

Creating a Family Cookbook

Almost every family has a treasured recipe, beloved as much for the memories it evokes of family get-togethers or a special family member, as it is for its taste. Most families have many such recipes, handed down through generations, taught to children, or squirreled away on index cards or scraps of paper.

A wonderful gift for family and friends, a family recipe book is a wonderful way to combine favorite family dishes with memories of treasured family moments and members. But how to turn those family culinary favorites into an actual family cookbook?

Collect the Recipes

Start by sending a letter to your relatives, asking everyone to send back one or more of their 'specialties' by a particular date. In the letter, be sure to encourage the submission of recipes that have been passed down from earlier generations, along with a story or photo of the family member best known for the recipe. Ask for memories of times spent cooking and/or eating together, as well as photos of holiday and other family get-togethers.

For best results, and to cut down on your workload, include a sample recipe format for submissions to follow. For example, you can ask family members list the ingredients in order, together with the quantities. A fill-in-the-blank recipe form can be useful here, because it helps remind people not to leave out important information like the cooking temperature, and you can also add spaces to encourage submitters to include a brief story about the recipe's creator or a favorite family memory. You may also want to ask family members to explain why they chose the particular recipe.

Items to Include on a Recipe Form

- Name of the recipe
- Name of the person contributing the recipe
- Name of the person who originated the recipe (if different from the submitter)
- The history of the recipe (Where did it come from and why is it special?)
- Ingredients and quantities needed, in the order in which they appear in the directions
- Cooking directions
- Prep time and cooking time
- The number of people the recipe serves
- Any special cooking tips or advice

If your family is like mine, you most likely have a relative or two who never writes down recipes. In this case, try to elicit a nearby relative to visit this family member and watch them prepare the dish, translating "a pinch of this" and "a dash of that" into more precise measurements and keeping track of cooking times and temperatures. The helper should also ask the relative for any special tips they may have for obtaining the best results.

Tips for encouraging a reply:

- Ask those that can to send their recipes and stories by email. You're not only more likely to receive more submissions, but you'll also be able to cut and paste the recipes right into your final document.
- Since emailing good quality pictures can be so painful for many, consider joining a photo share site to make it easier for participants to upload their photos.

- Set a deadline that allows family members at least a few weeks to gather together their recipes, but not so far out in the future that they forget about the project all together. You may also want to send a short reminder postcard or email a week or two before the final submission deadline.
- For participants you know don't have email, try sending a SASE with your letter to boost the chance of a response.
- If you're planning to sell the cookbook to help recoup your costs, it is still nice to offer free copies to everyone who contributes recipes, stories or photos.

Organizing the Recipes

There is no one correct way to organize a cookbook. It really depends upon the recipes you've collected and your purpose in creating the cookbook. Some suggestions:

- *by category* - appetizers, soups, salads, entrees and desserts
- *by individuals* - grandparents, cousins, etc.
- *by family* - by family unit (Mom, Dad & kids) or branch of the family tree (Grandma, Grandpa and all of their descendants)
- *by holiday* - Christmas, 4th of July, Thanksgiving

Assembling Your Family Cookbook

Once you have collected and organized the recipes and stories, it's time to sit down and design the cookbook. The theme should be something which reflects your family, whether its a photo from a recent family reunion, an old family photo of a distant ancestor, or a design that celebrate's your family's country of origin or ethnic heritage.

When assembling the actual cookbook, you have two major options: you can either photocopy the original submitted forms (transcribing the ones sent by email) or you can type everything into the computer for a more consistent format.

If you choose to use the computer to create your cookbook, stick to simple fonts like Times Roman or Arial that are easy to read. Save decorative fonts for chapter and recipe titles. Incorporate the photos and stories throughout the cookbook, in places where they enhance the recipes without obscuring them (on adjoining pages, for example).

To make your cookbook easy to read, create both a Table of Contents and an index.

Publishing Your Family Cookbook

If you're only creating a few copies, you may be able to print and assemble your family cookbook yourself at home. Three ring binders or folders make good covers, and allow the option for new recipes to be added in the future. You can even include each page in a plastic sleeve so that the cookbooks can actually be used without danger of spills!

