

Building a Family History Website

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PLANO STAKE FAMILY HISTORY
CONFERENCE
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Introduction

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- The goal of this course is to provide you with ideas on how to build your own family history website.
- This is a non-technical course. You don't need to be a programmer, but some knowledge of HTML is helpful.

Course Outline

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- *Plan your website*
 - *Define the purpose of your site.*
 - *Organize your site layout in a logical way.*
 - *Discuss ideas for your content.*
 - *Digitize your photographs and documents.*
- *Build Your Website.*
 - *Domain names and web hosting*
 - *Web building software*
 - *Blogs*
- *Launch your Site.*

Planning and Organizing your Site

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What's the purpose of your site?

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- **What is the purpose of your site?**
 - What is the purpose of the site you are planning? Do you have one or more genealogy databases you would like to share with family or fellow researchers? Do you have family stories or photos you want to share? Are you looking to do a single surname study? Track descendants of a specific individual? Present data on a particular region? Frequently, you have to view the entire page of someone's web site to find out what the purpose of the page or site is. With others, you may view the entire home page and still not know what the site is about. Tell your visitors what your site is about and what information they might find there.
- **Who is your Audience?**
 - Who is your audience - family and friends, beginning genealogists, seasoned genealogists, people who are only slightly interested in their family tree, or what? What does your audience want? If you don't know what your audience wants and provide them with the information, you will likely have very few repeat visitors.

