

What We Have Found – Family History Workshop #2

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Below is a suggested framework for questions to be raised during an oral interview. Please note that some of these questions are patterned along the lines of those found in Bob Greene and D.G. Fulford's *To Our Children's Children: Preserving Family Histories for Generations to Come* (New York: Doubleday, 1993). It should be remembered that this is a starting point for your own development of questions – by no means is this exhaustive.

1.) The details of your family.

A. *The category of family members.*

1. What were the names of your parents? What were the names of your grandparents? Could also name generations before them?
2. Where were your parents and other ancestors born? Did they come to Genesee County from other areas?
3. What are the names of your siblings, if any?
4. What are the names of your children and grandchildren?
5. What are the names of aunts, uncles, and cousins? Did you see any of these people on a regular basis?

B. *The category of family beliefs and habits.*

1. Did your family have political beliefs that you especially remember?
2. Did your family have religious beliefs?
3. Did your family go on vacations?
4. Did your family hold reunions?
5. Would you describe your family as warm and loving? Was it more formal and stern? Were family members emotionally demonstrative or reserved?
6. Did your family have pets? Were those pets treated as family members?

C. *What was the social and economic status of your family?*

1. Did your family enjoy prosperity or hardship? Did everyone in your family experience these economic realities in the same way?

2. Did you have less than others in your community? Did you have less or more than your relatives?
- D. *Stories you have heard about your family.*
1. What stories stand out about your parents and grandparents?
 2. What stories stand out about other relatives?
 3. How were prospective members of your family seen, e.g. a prospective spouse's initial meeting with your family? Were spouses accepted as family members?
 4. Were some family members seen as a source of family pride? Are there others who were viewed as family embarrassments?
 5. Are there any family stories in particular that stand out?
- 2.) Personal family matters.
- A. *Describe the physical appearance of family members.*
1. How did family members dress? Are there particular clothes, jewelry, or even perfumes or colognes associated with family members?
 2. Did some family members suffer from disabilities or chronic illnesses?
 3. Did your family have a family physician? Was there a family dentist?
 4. Did your family use home remedies?
- B. *Did your family have superstitions?*
- 3.) Physical and spatial questions regarding your family's home.
- A. *How was the household defined? How did the household function?*
1. Has your family included relatives outside of parents and children?
 2. Did your family have servants and/or boarders?
 3. When did the family first acquire new technologies, ranging from radios and phonographs through computers? What effect did new technologies have on your family?
- B. *How do you remember your home?*
1. Did your house feel comfortable? Was there enough room? Did your family rent an apartment or home – or did they own their own home?
 2. Can you remember the specifics of each room in your home?
 3. Was your family on friendly terms with neighbors?
 4. What were the rules of your home? For example, how late could you be on the telephone?
 5. Was your home a place to meet with friends and relatives?
 6. What was your favorite part of the house?

4.) Economic Issues.

A. *How did family members earn a living?*

1. What kinds of jobs did family members engage in?
2. Was any of your family in business for themselves?
3. Did members of your family have a profession that was respected in the community?
4. Did family members remain in the same job? Did some change jobs?
5. When were children expected to work?

5.) Religious and Social Practices.

A. *Which churches or other kinds of religious groups did your family belong to?*

1. How involved were they?
2. How were religious holidays celebrated? Were there family disputes about how to celebrate those holidays?
3. Did people of different faiths marry each other? If so, how were children raised?

B. *Which secular organizations did family members belong to?*

1. How involved were they?

6.) Education Issues.

A. *Was formal education important in your family?*

1. Were there different expectations for boys and girls?
2. Which schools did family members attend?
3. Which family members underwent apprenticeship training in lieu of academic training?
4. Did family members have a favorite subject? Did they have a favorite teacher?
5. What extracurricular activities did family members engage in while in high school and/or college?
6. What are your favorite memories of school days? What are your least favorite memories of school days?

7.) Participation in Politics and Political Ideas.

A. *Which political parties did family members belong to?*

1. Did family members work on a political campaign?
2. Did family members run for office?
3. Did family members vote regularly?
4. What did family members see as the most pressing local problems? How did they view national problems?

B. *Did any family members have strong political ideas?*

1. Did any family members display the American flag regularly? Did any family members display other flags regularly?
2. Did family members change their political views at different times of their lives?
3. Were any family members' political activists? If so, when and for what cause or causes?
4. What do family members think America's greatest moment was? What do family members think America's lowest moment was?
5. Were there any political leaders that family members especially admired – or disliked?

8.) Views of, and experiences in, the military.

A. *What military experiences did family members undergo?*

1. What family members served? When did they serve? What was their rank? Were any of them wounded or injured in the line of duty? Were any family members killed in action, or held as a prisoner of war?
2. Were family members drafted, or were they volunteers?
3. What significant events occurred for family members in the service?
4. What do family members remember about military service?
5. Were there family members who resisted military service?
6. Did any family members make the military a career?