

# CREATE A DIGITAL SCRAPBOOK

by Beverly Whitaker, CGRS

**QUESTION:** How can I capture the interest of my family in our family history?

**ANSWER:** A digital scrapbook – This is an attractive way to display photos, documents, charts, and stories.

**QUESTION:** How can I share my research findings inexpensively with my extended family?

**ANSWER:** A digital scrapbook – The finished product can be saved on to CDs and mailed inexpensively.

**Think about it!** You've been gathering information, photos, and documents to the point that you have a marvelous collection. You've made treks to courthouses, libraries, and cemeteries. More than likely you have exchanged correspondence with many persons by both email and snail mail. You've invested dollars and time in books, photocopies, postage, telephone bills, workshops, memberships, subscriptions, and probably in computer equipment.

**And what do you have to show for it?**

## MY SCRAPBOOKING EXPERIMENT

About two years ago, I decided it was time for me to get serious about sharing the results of 25 years of the research of my family and that of my husband's family. I felt overwhelmed looking at two shelves of Surname Binders and four filing cabinet drawers. My computer held much of the same information in a software database plus word processing files and a scattering of scanned documents and photos. Using desktop publishing, I had even begun to produce title pages and an occasional scrapbook-style page to add visual interest to my Surname Binders. Surely there was a way I could incorporate all this "stuff."

A new computer, better scanner, and some new software challenged me. That year for Christmas, our two sons and my sister-in-law received CDs containing a WHITAKER digital scrapbook which they could view using their Internet browser because I produced the book as a set of HTML documents. I wasn't totally satisfied with the effort, but it was pleasing to see that all were able to view the pages and that the content was valued. I knew I was on the right track, and I began to plan which families should get the next treatment.

## FINDING SOLUTIONS

Technology improves. I began to look at my options. Could I find solutions to the problems I had encountered in my first attempt?

**PROBLEM 1:** I didn't like the way the photo and document files were stored into the authoring document; sometimes they wouldn't open at all, and I would have to rely on a backup copy. The transfer to HTML went smoothly enough, and that version opened OK, but very slowly. [I used Publisher from Microsoft Office 2000 to create the scrapbook, then saved it in HTML.]

**PROBLEM 2:** As my "book" expanded to 60 pages, Publisher had begun to crash way too often. I had overloaded it.

**PROBLEM 3:** Although I did print a paper copy from the HTML document, the navigational arrows at the bottom of each page were unattractive in print. Moreover, it had been difficult to be sure that each page I designed would fit on an 8 ½ x 11 sheet.

**PROBLEM 4:** Being a perfectionist, I usually spent more than an hour creating and later editing each page. Then with multiple copies of the finished product, I erased the original version of the document, forgetting that I might need it to make future revisions.

**SOLUTION 1:** I've switched formats, from HTML to PDF. My personal preference for desktop publishing software is a little-known inexpensive package called *PagePlus*, produced by SERIF. Early in the year 2003, when they added the capacity to convert pages into PDF documents, I enthusiastically upgraded to the new version. Another program I considered was *Ancestral Author*, a program that constructs hyperlinked PDF files from GEDCOM files, text files, images, and other sources of user input. A full-fledged *Adobe Acrobat* package is a more professional but more expensive alternative for the production of PDF documents.

**SOLUTION 2:** I now create chapters, one for each generation. Each file bears the name of the key individual. All the files fit on to one CD with ample room to add charts and pages from my software database, with notes and annotated sources. [I use LEGACY database genealogy software which creates reports in both text and PDF formats.]

**SOLUTION 3:** Either the original *PagePlus* pages or the converted PDF pages print easily and attractively. I print a few copies on acid-free paper, create covers in heavy cardstock with a see-through protective overlay, and bind each book with a comb binding. Even this simple "book" is apt to be retained whereas binders may get tossed.

**SOLUTION 4:** This is only partially solved. I still spend many hours on each surname scrapbook, adding and rearranging content. I carefully backup and save my work while producing a scrapbook, and I find it to be much easier now that I'm using *PagePlus*. I also save both the *PagePlus* version and the converted PDF version because the latter can't be edited with the software I have. But as I work over a period of months on each scrapbook, I keep getting new ideas about what content to include and how to present it. I've learned how to import text from word processing files; I insert clips of charts and timelines; I add photos and documents; and perhaps best of all, I quote the stories shared over the years by older members of the family. I try to balance text and visuals on each page; I add bits of color, variable font sizes, text boxes etc.

## PREPARATION TIPS

1. Gather up all your materials relating to a particular individual or family.
2. With pencil and paper, lay out a rough draft of the content for each page.
3. Use a digital camera or scan photographs and documents (high quality .jpg format)
4. Crop and edit scanned materials, saving both the originals and the edited versions.
5. Type stories and biographical sketches and save them as word processing files.
6. Identify source references for stories and biographical sketches.
7. Attach captions to photos, with names, date, place, and occasion.
8. Select clip art if desired.
9. Plan to use standard fonts such as Arial and Times New Roman.
10. Prepare a set of pages using the software you have available; keep backups.
11. Burn a CD containing the files you've prepared; try them on other computers.
12. Create a CD cover with explanatory notes and a Content Listing.
13. Prepare a book cover and print at least two copies, one to show and one to archive.
14. Prepare copies of the original CD and share them with your extended family.

## RESOURCES on the Web

Serif Software (*PagePlus* with PDF; *PhotoPlus*)

<http://www.serif.com/>

*Legacy Family Tree*, genealogy software

<http://www.legacyfamilytree.com/DownloadHelp.asp#top>

*Ancestral Author*

<http://www.ancestralauthor.com/>

Adobe Acrobat family of products

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/main.html>

“Creating a Genealogy CD - A Case Study”

An interesting article by Rod Sullivan and Patricia Geary

<http://www.ancestralauthor.com/support/makecd.htm>

Cyndi's List: Scrapbooks (web links: ideas to incorporate into genealogy scrapbooking)

<http://www.cyndislist.com/scrapbooks.htm>