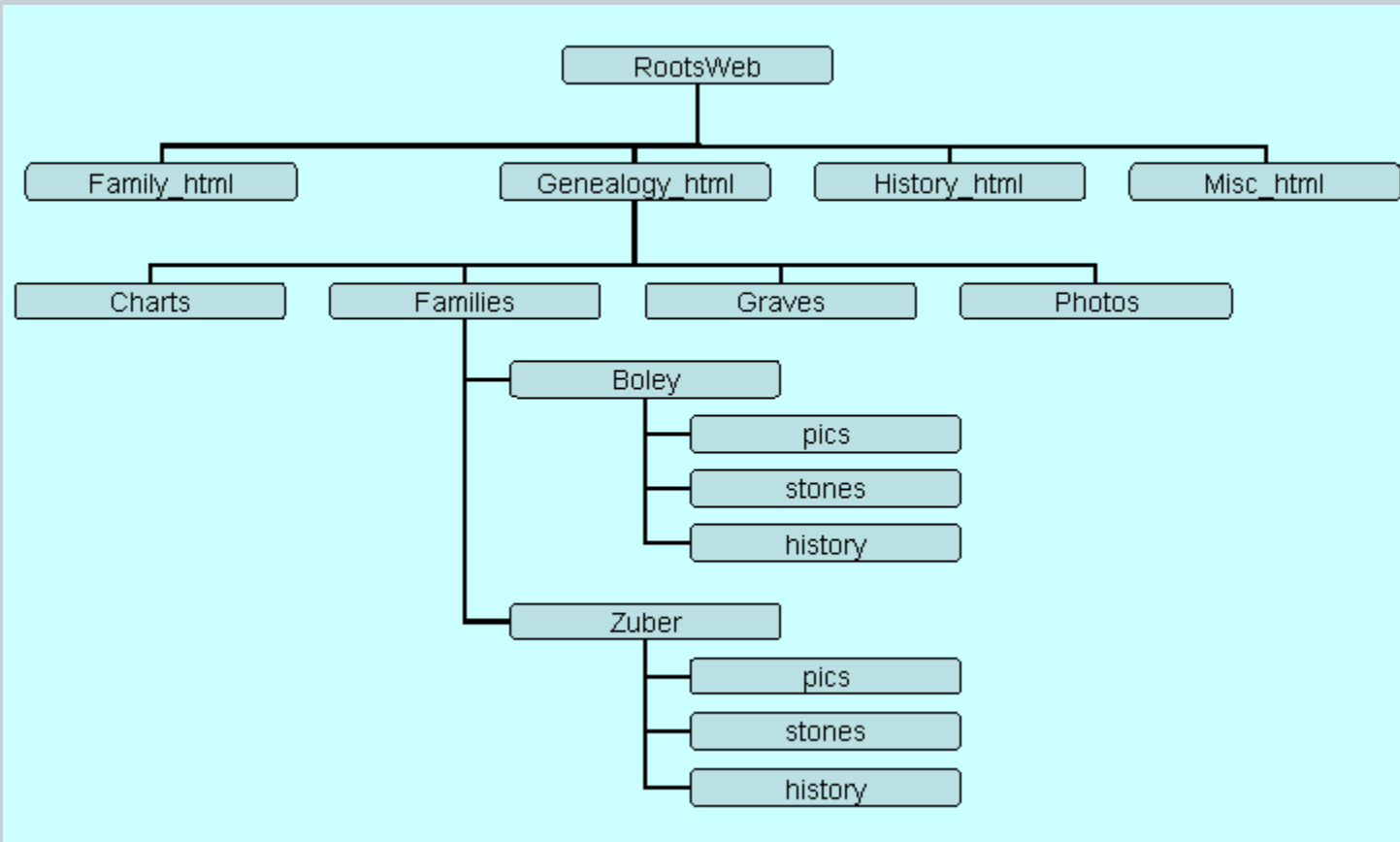
Planning and Organizing your Site

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- Next, develop a site map with your main topics and subtopics. This will be your guide in developing both your content and your navigation system.
- Your website needs to be easy to navigate because your goal is to make it easy for genealogists to find information.
- Figure out the most logical way to sort your information. Try designing your website like a business organizational chart (see next page).

Planning and Organizing your Site

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Planning and Organizing your Site

Here are some suggestions for your web pages:

- Home
 - Include an introduction. For example, “Welcome! This website contains the history of...”
 - Let visitors know what is new to your site, list new documents or discoveries.
- Documents
 - This page contains birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, obituaries, letters, newspaper articles, etc.
- Photographs
 - Group by families: “Ron and Marcia Jackson.” I recommend you use Picasa.com. [See this example](#).
- Personal Histories
 - This page contains personal histories, biographies, autobiographies and journals.
- Videos
 - Convert video to a Flash file (most common). You can use YouTube (more public). Both options provide HTML to add to your website.
- Audio
 - Includes audio histories.

Planning and Organizing your Site

- Recommended Links
 - List links your relatives may be interested in.
- Calendar
 - Include things like family reunions, key historical dates. Consider adding Google Calendar to your website for free.
- Discussion Group
- Site Search
 - If you have a large site, you should consider adding a search box to your site. There are a number of free ones available or if you are using paid hosting, there may be one available through the host.
 - [FreeFind](#) Here. you sign up to "Add a search engine to your site." You will need to enter your page URL and your e-mail address. Your password and setup instructions will be e-mailed to you.
 - [PicoSearch](#) Here, you sign up for your search engine. You will need to set up all the requested information. You'll then see the web page from which you manage and customize the Picosearch tool for your website.
 - [Google Free](#) - With Google Custom Search, you can harness the power of Google to create a customized search experience for your own website.

Planning and Organizing your Site

- Family Tree
 - Use a GEDCOM to HTML program to convert your GEDCOM file into organized, linked website. Some have pedigree charts and family group sheets, others have indexes of surnames and individuals. They are easy to use and free or low in cost.
 - Here are some examples:
 - ✦ [GED2Web](#) (view [Sample](#) web site),
 - ✦ [GED4Web](#) (view [Sample](#) web site),
 - ✦ [Ged HTree](#) (view [Sample](#) web site),
 - ✦ [GedPage](#) (view [Sample](#) web site),
 - Use [Rootwebs Essential](#), or one of the approved Family Search [products](#), to download your GEDCOM file from newfamilysearch.com.

Digitize your Photographs and Documents

Before adding your documents, photographs, family tree etc. to your website you need to gather, organize and digitize them.

- Digitize

- Scanning

- ✦ JPEG is a common format for photos (use 300 dpi).
 - ✦ Scan beyond the margins to avoid cutting off words (see <http://josephsmithpapers.org>)
 - ✦ Scan original documents into PDF, and if possible provide a transcription if necessary.
 - ✦ For large scanning projects (if you do not have the time) use a service such as a Sam's Club or Fotobridge.com.

- Video Conversion

- ✦ Use a professional service to convert VHS, 8mm and 35m negatives because they have the proper equipment and can do a better job. Once they are converted to a DVD, then you can use software like Corel to convert the video to Flash (.flv) or MP4. Flash is the most common format for PCs, but does not work on iPads, iPhones, etc.

- File Naming

- Use actual words, avoid special characters, use lower case, use hyphens instead of spaces (example, family-histories.htm). See DailySeoTip.com for more information.

Digitize your Photographs and Documents

- **Preservation.** Becoming an archivist is a natural consequence of becoming a genealogy webmaster. Here are some general ideas on preserving family papers:
 - No staples, paperclips or other metal fasteners.
 - Do not use any type of tape, not even “archival,” on personal documents that you wish to preserve.
 - Order storage sleeves in the largest size possible to avoid the folding and unfolding of your valuables.
 - Do not laminate paper documents.
 - Use acid-free tissue sheets in between scrapbook pages.
 - There are various sources for archival products (e.g., www.archival.com). Many craft stores and hobby supply chains also stock a variety of these products.
 - For more information see the [National Archives website](#).
- **Backup.**
 - After you have digitized all of your documents and photographs on your computer, keep at least one backup on an external hard drive.

