

How to Create a Timeline

A timeline lists the events in an ancestor's life in chronological order. This is a helpful tool to analyze the information you have collected, to help pinpoint social history events related to your ancestor's life, and is a good first step toward writing your ancestor's life.

This method can be used either for a handwritten timeline or one created on the computer:

- ▶ In the far left column of the paper, you will chronologically list years, beginning with the year your ancestor was born and ending with his/her death date (or the current year if he/she is still living).
- ▶ Create a narrow column just to the right of the first column and, beginning with the second line, number sequentially beginning with the number "1." This column will show the age of your ancestor in any given year. This column is particularly helpful when entering marriage dates and birth dates of children. You will be able to see, at a quick glance, the age of your ancestor when different life events occurred.
- ▶ The remaining space on each line will be used to enter life events. Fill in everything you know: marriage dates, migration dates, immigration, birth dates of children, death dates of parents, real estate purchases, military service...the list can go on, but you get the idea.
- ▶ Your ancestors were affected by the world around them. Incorporate local, world, and social events that affected their lives. These pertinent dates can be added to the timeline and may help to explain why your ancestor made a decision he/she made. Do not list extraneous events that are irrelevant, but do include those events that impacted your ancestors or the community in which they lived.
- ▶ As you review your documents chronologically and add pieces of information to the timeline, keep in mind the idea that your ancestor was a piece of a larger whole. The timeline will help you to keep your ancestor in context with his/her community.