

- A Family Craft Project -

FAMILY HISTORY SHRINES



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*A guide to making your own family history shrine or display,
Including additional how-to tips
And instructions for teaching this as a workshop*

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Many people feel that genealogy is boring. However, with photos, maps, and stories, family history can come alive.

By creating a family history display or shrine, you can make a family history more interesting to others.

No two shrines will turn out the same. Compositions will vary with the supplies that you have available and what you choose to use in each shrine.



SUPPLIES

The basic materials that you will need are:

- A paper background/support or other foundation for your display
- Glue -- I recommend Golden soft gel medium, available at most art supply stores
- Family photos prepared for the display
- Maps representing where your ancestors lived
- A small family tree or pedigree chart
- Names, dates, and anecdotes about each person for whom you have a photo

In addition to these shrines supplies, you'll probably need a pair of scissors to trim the papers, a sponge brush to apply the glue or gel medium, and a waterproof pen such as a fine point Sharpie.



Optional supplies include small envelopes, tags, buttons (antique ones –shown below -- are great), ribbon, and other embellishments that you might use for scrapbooking.



Some students choose plexiglass frames or displays to support their family history shrines and collages. Gift and crafts stores offer these and other options.

Paper support

The illustrated sample started with a sheet of heavy watercolor paper, trimmed to about 7 in. by 18 in. Remember that the support will be thicker and more rigid when the pieces are glued to it.

Choosing your glue



When selecting your glue, keep archival issues in mind. Never use an adhesive such as rubber cement which can stain or yellow the paper. Choose archival glues from the scrapbooking aisle at the crafts store, or use gel medium.

Gel medium also seals your final shrine or display, protecting it from stains and some fading.

When selecting gel medium, most artists prefer soft gel medium made by Golden or other acrylic paint companies. You can use gel medium with a gloss (shiny) finish or a matte finish; either will work fine.

Family photos

The largest part of your preparations will probably be locating family photos to use in this project. Start with your own childhood photos, some pictures of your parents, and perhaps a few photos of your grandparents.

If you would like to create a more extensive family history shrine, you may need to place a few phone calls or send some emails to find which family members have the old photos. Start with family members who may have genealogy as a hobby. Often, older women in the family are your best resources.

If you have trouble locating photos, referred to Appendix A in this book for more ideas.

Preparing photos and other images

It's important not to use original documents and photos in your family history shrines. I recommend using color photocopies; they are fairly archival and won't fade as quickly as inkjet prints. Remember that you can copy many photos on one sheet of photocopy paper. Then, you can cut apart the images and use them in your shrines.

Here's a helpful tip: If you have a scanner, scan all the photos and documents that you want to include in your shrine. Then, using a graphics program or even Microsoft Word, you can adjust the sizes of the images to fit your shrine design. In either of these programs, you can also cut-and-paste multiple images to fit on the paper that you will photocopy. (Remember that many copy shops charge the same for both letter and legal size color photocopies.)

Print these pages, and then take them to a copy shop where you can get either color photocopies or color laser prints. Both of these options are good for family history shrines, and art in general.

It's smart to get some extra copies made while you are there. Then you can use the same images in several spots on your shrines, or you can make extra shrines as gifts for family members.

Remember to make color photocopies of maps, ancestors' journal entries, and other old documents from your family. These may be useful as backgrounds for some sections in your shrine.

Family tree or pedigree chart

Among your supplies, it's smart to have a small family tree or pedigree chart that will fit your shrine. That helps people to understand where these individuals that in relation to you and other members of your family. You can print a small pedigree chart using most of genealogy programs such as PAF (Personal Ancestral File, a free program that I use) or Family Tree maker. If it is not the right size for design to suit your family shrine, you can predict copy of that and then make a reduced photocopy at the copy shop. Or, you can use a word-processing program to lay out a family tree that suits you.

DESIGNING THE SHRINE

To begin assembling your shrine, select images that you want to use. Spread them out on your desk or table, to get an idea of which items will fit best.

In the sample shrine, I started with maps representing the places that my ancestors' moved from and where they emigrated to. So, in my case, I have maps representing Ireland, eastern Canada, and New England.

Going from left to right, I placed the maps in date order. The oldest ancestors represented on my shrine came from Ireland, so that map that is farthest to the left as I assembled my shrine. All of my ancestors eventually moved to Massachusetts, so that is at the far right side of my shrine.

If you have journal entries by an ancestor, it would be appropriate to use a photocopy of that beneath a photo of that ancestor. Generally, people are more interested in seeing the person's handwriting than actually reading the words. Later, the viewer may want to read the actual journal; it's not necessary to put very much of a journal page on a shrine.