Build Your Website

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Basic Terms

- **HTML (Hypertext Markup Language)** is the predominant language for web pages. HTML elements are the basic building-blocks of webpages.
 - Example: `<i>This text is bold and italic</i>`
- **CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)** is a style sheet language used to describe the look and formatting of a document (layout, colors, fonts, etc.)
- **Web Hosting** companies provide space on servers that house the files and pages that comprise a website.
- **Domain Name.** This is your identity—`www.You.com`.

Build your Website

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- Before you can build your site, you will need to know where you are going to host it. You can use free hosting or buy a domain and use paid hosting.
- Next, you will need to create the programming for the website using web design software.
- There is no single correct method.
- Keep it simple. Start with the simplest website software you need.

Domain Name

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- If you want to create your own website with a personalized domain name, you'll need to lease the right to use your chosen name from a domain registration service.
- Make sure the registrar is accredited by ICANN. Check the ICANN-accredited registrar official list at <http://www.icann.org/registrars/accredited-list.html>.
- Research the cost and procedures for transferring your domain name to another domain name registrar in the event you become dissatisfied or find a lower price. Registrars in general have a terrible reputation for holding names hostage. Some charge exorbitant transfer fees or create delays to avoid losing business.

Domain Name

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- Experts disagree about whether your best bet is to acquire your domain name from your web hosting service or a third party. Using one company is obviously simpler and cleaner. A third party can be less expensive. Most hosting services charge \$15 per year for .com names. Some hosting services bundle free or below-cost domains with hosting service.
- Register your new domain name with multiple extensions and use the capabilities of your Web host to have them redirect to your main domain in a masked fashion.
- Here are two recommended services:
 - GoDaddy.com *Est. \$9.20 per year for a .com name. About one-sixth of all domains are registered through GoDaddy, which is twice as many as its nearest competitor.
 - NameCheap.com
 - ConsumerResearch.com – Reviews of Domain registration companies.

Web Hosting

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- Web hosting services enable people and organizations to upload and maintain websites on the Internet. Hosting companies provide space on servers that house the files and pages that comprise a website.
- Here are a few recommendations based on ConsumerSearch.com:
 - Webstrikesolutions.com - The base plan includes 1 GB of disk space and a monthly bandwidth of up to 20 GB -- more than enough for the majority of personal, enthusiast and small professional websites.
 - Others: iPage.com, FatCow.com and JustHost.com.
 - Wordpress.org - If you only want to start a personal blog, you don't really need a full-featured web host -- rather, you can go with a free blog host. WordPress is based on open-source software that reviewers and sophisticated users love. You do not need to download the software, and unlike some other free web hosts, WordPress does not post advertising on your pages.
 - ConsumerResearch.com – Reviews of Web Hosting companies

Web Building Software

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Examples of web building software:

- Free

- RootsWeb.com
- Genealogy software (Family Tree Maker)
- Google Sites
- Blogs

- Paid

- GoDaddy
- CoffeeCup
- Microsoft Extension Web 2.0/Dreamweaver

Free Websites

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- [Rootsweb.com](#) (Ancestry.com)
 - RootsWeb houses tens of thousands of websites for the genealogy community. It provides space free of charge, but ad banners are displayed on your site.
 - There are limitations:
 - ✦ The name you choose will become part of the url of your site. You cannot change it once selected. Using “gearyfamily” results in <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gearyfamily/>.
 - ✦ Will not make any websites for personal photo albums, games, fan sites, video files of any type, music files (e.g. mp3), file storage, zip files, software, commercial material, etc.
 - For information on how to build a free site see this [document](#). Here are some other examples of free pages:
 - ✦ [Monroe County New York Records](#)
 - ✦ [Langmacher Surname Genealogy](#) by *langmachers*
 - ✦ [Larbalestier to Smith](#) by *smithiks*
 - ✦ [Larsen - Brown Genealogy Page](#) by *larsenbrown*
 - ✦ [Larson Online Residence](#) by *tdlarson*
 - ✦ <http://www.genealogy-web-creations.com/rootsweb-worldconnect-project.html>

Free Websites

- There are genealogy programs available that are either freeware or very inexpensive that will convert your family history into web sites. And you need little or no knowledge of HTML. As you are creating your set of webpages on your hard drive, you can apply for webspace to host your pages. An example of a server that makes it easy for beginners is [Rootsweb](#).
- Many genealogy programs have a webpage building feature that allows the user to create a web site right from the program without the use of a GEDCOM to HTML program. Some of the programs have pedigree charts and family group sheets while others have indexes of surnames and individuals.
- Here are some examples: [Ancestral Quest](#) , [Family Tree Maker](#) (view [Sample](#) web site) and [RootsMagic](#) (view [Sample](#) web site).

