

# Creating an Ancestor Sketch

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Most genealogists never complete that family history book based on their research. Consider 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 sketches are done, compile them into one comprehensive book.

## Basic Elements of an Ancestor Sketch

To summarize genealogical research for an ancestor, consider including the following elements:

- **Cover or title page:** List the name of the ancestor, a descriptive subtitle with birth and death dates, and, if possible, a photo.
- **Brief life summary:** Create a narrative based on the facts uncovered about the ancestor. Superior writing skills are not required; numerous online tools can generate a summary based on facts.
- **Timeline of important life events:** Arrange facts in chronological order. Many genealogy platforms, such as Ancestry, offer this feature. Utilize online tools to create a timeline from an uploaded list of facts.
- **Photos:** Include photos of the ancestor, if available, with descriptive captions. If photos are unavailable, use images of significant places related to the ancestor’s life.

## Additional Elements of an Ancestor Sketch

- **Family Tree:** A family tree chart provides a visual understanding of the author’s relationship with the ancestor. Choose a simple 3-generation chart for clarity and use a larger chart for the final book compilation.
- **Family Stories:** Include family stories but verify their accuracy as with any other genealogical element. Document the story with sources, narrative text, and details about the people and places involved.
- **Social History:** Add context about the ancestor’s life, such as their hometown, occupation, military service, and religious affiliation, to enrich the narrative.
- **Access Points:** For both print and digital versions, include links to the ancestor sketch, both online and in PDF or other file format.

## Ancestor Sketch Formats

- **Order of elements:** The order is flexible, but a typical sequence includes a cover page, brief summary, photos, timeline, and credits. Adjust as necessary to enhance readability and engagement.
- **Print:** Use document creation platforms like Google Docs or Microsoft Word, then save as a PDF. Print copies at a local printer, public library, or home.
- **Digital:** Share sketches on digital platforms. Consider building a website using platforms like Wix or Weebly or circulating the PDF via email.

## Importing Genealogy Research Information

Genealogists use various methods and software to store research. These platforms may not always facilitate easy data access for creating sketches.

- **Review export options:** Explore export options for parts of an ancestor's profile. Platforms like MyHeritage and software like Legacy Family Tree offer book creation features.
- **Copy and paste:** Copy generated timelines or life stories from genealogy platforms into document creation tools. Some formatting adjustments may be needed.
- **Leverage the power of AI:** Utilize free AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to generate content based on provided facts.

## Source Citations, Copyrighted Material, and Credits

- **Source citations:** Decide if including source citations is necessary. For casual readers, they can be distracting. Consider using endnotes instead of footnotes.
- **Copyrighted material:** Avoid using copyrighted images or text without permission. Even for personal use, unauthorized content can lead to infringement issues if shared publicly.
- **Credits:** Acknowledge assistance from others and include a copyright statement, e.g., "© [YEAR], copyright [AUTHOR NAME]. All rights reserved."

## Documenting Family Stories

Family stories often inspire genealogical research. Ensure these tales are documented for future generations.

- **Getting started.** Start with a bullet list of recalled stories. Keep it concise.
- **Use a Family Story Template.** Document stories with details such as the title, source, narrative text, people, and locations involved.
  - **Title:** Enter the title of the family story.

- **Source:** Enter the author, title, who told the story or if it is personal knowledge, how the story was delivered (verbally, recording, email, etc.) and on what date and what location.
- **Text:** Enter the text of the family story.
- **People:** Enter names of people as they appear in the text; enter full name as well as nickname and add relationship information explaining how each person is related to each other.
- **Locations:** Enter location names as they appear in the text; enter full location name and add contextual information explaining how the location fits into the story.

## 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:** Develop a consistent template for all sketches to streamline future compilations.
- **Use graphic and publishing platforms and software:** Utilize platforms like Canva or Adobe InDesign for enhanced layouts and image integration.
- **Use artificial intelligence:** AI tools like ChatGPT can generate graphics, timelines, and social history content, and rewrite text in various styles.
  - 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 self-publishing platforms like Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing or Lulu.com to produce the ancestor sketches in print, PDF, and digital formats.

## Resources

- **Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing**  
<https://kdp.amazon.com/>
- **ChatGPT**  
<https://chat.openai.com/>
- **CHEAT SHEET – Documenting Family Stories in Writing**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/cs-familystoryFREE>
- **Copyright Services: Copyright Term and the Public Domain**  
<https://guides.library.cornell.edu/copyright/publicdomain>
- **Family Story Sample - Death of Anna Austin**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/form-familystory-sample>
- **TEMPLATE Ancestor Sketch – Microsoft Word**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/TEMPLATE-ancestorsketch>
- **TEMPLATE Family Story – Microsoft Word**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/form-familystory-doc>
- **Weebly**  
<https://www.weebly.com>
- **Wix**  
<https://www.wix.com>