If your cookbook project is larger with numerous family members interested in copies, you may want to turn the job over to your local copy shop. Be sure to ask about the various options, including glued bindings or spiral bindings, different paper types, etc. Get cost estimates based on the number of copies you require and then make your final selections accordingly.

Tips for incorporating family history into your cookbook

- Make color copies or scans of family heirlooms that relate to cooking to use as a background behind a few of the recipes. This might include items such as an award won for a particular recipe, a newspaper clipping about the family, a handwritten copy of the

recipe which has been passed down through several generations, special family table linens, or airplane tickets from a family trip that produced a great recipe.

- Write an introduction to the cookbook, which shares the details of its creation and how family members responded to the project. Make sure to include the date!
- Include a photo and short bio of the family members originally known for some of the more treasured recipes. If the family member is deceased, a few short memory quotes about the individual and their recipe from the descendants makes a nice touch.

When you're done, pat yourself on the back, try out some of the recipes, and enjoy your delicious bits of family history!

Make a Memory Book

Important pieces of a family's history are found only in the memories of the living relatives. But many times those personal stories are never written down or shared before it is too late. The thought-provoking questions in a memory book can make it easier for a grandparent or other relative to recall people, places and times that they thought they had forgotten. Help them tell their story and record their precious memories for posterity by creating a personalized memory book or journal for them to complete.

STEP 1: Begin by purchasing an empty 3-ring binder or a blank writing journal. Look for something that either has removable pages or lies flat when open to make writing easier. I prefer the binder because it lets you print and use your own pages. Even better, it also allows your relative to make mistakes and start over with a fresh page - which can help lessen the intimidation factor.

STEP 2: Create a list of questions. Be sure to include questions which cover each phase of the individual's life - childhood, school, college, job, marriage, raising children, etc. Get your family into the act and have your other relatives, children, etc. suggest questions that interest them. These [history interview questions](#) can help you get started, but don't be afraid to come up with additional questions of your own.

STEP 3: Gather together family photos that include your relative or her family. Have them professionally scanned into digital format or do it yourself. You can also photocopy the photos, but this generally doesn't yield as nice a result. A memory book offers an excellent opportunity to have relatives identify individuals and recall stories in unidentified photos. Include one or two unidentified photos per page, with sections for your relative to identify the people and place, plus any stories or memories which the photo may prompt them to recall.

STEP 4: Create your pages. If you're using a hard-backed journal you can print and paste in your questions or, if you have nice handwriting, pen them in by hand. If you're using a 3-ring binder, use a software program such to create and arrange your pages before printing them out. Include only one or two questions per page, leaving plenty of room for writing. Add photos, quotes or other little memory triggers to accent the pages and provide further inspiration.

STEP 5: Assemble your book and decorate the cover with personalized sayings, photos or other family memories. If you want to get really creative, [scrapbooking supplies](#) such as archival-safe stickers, die cuts, trim and other decorations can help you add a personal touch.

Once your memory book is complete send it off to your relative with a pack of good writing pens and a personal letter. Once they have completed their memory book you may want to send new pages with questions to add to the book. Once they return the completed memory book to you, be sure to have photocopies made to share with family members and protect against possible loss.

10 easy steps for making your family history book a reality.

1) Choose a Format for Your Family History

What do you envision for your family history project? A simple photocopied booklet shared only with family members or a full-scale, hard-bound book to serve as a reference for other genealogists? Or, perhaps, a family newsletter, cookbook or Web site is more realistic, given your time restraints and other obligations. Now is the time to be honest with yourself about the type of family history which meets your interests and your schedule. Otherwise, you'll have a half-finished product nagging you for years to come.

Considering your interests, potential audience and the types of materials you have to work with, here are some forms your family history can take:

- **Memoir/Narrative:** A combination of story and personal experience, memoirs and narratives do not need to be all-inclusive or objective. Memoirs usually focus on a specific episode or time period in the life of a single ancestor, while a narrative generally encompasses a group of ancestors.
- **Cookbook:** Share your family's favorite recipes while writing about the people who created them. A fun project, family history cookbooks help carry on the family traditions of cooking and eating together.
- **Scrapbook or Album:** If you're fortunate enough to have a large collection of family photos and memorabilia, a scrapbook or photo album can be a fun way to tell your family's story. Include your photos in chronological order and include stories, descriptions and family trees to complement the pictures.