Also, you may choose to focus on the town where your ancestors lived. The library or bookstore may have books featuring photos and stories of that town's history. Photocopies of these pages can be ideal for your shrine. Just remember that this is a shrine; it's more for people to study casually rather than read.

If you do not have an appropriate background for your family history shrine, you could always use pages from an antique or vintage book. Of course, choose a book that is already falling apart. Antique shops and book dealers sometimes keep these in a box underneath a table or otherwise tucked away.

In New England, I could usually buy books for this purpose for under \$2 per book.

If the paper is very old, sturdy, and not too yellowed, it may already be on rag content paper. In that case, you can use the actual paper if you'd like to. However, if the pages are dry, brittle, and generally falling apart, it's wise to photocopy them for your shrine.

See Appendix B for scanned pages from an antique book. You can make copies and use them as backgrounds if you like.

As you place photos and other images on your background, try arranging them in various ways for the most pleasing design. Remember that there should be some logic to this arrangement, so that it makes sense to the viewer. Cluster the photos in family groups, or place them chronologically, or by location, so that people understand how they fit together.

Be sure to include your pedigree chart or family tree somewhere in your shrine, so that people can see how the different people are related.



Preview the finished shrine

Once you have a design that suits you, you may want to tack the pieces together lightly using a glue stick. (If you have a glue stick with the same kind of temporary adhesive that is on Post-it notes, you can rearrange the pieces until you get a design that pleases you.)

Then, prop the shrine so that you can look at it from a few feet away. See if it still looks good. Ideally, you'll want a shrine that looks interesting from a distance so that people are attracted to it.

If you are not pleased with your design, carefully separate the pieces and try again. If you're not happy with this design but can't figure out what's wrong, here are a couple of tricks: First, turn shrine upside-down and see how it looks. One or more problem areas may seem to leap out.

If turning the shrine upside-down doesn't help, hold it up to a mirror so that you are seeing it backwards. You may spot areas that need improvement. Then, you can add things, remove items, or simply rearranged the pieces.

Final assembly

Once you are pleased with the design, it's time to trim the paper. You may also need to trim the support that will go underneath your shrine so that it stands up on its own.

Now, use your permanent glue or gel medium to fasten everything in place.

If you are using gel medium, be sure to let it dry completely before adding another layer. Generally, gel medium doesn't breathe. This means that air will not get through to the lower layers to help them dry. For the best results and to avoid mildew, use the gel medium as thinly as possible and allow at least 10 to 20 minutes for each layer to dry.

If you are working on a two-sided shrine, wait at least an hour before turning the shrine over to apply the second side. If you are working with watercolor paper or a very

absorbent poster paper as a support, water from the gel medium or glue can be absorbed by the support and stay damp for quite awhile.

Seal the shrine

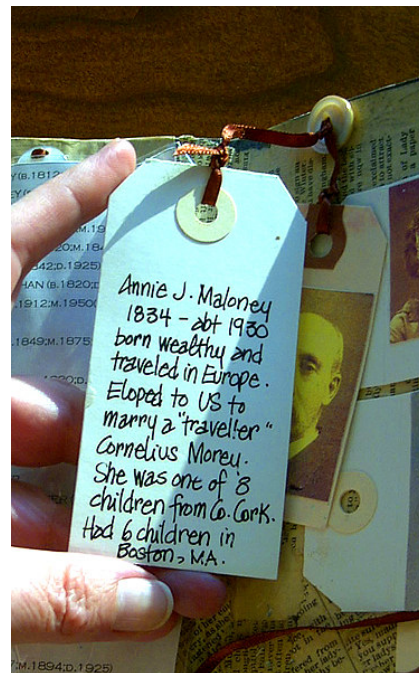
After the shrine is assembled and dry, it's smart to coat the finished shrine with a layer of gel medium or a paper-friendly varnish. This gives it a water resistant finish so that you don't need to worry when it's being admired by small children who may have sticky or dirty hands. You can sponge off dirt without damaging the shrine.



Optional embellishments

Finally, decide if you would like to embellish the shrine.

On one side of my sample shrine, I have taken copies of the same photographs that I used on the map side, and fastened them to tags and small envelopes. I used gel medium as my glue.



On the back of each tag, I have written a little information -- and perhaps a brief anecdote -- about that person. This makes that person seem more real to later generations.

In some cases, I attached part of the tag directly to the shrine using gel medium as the glue. It's important to be sure that the tags are well attached since they will be handled a lot.



