

# From Census to Story: Bringing Ancestors to Life with Evidence, Context, and AI

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for

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## Randy's Background

- 40 years as an aerospace engineer. Retired in 2002.
- Started genealogy as a hobby in 1988, became a Geneaholic.
- Do all my family tree work in RootsMagic with 75,000 profiles, have an Ancestry Member Tree and MyHeritage Family Tree. Contributed to over 53,000 profiles on FamilySearch Family Tree.
- Started my blog Genea-Musings in 2006, now have over 19,000 posts. Records, research, transcriptions, biographies, photographs, opinions, even some stories.
- Wrote over 20 genealogical “ancestors of” and “descendants of” e-books in 2012 (saved on [www.Scribd.com](http://www.Scribd.com)) with sources. No notes or stories included.
- I have oral histories from my father’s siblings on audio tape (transcribed to a document) for the Seaver and Richmond families.
- I have a StoryWorth book of my own memories for my descendants — I gave it to my daughters as a Christmas present.
- Started writing genealogical sketches of ancestors in 2014, now have over 580 sketches.
- Genealogical sketches are in my family tree program, on my blog and in PDF files. They are compiled from extracts and transcriptions of records and articles in chronological order. “Just the facts” and assertions with notes, sources and media. Poor quality compared to NGSQ, NEHGR articles.
- They are boring...will my relatives care or read them?

## What Do My Relatives Want?

- They don’t want a 500 page “ancestors of” book without any family stories.
- They don’t want to see, interpret or navigate my family tree.
- They don’t want to read my blog every day (way TMI).
- They do want to hear stories of my life, and interesting stories of persons they know.
- They like hearing of relationships with famous people.
- They prefer audio and video rather than text and paper, short rather than long.

## How Can I Best Share With Them?

- I don’t have stories of my ancestors before my parents. I knew one set of grandparents but never asked them questions about their lives.
- What I didn’t have, until 2024, is family stories -- about me, my parents, grandparents, ancestors -- that my descendants might be able to relate to.
- Judy G. Russell told us “It only takes three generations to lose a piece of oral family history” at RootsTech 2014. I am that third generation.
- My writing style is unappealing to them. I don’t convey feelings and emotions. I don’t include social history and historical events.
- I’m too old to do everything over, and I am the elder of the family, and the only one who has done family history work.
- Every historical person has a story – Can I write their stories better?
- The answer: **Tell stories about the ancestors in an engaging way, with historical context, in a way the descendants can relate.**

## Can Artificial Intelligence Tools Help Me?

- Large language models (LLMs, such as ChatGPT) are pre-trained on billions of pages of published material.
- They are great at analyzing and summarizing text, photos, records, etc.
- BUT – the user has to carefully verify what the LLM says.
- I use FREE AI tools -- OpenAI ChatGPT, Anthropic Claude, X.AI Grok, Google Gemini, Google NotebookLM, Perplexity, Microsoft CoPilot, etc.
- Advanced models can “Think” and “Reason.”
- Advanced AI Agents can multi-task and do a sequence of tasks.

## Genealogy Researchers Are Using AI To:

- Summarize a document, record, web page, image, etc.
- Transcribe hand-written or typewritten text
- Translate from one language to another
- Enhance, repair, resize and colorize images
- Craft a locality guide for a place (county, state, nation)
- Produce a genealogy research plan for a person or family
- Analyze a document for GPS compliance
- **Write an engaging biography or story about a person or family.**
- **Create interesting poems, songs, podcasts, videos, slide shows about a person, family, or event.**
- And much more!!

## Can Artificial Intelligence Help Me Tell Family Stories?

- Can I feed a genealogical sketch to an LLM and have it tell me a life story in an engaging style? **YES!**
- Can an LLM integrate social history and significant historical events into a life story? **YES!**
- Can an LLM create poems, song lyrics, memoirs, person-to-person dialogue, audio podcasts, narrated videos, slide shows, etc.? **YES!**
- Can I find a way to combine all of that into an ancestor biography or story book? **YES!**

## The “Ancestor Biography Creation” (ABC) Process

- Upload a genealogical sketch PDF or image for a person to an LLM.
- Ask the LLM to write an engaging biography including historical events and social context.
- Ask an LLM to create a Podcast, Video, Infographic and Slide Deck for the person.
- Ask an LLM to write a poem and song lyrics to celebrate the life of the person.
- Ask an LLM to create historical fiction stories for the person.
- Each of these creations can provide insightful, perceptive, and engaging text with historical and social context.

