

Organizing Your Paper Files Using Binders (Notebooks)

Introduction

You can use 3-ring binders (notebooks) to organize family history materials. After you set up a basic file folder system to organize your direct and collateral family lines, you may want to supplement the basic system with binders for various special needs.

Uses of Binders

Organize by surname

One method of organizing, instead of the basic file folder system, is to set up a separate binder for each of the main surnames on your pedigree. Family group records, pedigree charts, notes, and photocopies of documents can be 3-hole punched and filed in binders. Sheet protectors (archival quality or acid free) allow you to store items without having to 3-hole punch them.

If you trace the family line of a surname back to the early 1800s, and especially if you research the families of aunts, uncles, and cousins, the binder will soon become too full. Binders are also heavy to carry around and take up lots of shelf space. Many researchers have found it better to set up a basic file folder system and then supplement the basic system with binders for various special needs such as original documents, histories, and photographs (see below).

Store original documents, histories and photographs

Three-ring binders are a good method for keeping valuable original documents, family histories, and photographs. You may want to number items and create an index for them. You should store valuable original documents in sheet protectors (archival quality or acid free). Do not carry these items with you when doing research. Put photocopies of original documents into family file folders in the basic file folder system and take these folders with you in a carrying case when you are doing research.

For instructions on how to set up a 3-ring binder system for filing documents, histories, and photographs, see *Eliminating Genealogy Clutter* by Sherene Henrie Whiting, (Provo, Utah: Stephenson's Genealogy Center, 2000).

Challenging research problems

Use a 3-ring binder to organize information about a single, challenging family history research problem. Dividers might include tabs for:

- Pedigree charts for the branch of the family you are researching.
- Family group records of the families concerned.
- To Do Lists that list what questions to research and answer.
- Research Logs for each family you are researching. Keep track of the records you search on research logs.

- Printouts of records from the Family History Library Catalog. Custom Search in FamilySearch allows you to click on **Family History Library Catalog** and select **Place Search** to find records you want to search.
- Notes you have taken.
- Documents, including census records, deeds, wills, and so forth. You may want to organize these documents by record type. Sheet protectors allow you to store documents without having to 3-hole punch them.
- Extra paper.

Once the research problem is resolved:

- Type the information about individuals into your computer genealogy program. Document your findings in **Sources** and make necessary explanations in **Notes** in the computer program.
- Either leave the binder intact, or place the information into your basic file folder system in the folders of the families or locations involved.

Binder of a family history line

After you complete your research on a family line, you can compile a binder that includes family group records, pedigree charts, documents, family histories and stories, and photographs. Such a binder is almost like a book, but only one copy is usually made. The compilation binder can become the precursor to a book and makes a nice gift to a family member.

Scrapbooks and albums

Scrapbooking is a fun and creative way to preserve items of interest for yourself, your children, and your grandchildren. Place items in top-loading sheet protectors. Colored acid free paper, stickers, and inked stamps allow you to turn your scrapbook into a personal artistic expression. These items are available at stores that specialize in office and craft supplies.