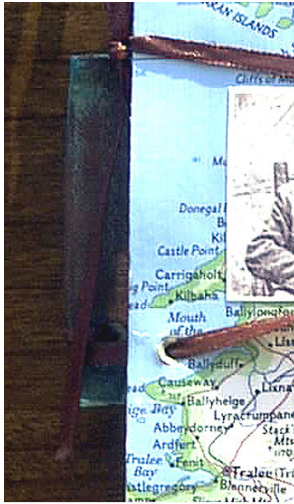
In other cases, I sewed antique buttons at the top of the shrine. I always sew the buttons back to back, one on either side of the shrine. This prevents the thread from pulling through the paper. You can hide the knot by pushing it behind one of the buttons when you finished your sewing.

I hung the tags from the buttons using one-eighth inch satin ribbon. I chose brown ribbon to continue the antique look. Other colors may suit you better.



More photos can be "hidden" in small envelopes

Because I had additional photos that I did not use on the shrine, I added a small envelope suspended from a ribbon. Inside the envelope I tucked extra photos so that viewers would feel that they had discovered a surprise when they opened the envelope.



Screen + grommets + ribbon
as closures

When I was designing the sample shrine, I added a folded piece of copper mesh screen that had been antiqued with verdigris. Then I used small eyelets or grommets to feed extra ribbon through. This made it possible to fold up the shrine and wrap a ribbon around it to store it flat.

However, while the copper mesh is an interesting detail, there weren't enough other metal embellishments for it to work, visually.

To finish the ends of your ribbons so that they don't fray, put a dot of clear glue at the end of each ribbon. Or, you can use a product called Fray Check, sold in the notions aisle at most fabric stores.



Shrine, folded
1/8" ribbon holds it closed

Optional copies

Now that your shrine is completed and ready to display, consider making color photocopies of the shrine. You can trim each photocopy, glue it to a sturdy support base such as poster board, add a few embellishments such as ribbon, and give this as a gift to another family member.

Display your shrine

Many people like to display these shrines on top of the TV, in the dining room, in the kitchen, or in any room where visitors will see the shrine and have a chance to enjoy it.



Your new family history shrines should provide years of enjoyment, and help future generations understand their heritage. It's a great gift for your family.

APPENDIX A – FINDING FAMILY PHOTOS

Start by asking your family

Generally, someone in every family has old family photos. Often, many members of your family will have a few photos, and one or two people will have boxes of them.

Start by asking your immediate family if they have ever seen old photos of your ancestors. Focus on older members of your family. Many of them may have inherited family photos.

There is a cliché in family history that is often accurate: older, single women in the family have often had the time to work on genealogy or at least take charge of the old family photos, the family Bible, and perhaps journals by some of your ancestors.

Frequently, relatives are reluctant to let go of these photos. If this happens, you have several options.

First of all, ask if the relative has a computer scanner. Many families have them. Ask if they will scan the photos and send you a CD, or post the photos online so that you can download them.

Photos should be scanned at resolutions of at least 150 to 300 pixels per inch. This resolution provides an image that will print well and look like the original.

If the family member has a scanner but no time, you may need scan the pictures in their home or office.

If a family member lives far away or does not have a scanner, ask if they can take the pictures to a scanning service to have them copied as digital files. Many copy shops offer this service.

Another option is to have the family member take pictures -- digital or film -- of the family photos. You can then use the negatives or the files to make your own prints.

Perhaps the family member would be more comfortable having someone else -- perhaps someone they know better -- take charge of this project.

Keep working with the family member until you find a solution. You may need to be a little bossy about this. Frequently, people know that they have the photos, but they don't want to admit that they aren't sure where the photos are.

Once you have the photos, or copies of them, it's important to identify who these people are. If you aren't sure, start asking older relatives and neighbors of your older relatives if they recognize people in the pictures. Be sure to write this information in pencil on the back of each photo. (Ink can bleed through, and pencil will not run if the photos become damp while in storage.)

Also, once you have copies of the photos, try to put these files online at your own website. At the very least, you can get a free website for this purpose at a host such as GeoCities. Then, your cousins can go to the website and download their own copies.

However, if your family has moved often, not kept in touch, or there is some other reason why you are not able to find family photos, you may need to do more looking.

Check with online researchers

If your family doesn't seem to have any photos or other records, use Google or another search engine to find your more distant cousins.

Before you do this, however, print or create a worksheet to keep track of your efforts. You can find several free worksheets online, and they can be time-savers. One resource is the PBS Ancestors Series webpage from KBYU.