**VOILA: The ABC Biography Process.**

## The “Ancestor Biography Creation” (ABC) Process Benefits

- You learn so much more about the lives of your ancestors – they each lived a life with family, education, work, success, failure, sadness, happiness, and much more. Each ancestor has a **UNIQUE** story.
- Having an organized and consistent writing process is critical to writing a biography about one or more of your ancestral families.
- You can add photographs, maps, audio segments, video segments, specific family stories, memoirs, social history (e.g., local events, residences, occupations, health), or dialogues to the biography.

- You then have a collection of stories (e.g., about a person or family) that could be distributed in a PDF Book via email, a published book (using a service), and put in a personal archive for the family (using a service).

## **The “Ancestor Biography Creation” (ABC) Process – 11 Steps**

### **1. Gathering Information: For a Selected Ancestor or Family, gather information about their life events.**

- Obtain home sources, documents, books, periodicals, records, photographs, stories, etc., including source citations – on paper, on media, or online.
- This can be organized by using desktop genealogy Family Tree programs (e.g., RootsMagic, Family Tree Maker, Reunion, etc.) or online Family Trees (e.g., Ancestry, MyHeritage, FamilySearch, etc.).
- Enter names, dates, places, relationships, notes, sources, media, etc. into the Family Tree of your choice.
- Create Research Notes that describe each life event, abstract or summarize the event, with the Source Citation.

### **2. Creating a Genealogical Sketch for your Selected Person or Family -- include parents, siblings, spouse(s) and children, with life events and sources.**

- Use a Desktop or Online Family Tree to create Person or Family Notes
- Create a Narrative Report or a Timeline with Source Citations.
- Include whatever event notes (abstract or transcription) you have -- the more information the better.
- Create a Word document to organize all of your information. Chronological order is good!
- Save the Genealogical Sketch to a PDF file on your computer.
- Collect it all into a Genealogical Sketch that includes:
  - Birth Family (parents and siblings)
  - Married Family (spouse(s) and children)
  - Significant Events (e.g., birth, baptism, marriage, death, burial, church, military, migration, census, residence, occupation, deeds, probate, offices, newspapers, obituaries, stories, and more) => Kitchen Sink!
  - Be Sure To Add Sources!
  - Try to Make it Chronological.
- There are several ways to create a Genealogical Sketch:
  - Use your Desktop Family Tree to create a Narrative Report or an Individual Report (with notes and sources; check spelling, names, relationships, dates, places). Save the report as a PDF file.
  - If you have no Notes, use the Timeline feature in your Desktop or Online Family Tree to create a Timeline report with dates, events, names, dates, places, descriptions. Save the report as a PDF file.
  - If your Notes are a hodge-podge, copy them into a PDF file. Something is better than nothing (and an AI Tool can work with them).
- There are other ways to create a Genealogical Sketch:
  - If you are using your Ancestry Member Tree, on the Person Page Facts, use the Tools Menu to Print the page and save it as a PDF. Use the PDF as input to the AI Tool.
  - If you are using a MyHeritage Family Tree, go to your Profile page, select Details and/or Memories, and copy them into a Word document. Use the PDF as input to the AI Tool.
  - If you have an AI Browser Agent (like Perplexity Comet, Google AI Assistant, etc.), you can ask the Agent to create a Genealogical Sketch from the information on an Ancestry Member Tree, a MyHeritage Family Tree, or some other Online family tree. Copy the output to Word document and to a PDF file to use as input to the AI Tool.
  - Use Thomas MacEntee’s [Creating an Ancestor Sketch](#).