Most family histories are generally narrative in nature, with a combination of personal story, photos and family trees. So, don't be afraid to get creative!

2) Define the Scope of Your Family History

Do you intend to write mostly about just one particular relative, or everyone hanging from your family tree? As the author, you next need to choose a focus for your family history book. Some possibilities include:

- **Single Line of Descent** - Begins with the earliest known ancestor for a particular surname and follows him/her through a single line of descent (to yourself, for example). Each chapter of your book would cover one ancestor or generation.
- **All Descendants Of...** - Begins with an individual or couple and covers all of their descendants, with chapters organized by generation. If you're focusing your family history on an immigrant ancestor, this is a good way to go.
- **The Grandparents** - Includes a section on each of your four grandparents, or eight great-grandparents, or sixteen great, great grandparents if you are very ambitious. Each individual section focuses on one grandparent, and works backwards through their ancestry or forward from his/her earliest known ancestor.

Again, these suggestions can easily be adapted to fit your interests, time and creativity. For example, you may choose to write a family history covering all people of a particular surname in a particular region, even if they aren't all necessarily related to one another!

3) Set Deadlines You Can Live With

Even though you'll likely find yourself scrambling to meet them, deadlines force you to complete each stage of your project. The goal here is to get each piece done within a specified time frame. Revising and polishing can always be done later. The best way to meet these deadlines is to schedule writing time, just as you would a visit to the doctor or hairdresser.

4) Choose a Plot & Themes

Thinking of your ancestors as characters in your family history story, what problems and obstacles did your ancestors face? A plot gives your family history interest and focus. Popular family history plots and themes include:

- Immigration/Migration
- Rags to Riches
- Pioneer or Farm Life
- Rising Out of Slavery
- War Survival

5) Do Your Background Research

If you want your family history to read more like a suspense novel than a dull, dry textbook, then it is important to make the reader feel like an eyewitness to your family's life. Even when your ancestor didn't leave an account of his or her daily life, social histories can help you learn about the experiences of people in a given time and place. Read town and city histories to learn what life was like during your time period of interest. Research timelines of wars, natural disasters and epidemics to see if any might have influenced your ancestor. Investigate your ancestor's occupation to gain greater understanding into his daily activities. Read up on the fashions, art, transportation and common foods of the time period and location. If you haven't already, be sure to interview all of your living relatives. Family stories told in a relative's own words will add a personal touch to your book.

6) Organize Your Research

Create a timeline for each ancestor that you plan to write about. This will help you arrange the outline for your book, as well as spot any gaps in your research. Sort through the records and photos for each ancestor and identify the ones you'd like to include, making note of each on the timeline. Then use these timelines to help develop an outline for your narrative. You may choose to order your material in many different ways: chronologically, geographically, by character, or by theme.

7) Choose a Starting Point

What is the most interesting part of your family's story? Did your ancestors escape a life of poverty and persecution for a better one in a new country? Was there an interesting invention or occupation? A war time hero? Pick out an interesting fact, record or story about your ancestors and open your narrative with it. Just like the fiction books you read for pleasure, a family history book doesn't need

to begin at the beginning. An interesting story will grab the reader's attention, with the hope of drawing them in past the first page. You can later use flashback to fill in the reader on the events which lead up to your opening story.

8) Don't be Afraid to Use Records and Documents

Diary entries, will excerpts, military accounts, obituaries and other records offer compelling, first-hand accounts of your family's history - and you don't even have to do the writing! Anything written directly by your ancestor is definitely worth including, but you may also find interesting accounts that mention your ancestor in the records of neighbors and other family members. Include short excerpts within the text of your writing, with source citations to point readers to the original record.

Photos, pedigree charts, maps and other illustrations can also add interest to a family history and help break up the writing into manageable chunks for the reader. Be sure to include detailed captions for any photos or illustrations that you incorporate.

