Brick Wall Special Interest Group
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TIMELINES AS RESEARCH TOOLS

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USES OF TIMELINES:

- Reconstruct your ancestor's life; Who, When, Where, Why?
- Identify "holes" and/or inconsistencies in research
- Organize and/or combine notes from different sources
- Distinguish between people with the same name
- Analyze logical timeframes and ages for marriage, births, military service, etc.
- Track family members before 1850 when they were "census tally marks"
- Create a chronological sequence before writing a biography or family history narrative
- Integrate historical events into your ancestor's life

TIMELINE TOOLS

- Pencil and paper – Good for a quick summary of known facts; Bad for adding and subtracting facts
- Family tree software (Ancestry, Family Search, Family Tree Maker, etc.) Automatically generated from saved documents and facts; Will not include personal facts unless they are entered in the person's profile; Ancestry can add historical events that may have impacted your ancestor
- Word text document – Good for moving information around easily (Cut, copy, paste, color code, strike out, delete)
- Word table – Easy to add or delete columns and rows
- Google Doc – Also easy to manipulate data
- Excel file – Good for long-term research projects, organizing, sorting, adding or deleting rows & columns; can copy and paste URL or other links; can sort by different criteria
- Computer folder containing jpeg, PDF, etc. files (arrange by Last Name First Name Date Title or Just by Date) Good for organizing everything from birth certificates to probate files in chronological order over a person's lifetime
- Free or fee Historical Events Timeline computer apps or software www.ourtimelines.com/create_tl_2c.html

NICE VIDEO INTRODUCTION TO TIMELINES:

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Timelines_-_Creation_and_Use_with_Families

TIPS ON USING TIMELINES:

COLUMNS FOR

- Date
- Age
- Location
- Event
- Source

DATES

- Use as clues to historical events that might have affected your ancestor (War, drought, grasshopper plague, outbreaks of disease, extreme weather, etc.)
- Use as guides to find land records, tax rolls, school records, state censuses, etc.
- Use to determine location by the date counties, townships, towns, etc. were established (Look in county history books or Wikipedia)
- Use to research laws that might have affected your ancestor (Civil War Pension laws, women's property rights, guardianship laws, etc.)
- Use to locate church and civil vital records (When were records kept at the county and state level, etc.? Check Family Search Research Wiki for information)

AGE COLUMN IS IMPORTANT!

- Childbearing years
- Age of consent for marriage
- Minor (varies by circumstances, laws, location, etc.)
- Eligible for military service
- Eligible to vote
- Taxable (ex. age 21 single men, poll tax, etc.)
- Missing generation
- Normal lifespan

LOCATION AND LAND OWNERSHIP

- Note if location is the same but the **name** of the location changes
- Include the formation dates for state, county, and township in your timeline if the boundaries may have changed during the time your ancestor lived in the area
- The Family Search Wiki for a county is extremely helpful
- Look for odd changes in location as signs that you may be "off track"
- Look for migration routes or modes of transportation such as rivers, railroad lines, etc.
- Search federal land warrants and patents at https://glorecords.blm.gov or state archives for "state land" land patents

- Search land transfer deeds at the county recorder of deeds office
- Check county history books

USE MAPS, ESPECIALLY PLAT MAPS

- May provide date land was obtained if it was a "first purchase," patent, homestead or military warrant
- Can give clues as to where to find land transfer deeds if the Section, Township & Range are determined and another owner is listed on the tract
- May list neighbors who are members of your ancestor's family or "FAN Club"
- Railroad and other transportation or migration maps may suggest how your ancestors traveled from one place to another and help estimate the length of time travel may have taken
- May mention churches, schools, cemeteries, businesses, ferries, bridges, roads, etc. that your ancestors may have been associated with

VITAL SIGNS

- Birthdates and birthplaces
- Baptism
- Confirmation
- Military registration, service, pension eligibility (Fold3, NARA, GAR, DAR, SAR, NPS, etc.)
- Marriage
- Death and burial (FindaGrave, BillionGraves, GenWeb, Cemetery Websites, etc.)
- Probate
- The Family Search Wiki lists dates and repositories for these types of documents

ENUMERATIONS:

CENSUS

- Think beyond U.S. population schedules
- 1890 Veterans schedule, mortality schedules, slave schedules, agriculture schedules, and other special schedules
- State and city censuses (Kansas has many)

CITY & COUNTY DIRECTORIES

- Provide date of residence and street or postal address
- May list wife or widow at the residence
- May list occupation and/or place of work
- Can search by address in some cases – Who lived together in the same residence?

TAX LISTS

- Can track wealth, real estate, personal property and even children as they attain taxable age
- Often are available for every year between census enumerations
- May lists relationships, ex. widow of, son of, Jr. and Sr.

MILITARY DRAFT REGISTRATION, SERVICE RECORDS AND PENSIONS

- Check ages of male ancestors to determine if they were required to register for the Civil War, WWI, WWII or Viet Nam Conflicts
- Military Pension File Applications can be a source of births, marriage, divorce, death, illness, disability, family relationships, places of residence, occupations, etc. (NARA, some on Fold3)
- Military Compiled Service Records can also supply birth, military service dates, and death information

COURT RECORDS

- Deeds provide property information, location of residence and family relationships
- Wills and Probate provide family relationship, ages, etc.
- Might reveal family squabbles or favored children
- May explain relocation because of bankruptcy, lawsuits, tax sales, business losses, etc.

NEWSPAPERS

- Newspapers from the last century were our ancestors' social media. Look for family dinners and visits, births, hospitalization, funerals, land transfer information, tax records, estate announcements, school and church functions, etc.

SCHOOL RECORDS AND YEARBOOKS

- Provide proof of residence and approximate age
- Signatures on grade cards suggest parents or guardianship of adoptees or foster children

GOOGLE

- Name, location and date