### **3. Writing the Biography:**

- Open the AI Tool of choice (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity, Grok, CoPilot, Meta, etc.) and attach the Genealogical Sketch PDF before asking the AI tool.
- Ask the selected AI tool to: **“Create a structured and engaging Biography of this person using the attached file, with historical and social context, including parents, siblings, spouse(s) and children, without changing**

or adding persons or events. Use section headings. Expand the information in each section to add more details. The tone should be casual and suitable for family members.”

- Copy and paste the AI output to a word processing file.
- Review and verify the statements in the AI output. Edit the statements for accuracy if necessary. Add statements that you forgot to include in the Genealogical Sketch.
- Save the AI assisted Biography to a Word document and to a PDF File.

#### 4. Suggest or Create Story Ideas:

- You can ask the AI Tools to create suggestions for interesting “Family Stories” or “Turning Points” based on the Genealogical Sketch or Biography.
- Select specific suggestions and ask the AI Tool to tell the Story based on what it knows based on the Genealogical Sketch with historical events and social history.
- Or use your own “Family Story” or “Turning Points” ideas as prompts of the AI Tool.
- Download and save the Story Idea AI outputs to your computer as a Word document. Review, edit and verify the details.
- Typical Family Stories: You can ask the AI tool to tell “Historical Fiction” stories, based on your genealogical sketch, “The way it might have been.” Examples:
  - Tell a life memoir to grandchildren
  - Describe their life at age [10, 15 or 20] – family, education, work, fun
  - What was their life like at age [40 or 50]?
  - What advice did their mother/father provide before marriage?
  - Describe how they performed their occupation in the year [1900].
  - Describe their migration trip.
  - Describe their military service.
  - Provide known information to write historical fiction to tell a longer chapter story.

#### 5. Poem and Song:

- Ask the AI Tools to generate a Poem and/or Song Lyrics to describe and celebrate the life of the person or family.
- Copy and paste the AI output to a Word document.
- Input the Poem stanzas or Song Lyrics in [Suno.ai](https://www.suno.ai) (or another song creation tool) to create a song with music.
- Define a music style (e.g., storytelling, pop, ballad, etc.), voice (male/female, strong/soft, etc.), tempo (slow, fast, upbeat, melodic, etc.), instruments (band, guitar, woods, etc.)
- [Suno.ai](https://www.suno.ai) will create two different but similar songs. Listen to them, and choose one of them.
- Download and save the Suno poem or song [as an audio MP3 file --A paid Suno account will create MP4 or WAV video files] to your computer.

#### 6. Create a Poem/Song Presentation Using Canva [Free] <https://www.canva.com/>

- Use a one-screen Life Summary, or an image (document, photograph, etc.) as the visual image.
- Use the Suno Poem or Song as the audio presentation.
- Use Canva to put them together into a Video.
- Create the summary slide, then Upload the Song MP3 or MP4, and extend the slide for the length of the Song.
- Save the Canva narrated Video (MP4) to your computer.
- You could upload it to a YouTube Channel or to social media.

#### 7. Create Audio/Visual Stories Using Google NotebookLM (Free, <https://notebooklm.google.com/>) -- Input the PDF Biography or Story to create:

- Reports – a summary of the person/family biography/story
- Timeline – what happened, where and when?
- Cast of Characters – who is involved in the biography/story
- **Infographic** – a one-page image summarizing the biography/story – save it!

- [Narrated Video Overview](#) – a 6 to 10 minute discussion of the bio/story – save it!
- [Audio Overview](#) – a 10 to 20 minute two-person discussion of the bio/story – save it!
- [Slide Deck](#) – 10 to 15 graphical image slides that tell the bio/story – save it!

#### 8. Create a Narrated Audio Overview Presentation Using Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>)

- Use the NotebookLM Infographic or biographical summary as the visual image.
- Use the Audio Overview (.MP3 file) as the narrated story.
- Use Canva to put them together into a Video.
- Create the visual slide, then Upload the Audio Overview, and extend the slide for the length of the Audio Overview (e.g., if video is 4 minutes, then copy the slide 8 times).
- Save the Canva narrated Video (.MP4 file) to your computer.
- You could upload it to your YouTube Channel or to a social media post.