9) Make it Personal

Anyone who reads your family history will likely be interested in the facts, but what they'll most enjoy and remember are the everyday details - favorite stories and anecdotes, embarrassing moments and family traditions. Sometimes it can be interesting to include varying accounts of the same event. Personal stories offer a great way to introduce new characters and chapters, and keep your reader interested. If your ancestors left no personal accounts, you can still tell their story as if they had, using what you've learned about them from your research.

10) Include an Index and Source Citations

Unless your family history is only a few pages in length, an index is a really important feature. This makes it much easier for the casual reader to find the portions of your book that detail the people in which they are interested. At the very least, try to include a surname index. A place index is also useful if your ancestors moved around a lot.

Source citations are an essential part of any family book, to both provide credibility to your research, and to leave a trail that others can follow to verify your findings.

Getting people to share their stories isn't always easy. Follow these step-by-step ideas for a successful family history interview!

Time Required: 1-2 hours

Here's How:

1. Schedule a time in advance. This gives everyone a chance to prepare.
2. Prepare a list of questions beforehand and either share them with your relative, or give them an idea of what you want to cover.
3. Bring several notepads and pens to the interview. If you plan to make a recording, be sure to have a tape player, microphone, extra tapes and batteries.
4. Take good notes and make sure you record your name, the date, the place the interview is being conducted and the interviewee.
5. Start with a question or topic that you know will elicit a reply, such as a story you have heard her tell in the past.
6. Ask questions which encourage more than simple 'yes' or 'no' answers. Try to elicit facts, feelings, stories and descriptions.
7. Show interest. Take an active part in the dialogue without dominating it. Learn to be a creative listener.
8. Use props whenever possible. Old photographs, favorite old songs and treasured items may bring memories flooding back.
9. Don't push for answers. Your relative may not wish to speak ill of the dead or may have other reasons for not wanting to share. Move on to something else.
10. Use your prepared questions as a guideline, but don't be afraid to let your relative go off on a tangent. They may have many things to say that you never thought to ask!
11. Don't interrupt or attempt to correct your relative; this can end an interview in a hurry!
12. When you are done, be sure to thank your relative for her time.

Tips:

1. Put your relative at ease by telling them that they will have a chance to see and approve of anything that you write before you share it with others.
2. Keep the interview length to no more than 1-2 hours at a stretch. It's tiring for you and for the person being interviewed. This is supposed to be fun!
3. Consider preparing a transcript or written report as a tangible thank you to your relative for her participation.

50 Questions for Family History Interviews:

1. What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname?
2. When and where were you born?
3. How did your family come to live there?
4. Were there other family members in the area? Who?
5. What was the house (apartment, farm, etc.) like? How many rooms? Bathrooms? Did it have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephones?
6. Were there any special items in the house that you remember?
7. What is your earliest childhood memory?
8. Describe the personalities of your family members.
9. What kind of games did you play growing up?
10. What was your favorite toy and why?
11. What was your favorite thing to do for fun (movies, beach, etc.)?
12. Did you have family chores? What were they? Which was your least favorite?
13. Did you receive an allowance? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?
14. What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school? College?
15. What school activities and sports did you participate in?
16. Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothes?
17. Who were your childhood heroes?
18. What were your favorite songs and music?
19. Did you have any pets? If so, what kind and what were their names?
20. What was your religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?
21. Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper?
22. Who were your friends when you were growing up?
23. What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?
24. Describe a typical family dinner. Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? What were your favorite foods?
25. How were holidays (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) celebrated in your family? Did your family have special traditions?
26. How is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?
27. Who was the oldest relative you remember as a child? What do you remember about them?
28. What do you know about your family surname?
29. Is there a naming tradition in your family, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?
30. What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors?
31. Are there any stories about famous or infamous relatives in your family?
32. Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?
33. Are there any physical characteristics that run in your family?
34. Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?
35. What was the full name of your spouse? Siblings? Parents?
36. When and how did you meet your spouse? What did you do on dates?
37. What was it like when you proposed (or were proposed to)? Where and when did it happen? How did you feel?
38. Where and when did you get married?
39. What memory stands out the most from your wedding day?
40. How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them?
41. What do you believe is the key to a successful marriage?
42. How did you find out you were going to be a parent for the first time?
43. Why did you choose your children's names?
44. What was your proudest moment as a parent?
45. What did your family enjoy doing together?
46. What was your profession and how did you choose it?
47. If you could have had any other profession what would it have been? Why wasn't it your first choice?
48. Of all the things you learned from your parents, which do you feel was the most valuable?
49. What accomplishments were you the most proud of?
50. What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