Google Sites

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- **Pros:**
 - The designer doesn't have to purchase any software, have taken any classes, or even provide hosting.
 - Google Sites has a very user-friendly interface for end-user and clients. Jump right in and own your website.
- **Cons:**
 - Must use provided site themes and structure (only limited customization is available, some colors, font-type, font-size).
- See <http://www.googlesiteswebdesign.com/> for help.

Blog

- **Blog Your Family History** - You could choose to use a genealogy blog to document your family history search. A blog, short for "web log," is basically an online journal. You can add text, graphic images and allow others to add comments as part of your Blog. You can either sign up for an account through a Weblog host like Blogger.com, or run a blog publishing system on your own Web server such as WordPress. If you already have your own domain hosted on a server, you might be interested in [Launching a WordPress Blog](#), a FREE EBook by Tina Clarke and Pat Geary, both Microsoft MVP's - Expression Web. This is a step-by-step tutorial for launching your own WordPress Blog. You can also request a free WordPress Blog to be hosted on the WordPress site. All you need is your name and an email address. If you already have a blog elsewhere and would like to move it over to WordPress.com, they provide several import options that can import posts and comments.

Web Building Software

- GoDaddy.com. Web-hosting solutions often throw in site-building software free or at minimal charge. The main drawback is that you may find it hard to move your site if the hosting service deteriorates or you find a better deal.
- Let's look at an example....

Web Building Software

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CoffeeCup Visual Site Designer (\$50)

- For those who want to create a full-fledged website and not just a blog, reviewers say Visual Site Designer offers just the right mix of capabilities and ease of use for most beginners. It's easier to use than most budget web design software, with "drag and drop" usability -- no need to learn any code. It comes with lots of templates, backgrounds, textures and more. You can easily add video and insert Flash animations.
- Much easier to use than Dreamweaver or Expression.
- Let's take a look at an example.....

Web Building Software

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- Microsoft Expression Web 2/Dreamweaver
 - Expression is much less complicated than Dreamweaver.
 - Both Dreamweaver and Expression Web are "What You See Is What You Get" -- or WYSIWYG -- website design programs designed to be a user-friendly way to create the complex code required for a sophisticated web page.
 - Pros:
 - ✦ More control over your website and a virtually unlimited ability to add more features.
 - Cons:
 - ✦ Very technical and time intensive. Requires much greater technical knowledge of HTML and CSS.
 - ✦ Expensive (~\$400 for DW).
 - ✦ Not recommend for beginners.

Web Building Software

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Website built using Dreamweaver. Split screen shows code and design.

The screenshot displays the Adobe Dreamweaver CS3 interface. The top menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Insert, Modify, Text, Commands, Site, Window, and Help. The toolbar contains various icons for text formatting and editing. The main workspace is split into two panes: the left pane shows the HTML code for 'Index.html', and the right pane shows the visual design of the website. The website has a blue header with the title 'JacksonFamilyHistory.com' and the tagline 'PRESERVING OUR PAST'. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for Home, Documents, Photographs, Histories, Video, Family Tree, and Links. The main content area features a 'MainEditRegion' with a 'News' section. A recent news item is titled 'Samuel Jackson, Sr. Letter' and is dated August 5, 2011. The right sidebar contains the CSS Styles panel, the Application panel, and the Local Files panel. The Properties panel at the bottom shows the current element's format, style, and CSS classes.

Building a Website

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- What Not to Do
 - A typical genealogist, amateur or professional, is looking for data and does not want to waste time viewing large animated graphics that do not pertain to that data. Your visitor is also probably not interested in the music on your site. They want data, plain and simple. They want the page to come up in the fastest time possible. Some do want fancy stuff, but the majority of genealogists do not.
 - Example, see [“World’s Worst Website”](#)
- Security and Privacy
 - Generally speaking I do not post photographs, addresses, emails or phone numbers of living relatives without their permission.

Launch your Site

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Launch Your Site

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- Celebrate your success!
 - Throw an on-line web-warming party. Send emails to all your relatives and friends and invite them to visit your new web home.
 - Register your site on Rootsweb.com.
- Attracting visitors.
- Maintenance.
 - Websites require regular attention to ensure that they remain up-to-date and in operational condition. Audit your site for spelling, inaccurate information, broken links, etc.

Appendix

- Helpful Links for Building Websites:
 - www.2planawebsite.com
 - <http://validator.w3.org/checklink> - Checks for broken links.
 - http://www.w3schools.com/html/html_xhtml.asp - HTML help.
 - <http://www.gimp.org/> - Free photo editing software.