#### 9. Create a Narrated Video Biography/Story Slide Presentation Using Google Slides (Free, <https://workspace.google.com/products/slides/>) and Google Vids (Free, <https://workspace.google.com/products/vids/>)

- Create an Introduction Slide – Subject
- Use the Google NotebookLM Infographic (second slide)
- Use the Google NotebookLM Slide Deck (10-15 slides)
- Create a Credit Slide – Who did this and how (end slide)
- In Google Slides, select File > Convert to Video to create the video.
- Save the Google Vids Narrated Video (.MP4) to your computer.
- You could upload it to your YouTube Channel or to a social media post.

#### 10. Presentation to Family and World

- Put all of the text elements into a Word document with images, audio and video embedded files.
- Share the text document as a PDF with family via email.
- Share with the world as a blog post or social media post.

#### 11. Create and maintain a YouTube channel for your videos of your family history work.

- Include biographies, stories, songs, presentations, digitized home movies or videotapes, etc.
- Share links to the videos on your YouTube channel or social media with your family via email or text.

#### Links for One Ancestor: [Norman Seaver \(1734-1787\)](#)

- Genealogical Sketch: [52 Ancestors - Week 105: #128 Norman Seaver \(1734-1787\)](#)
- ABC Biography: [ABC Biography of Norman Seaver \(1734-1787\) of Massachusetts](#)
- Poem and Song: ["The Ballad of Norman Seaver" - A Family History Poem and Song](#)
- Life Memoir: [Norman Seaver's Life Memories - An AI-Assisted Memoir](#)
- Revolutionary War Service Summary: [Ask AI: "Please Describe Norman Seaver's Revolutionary War Service"](#)
- Courtship Story: [Ask AI: Describe the Courtship and Marriage of Norman Seaver and Sarah Read in 1755 in Sudbury, Massachusetts Bay Colony](#)
- Christmas Story: [Thirteen Blessings - The Norman and Sarah Seaver Family](#)
- YouTube Video: [Captain Norman Seaver \(1734-1787\) Biography](#)
- Narrated Video Slide Presentation: [Slide Show for the Norman and Sarah \(Read\) Seaver Family of Massachusetts](#)

#### How I Learned To Do This

- Lifelong Learning – Genealogy, Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Application (Trying Things!) – It Takes Time!
- Facebook Group: [Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#)

- Steve Little and Mark Thompson’s [The Family History AI Show Podcast](#)
- Steve Little’s Blogs: [AI Genealogy Insights](#) and [Vibe Genealogy](#)
- Carole McCulloch’s [Essential Genealogy Blog](#) and [YouTube Channel](#)
- Denyse Allen’s [Chronicle Makers Blog](#) and [YouTube Channel](#)
- [Family Tree Webinars](#) and [RootsTech AI videos](#)
- Many Other Bloggers, YouTubers, Writers

### **Some Takeaways**

- Everything I’ve Done To Date Has Been On Free AI Websites.
- Every AI Website Has a Learning Curve – 20 Hours to a Basic Understanding, 100 Hours To Work Effectively.
- The Large Language Models Are Very Perceptive, Creative, Inspiring, Engaging, Positive.
- Biographies and Life Memoirs Are Based Only on Genealogical Sketches – “**The Way It Was.**”
- Many Family Stories Are Historical Fiction That Rely on the Sketches for Facts and on Historical Events and Social History For Details and Scenes -- “**The Way It Might Have Been.**”
- Every Ancestor Had a Unique Life and Their Stories Will Be Lost If we Don’t Tell them.
- Audio and Video of Biographies and Family Stories Can Be Very Effective.

### **Randy’s AI Websites**

- [Genea-Musings Blog Posts](#) and [SubStack Geneaholic Blog Posts](#)
- Links to my blog posts about using Artificial Intelligence are on [Randy's AI and Genealogy](#) page.
- Links to AI information and articles about Artificial Intelligence in Genealogy by other genealogists are on [AI and Genealogy Compendium](#) page.
- Links to videos are on my YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@RandySeaver/videos>