Another superb free source is FamilySearch.org, the LDS Church site. (You'll need the free program, Adobe Reader, to view & print these forms.)

Or, you can make your own form with notebook paper.

For this part of your search, you can use regular, lined notebook paper. You'll want a wide left-hand column, and at least five or six narrower columns to the right.

In the left column, list all of the surnames that you're researching. These are the last names of your parents, your grandparents, and so on. Remember to list your mother's maiden name, her mother's maiden name, etc.

(Note alternate spellings, too. For example, my Molony ancestors' names can be spelled Maloney, Moloney, and so on. My Maguire ancestors also used the McGuire and MacGuire spellings.)

In the right columns, enter headings that indicate where you've searched, such as Google, Ancestry.com, Genealogy.com. Use a dash when there is nothing there. Use a check mark when there is a page that's helpful. Use a highlighter or other mark when you've left a message in a forum or on a message board.

At Google, enter your surname and the word "genealogy", and see which websites exist.

Some of the sites will be forums at places such as Ancestry.com, etc. Post a notice on free message boards for your surnames. Here are a few forums and message boards to check: Genealogy.com | Ancestry.com | GenealogyRegister.com | Family Search Collaboration Lists (LDS).

Do NOT sign up for any online service that costs money. This is not necessary at this stage of your research. In fact, you may never need a paid genealogy service; most of what they offer is available free online, or at your local Family History Center.

APPENDIX B – Scan of pages in the 1819 Farmer's Almanac

You can use a photocopier to enlarge these pages for shrine backgrounds.

1819. FEBRUARY hath 28 Days.

ASTRONOMICAL CALCULATIONS.


Days	in d.	m.	Days	in d.	m.	Days	in d.	m.
1	12	11	52	13	22	24	1	25
2	13	54	15	26	2	27	6	6
3	15	56	17	28	3	28	9	7
4	17	57	19	30	4	29	11	8
5	19	59	21	31	5	30	13	9
6	21	0	23	1	6	31	15	10

☽ First Quarter 1st day, 3h. 40m. evening.
 ☾ Full Moon 10th day, 1h. 31m. morning.
 ☽ Last Quarter 17th day, 3h. 56m. evening.
 ☾ New Moon 24th day, 7h. 9m. morning.

W. D.	rise	L. D.	set	rise	L. D.	set	rise	L. D.	set
1 Mond.	7 6 5	9 48 0	5 14	7 4	48	neck	5 53	5 53	5 53
2 Tuesd.	7 4 5	9 53 0	5 14	8 5	53	neck	0 50	6 18	6 18
3 Wedn.	7 3 5	9 54 1	0 14	9 6	21	arms	1 55	7 56	7 56
4 Thurs.	7 2 5	9 56 1	2 14	10 7	11	arms	2 57	7 56	7 56
5 Friday	7 1 5	9 58 1	4 14	11 8	1	arms	4 0	8 46	8 46
6 Satur.	7 0 5	10 0 1	6 14	12 8	33	breast	5 0	9 38	9 38
7 SUN.	6 58 6	10 4 1	10 14	13 9	43	breast	6 31	11 17	11 17
8 Mond.	6 57 6	10 6 1	12 15	14 10	52	breast	7 4	12 5	12 5
9 Tuesd.	6 56 6	10 8 1	14 15	15 11	19	heart	8 5	13 17	13 17
10 Wedn.	6 54 6	10 12 1	16 15	17 0	4	heart	9 47	0 49	0 49
11 Thurs.	6 53 6	10 14 1	18 15	18 0	4	belly	10 52	1 32	1 32
12 Friday	6 52 6	10 16 1	20 15	19 0	4	belly	12 5	2 14	2 14
13 Satur.	6 50 6	10 20 1	22 15	20 1	11	rein	14 5	3 56	3 56
14 SUN.	6 49 6	10 22 1	24 15	21 2	11	rein	16 5	5 40	5 40
15 Mond.	6 48 6	10 24 1	26 15	22 2	2	secrets	18 5	7 26	7 26
16 Tuesd.	6 46 6	10 28 1	28 15	23 3	41	secrets	20 5	9 14	9 14
17 Wedn.	6 45 6	10 30 1	30 15	24 4	31	secrets	22 5	11 1	11 1
18 Thurs.	6 44 6	10 32 1	32 15	25 5	26	knights	24 5	12 11	12 11
19 Friday	6 42 6	10 36 1	34 15	26 6	2	knights	26 5	13 11	13 11
20 Satur.	6 41 6	10 38 1	36 15	27 7	1	knights	28 5	14 11	14 11
21 SUN.	6 40 6	10 40 1	38 15	28 8	3	knights	30 5	15 11	15 11
22 Mond.	6 38 6	10 44 1	40 15	29 9	3	knights	32 5	16 11	16 11
23 Tuesd.	6 37 6	10 46 1	42 15	30 10	3	knights	34 5	17 11	17 11
24 Wedn.	6 36 6	10 48 1	44 15	31 11	3	knights	36 5	18 11	18 11
25 Thurs.	6 34 6	10 52 1	46 15	32 12	3	knights	38 5	19 11	19 11
26 Friday	6 33 6	10 54 2	0 13	33 1	9	head	40 5	20 11	20 11
27 Satur.	6 31 6	10 58 2	2 13	34 2	1	head	42 5	21 11	21 11
28 SUN.	6 30 6	11 0 2	4 13	35 3	1	head	44 5	22 11	22 11

