an expert to help can really BE the answer. That my research time is most effective when I have a plan. And that if my research is a mess at the time of my departure, it WILL end up in the 'round file'.

Remember.....*your ancestors WANT to be found!!*