Additional Questions for Family History Interviews:

- What is your full name and why were you named it?
- Were you named after somebody else?
- Did you have a nickname as you were growing up?
- If you did, what was it and why did they call you that?
- Have you had other nicknames as an adult?
- What do family members call you now?
- Where were you born and when?
- Do you remember hearing your grandparents describe their lives? What did they say?
- Do you remember your great-grandparents? What do you know about them?
- Who was the oldest person you can remember in your family as a child? What do you remember about them?
- Do you remember your family discussing world events and politics?
- Was there a chore you really hated doing as a child?
- What would you consider to be the most important inventions that have been made during your lifetime?
- How is the world now different from what it was like when you were a child?
- What kinds of books did you like to read?
- Do you remember having a favorite nursery rhyme or bedtime story? What was it?
- Do you ever remember not having enough food to eat because times were hard for your family?
- What were your favorite toys and what were they like?
- What were your favorite childhood games?
- What were your schools like?
- How did you get to school?
- What was your favorite subject in school and why?
- What subject in school was always the easiest for you?
- What was your least favorite subject in school and why?
- Who was your favorite teacher and why were they special?
- How do your fellow classmates from school remember you best?
- What school activities and sports did you participate in?
- Did you and your friends have a special hang-out where you liked to spend time?
Where was it and what did you do there?
- Were you ever given any special awards for your studies or school activities?
- How many years of education have you completed?
- Do you have a college degree? If so, what was your field of study?
- Did you get good grades?
- Did you like school?
- What did you like the most and the least about it?

- What did you usually wear to school? Describe it.
- Were there any fads during your youth that you remember vividly?
- How old were you when you started dating?
- Do you remember your first date? Describe the circumstances.
- Name a good friend that you have known for the longest period of time? How many years have you been friends?
- Has there ever been anyone in your life that you would consider to be your kindred spirit or soul mate?
If so, who were they and why did you feel a special bond to them?
- How did you meet the person that you would later marry? Describe them?
- Do you remember where you went on the first date with your spouse?
- How long did you know them before you got married?
- Describe your wedding proposal.
- When and where did you get married?
- Describe your wedding ceremony. Who was there?
- Did you have a honeymoon? If so, where did you go?
- How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them?
- How long have you been married (or were you married)?
- What wise advice would you give to a grandchild on their wedding day?
- How did you find out that you were going to be a parent for the first time?
- How many children did you have all together?
- What were their names, birth dates and birthplaces?
- Do you remember anything that your children did when they were small that really amazed you?
- What is one of the most unusual things that one of your children did regularly when they were small?
- What was the funniest thing you can remember that one of your children said or did?
- If you had it to do all over again, would you change the way you raised your family? How?
- What did you find most difficult about raising children?
- What did you find most rewarding about being a parent?
- Did you spoil any of your children? How?
- Were you a strict or lenient parent?
- Did you find that you had to treat each of your children differently? If so, why?
- How did you first hear that you were a grandparent and how did you feel about it?
- What advice do you have for your children and grandchildren?
- As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- What was your first job?
- What kinds of jobs have you had?
- How did you decide on your career?
- Did you make enough money to live comfortably?
- How long did you have to work each day at your job?