Venus will be morning star till October 9th; thence evening star to the end of the year.—Jupiter will be morning star through the year.

FEBRUARY, second Month. 1819.



The snowy flakes bedim the sky,
And whiten every object round;
Swift o'er the plain the cutters fly,
And the merry bells resound.

Courty, Aspects, Holidays, Weather, &c.

FARMER'S CALENDAR.

Now, if you want time to pass away, go, buy an old horse or watch; give your note for 60 days and you will be gratified. Where is the benefit in allowing young idleness to swagger around with a paltry old watch in his pocket and a seal as big as a kitchen's head, puffing his segar like a wind-broken horse? Or, if it is passing strange that we should let the wholesome habits of good old times pass away, and be forgotten. Send your boys to school and see that they are at least something at home. The barn-door—the litter—the fall & the curry-comb are not to be neglected. 'To be sure it is well enough, and indeed it is very proper to have recreation; but to have nothing else doing will ultimately bring ruin. Either the body or mind must be engaged. honest industry, for idleness is like going—take nothing else and—your're gone.

Now is your time to see that your women shall not complain of wood-house be well filled, that they need not be obliged to buy out their brains over brush, old punk and cow dung.

In old Morda's opinion of Martin's Young Men's history, many white you may.

APPENDIX C - TEACHING THIS CLASS

If you are going to teach this as a class, teach it in at least two different sessions.

First, you'll need to show your students the supplies they'll need, such as the kinds of paper or plexiglass supports that they might like. If they are new to arts and crafts, show them what a jar of gel medium looks like, with a sponge brush.

More importantly, you may need to do some one-on-one work to help each student locate family photos, paper memorabilia, and other items such as a pedigree chart. Be sure that each student has enough supplies to create a meaningful family history shrine.

Unless all of your students have a good supply of family photos, allow *at least* two weeks between this class and when the students began to assemble their family history shrines.

Sometimes, students have photos but don't have time to prepare them. It may be wise to meet once at Kinko's where you may have access to scanners, computers, and color photocopying machines. Together, the class can prepare their photos for use in shrines.

When you teach the final workshop -- designing and assembling the shrine -- allow at least two to three hours for this class. It can even be a full-day class.

Also, I generally bring extra supplies such as extra sponge brushes, ribbon, a few buttons, and maybe a grommet kit plus other embellishments. If I have an antique or vintage book that can be torn up, I bring this for students who want to use the paper for their backgrounds.

Because gel medium and other glues can be messy, have each student cover his or her work area with newspaper or a drop cloth. It's good to have paper towels on hand for cleanup as well. If the students want to take their sponge brushes home, have a few baggies for them to use so the brushes stay moist but don't stick to other things on the way home. (At home, brushes can be kept wrapped and stored in the freezer for a week or so.)

Also, allow time after class for students to clean up; usually, there'll be scraps of paper on the floor in addition to the mess on top of the desk.

At the end of the class, students enjoy a show-and-tell time to display their shrines. This can also provide ideas for additional shrines they may want to make, later.

Generally, this is a really fun class to teach if the students are properly prepared. You'll be amazed at how diverse the shrines are.

However, if your students are not able to find family photos, or arrive at the class without adequate supplies, don't worry about it. Teach this as a demonstration, because most of these students will go home and make the shrines on their own when they do have adequate supplies. It's important to teach them each step as clearly as possible, and to encourage them to take notes so that they can complete their shrines at home.

This class is especially successful if it is taught around September or October, so that students can make these shrines to give to family members during the holiday season.