- How old were you when you retired?
- What were the hardest choices that you ever had to make? Do you feel like you made the right choices?
- Who was the person that had the most positive influence on your life? Who were they and what did they do?
- Is there a person that really changed the course of your life by something that they did?
Who were they and what did they do?
- Do you remember someone saying something to you that had a big impact on how you lived your life?
What was it?
- How would you describe yourself politically?
- Are you Conservative or Liberal and why?
- What wars have been fought during your lifetime? How did you feel about them?
- If you served in the military, when and where did you serve and what were your duties?
- If you served in the military, were you ever injured in the line of duty? What were the circumstances and what were your injuries?
- What United States President have you admired the most and why?
- As you see it, what are the biggest problems that face our nation and how do you think they could be solved?
- How tall are you?
- What color was your hair as a young child and then as an adult?
- What color are your eyes?
- Where have you lived as an adult? List the places and the years that you lived there.
- Why are you living where you are today?
- Do you wish you lived somewhere else (If so, where would it be)?
- Describe your general health.
- What major illnesses or health problems do you remember having?
- Do you have any health problems that are considered hereditary in nature? If so, what are they?
- What do you do regularly for exercise?
- Do you have any bad habits now or in the past? What were they?
- Have you ever been the victim of a crime? What happened?
- Have you ever been in a serious accident?
- Has anyone ever saved your life? Describe.
- Have you ever saved anyone else's life? Describe.
- Have you ever been hospitalized? If so, what for?
- Have you ever had surgery? If so, what for?
- If you could change something about yourself, what would it be?
- Have you ever had an experience that you would consider to be supernatural or psychic? Did you ever know something was going to happen before it actually did? What was it?
- What do you usually dream about?

- What church, if any, do you attend regularly?
- Describe your religious beliefs.
- Do you believe in an after life?
- What was the most stressful experience that you ever lived through? What helped you get through it?
- What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you personally?
- What kinds of musical instrument(s) have you learned to play?
- Would you consider yourself creative?
- What things have you made that others have enjoyed?
- How would you describe your sense of humor?
- What is the funniest practical joke you ever played on anyone?
- What activities have you especially enjoyed as an adult?
- What are your hobbies?
- What did you like to do when you were not working?
- What is the most amazing thing that has ever happened to you?
- What is the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?
- Have you ever met any famous people? Describe what happened.
- What organizations and groups have you belonged to?
- Have you ever won any special awards or prizes as an adult? What were they for?
- Describe a time and place when you remember feeling truly at peace and happy to be alive.
Where were you and what were you doing?
- What is the most beautiful place you have ever visited and what was it like?
- What is the longest trip that you have ever gone on? Where did you go?
- What has been your favorite vacation? Where did you go and why was it special?
- What was the favorite place you ever visited and what was it like?
- What pets have you had?
- Do you have a favorite story about a pet? What is it?
- Is there anything you have always wanted to do, but haven't?

FAVORITES

- What is your favorite style of music?
- What is your favorite musical instrument?
- Who is your favorite musical group?
- What is your favorite song?
- Who is your favorite singer?
- Who is your favorite movie star?
- What is your favorite movie?
- Who is your favorite artist?
- What is your favorite painting?
- Who is your favorite poet?
- What is your favorite poem?

- What is your favorite TV program?
- Who is your favorite author?
- What is your favorite book?
- What is your favorite season?
- What is your favorite tree?
- What is your favorite flower?
- What is your favorite holiday?
- What is your favorite color?
- What is your favorite sport?
- Who is your favorite athlete?
- What is your favorite animal?
- What is your favorite meal?
- What is your favorite fruit?
- What is your favorite vegetable?
- What is your favorite candy?
- What is your favorite cookie?
- What is your favorite drink?
- What is your favorite restaurant?
- What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?
- What is your favorite board game?
- What is your favorite card game?

IF YOU HAD TO PICK A LABEL FOR YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS (your spouse, children, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts & uncles, cousins), WHO BEST FITS THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTIONS? The best cook; The hardest-worker; the quietest; the best memory; the best gardener; the funniest; the best-looking; the animal lover; the most politically-active; the most mischievous; the calmest; the most athletic; the most intelligent; the most educated; the best career; the most creative; the wildest life-style; the most sociable; the biggest tease; the best housekeeper; the most reclusive; the most colorful; the most relaxed; the most frugal; the most generous; the tallest; the shortest; the best story-teller