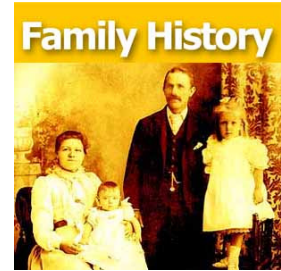# Family History: Genealogy Made Easy
with Lisa Louise Cooke
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Welcome to this step-by-step series for beginning genealogists—and more experienced ones who want to brush up or learn something new. I first ran this series in 2008-09. So many people have asked about it, I'm bringing it back in weekly segments.

Episode 33: Organize Your Genealogy Files, Part 2

In our last episode (http://lisalouisecooke.com/?p=6311) I shared how I went from disorganized procrastinator to proactive organizer after a few hard knocks. I hope you will agree now that organization doesn't have to come naturally: it can be learned and practiced!

I also introduced you to a system that I developed about a decade ago, and have leaned on ever since to keep my computer's hard drive organized as I have added hundreds if not thousands of source documents to it as I went about my genealogy research. Even now I can retrieve exactly the document I need quickly and easily…and you will be able to as well!

In this episode I'm going to pick up where we left off, at the GENEALOGY folder on our C: drive. So fire up your computer and rev up that mouse because we have some organizing to do!

Create the File Folders

Today it's back to our computer's hard drive. Open Windows Explorer. Now using your mouse you need to navigate your way to your C drive.

This system is going to be based on the surnames in your family tree. I currently have 32 surname folders on my computer. Start by creating about a dozen of the surnames folders that you tend to spend the most time on. Don't worry about creating a folder for every surname right now. Down the road when you find a record for a surname that you don't have a folder for you can just create the folder right then and there.

Now click on one of the surname folders that you know you have digital records for – now we're going to create folders for each of the major categories of records that you may come across.

I've made a half dozen surname folders for the surnames I work on the most, and now I'm going to set up folders in the surname folder for all the different kinds of records I have.

And these folders really follow along with so many of the topics we've covered here on the podcast. Examples of record folders are Births, Deaths, Census, Marriages, Land, Military, Newspapers, Occupation, Wills & Estates.

So here's what the folder structure looks like:
C: - GENEALOGY

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        - BILLS TREE
        - LISAS TREE
                - BURKETT
                        - BIRTHS
                        - CENSUS
                        - DEATHS
                        - LAND
                        - LOCATIONS
                        - MARRIAGE
                        - MILITARY
                        - NEWSPAPER
                        - OCCUPATIONS
                        - WILLS & ESTATES
                - NIKOLOWSKI
                - SPORAN
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So now that the initial Burkett folders are set up, and I say initial because again I'll be adding more as I do my research and find new types of records, I'm now going to set up the same 9 files in the other surname folders I created.

Name Your Files

Once you have these initial records folders created within each of your first surname folders it's time to start filing your records.

File Naming Conventions:
       "1920 Russell Springfield OH" or "SOURCE 721 1920 Russell Springfield OH"

If you have digital records sitting in a folder or on your C drive or even on your computer's desk top, now's the time to file them in their appropriate folders. File them all now and you'll very quickly get the knack for where thingsgo. If you come across a record type that we haven't created a folder for yet, go ahead and create it. But just be sure that it doesn't fall under one of the other categories.

I strongly recommend creating a LOCATIONS folder in your GENEALOGY folder. Inside the LOCATIONS folder you would then create folders for each major location where ancestors with that surname would have lived.

If I had lots of location records for several different counties, I might create county folders. So I file all the maps, postcards, county histories and other information about Ohio in the Ohio folder, and the same goes for Indiana and California. Down the road if it turns out you have a really large number of documents, or you start finding relatives in other counties, you can always create county folders, or more detailed records folder and then file the documents accordingly.

Filing Photographs

I've given this a lot of thought over the years and have found that what works best for me is NOT to include photos in these files. There are genealogical RECORDS files, and records are not the same as photos.

Filing Structure:

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C: - GENEALOGY
        - PHOTOS
                - BILLS FAMILY
                - LISA FAMILY
                        - BURKETT
                                - CHARLES AND ALFREDA BURKETT
                                        1940_Alfreda_Louise.jpg
                                - CHARLES AND ELLEN BURKETTE
                                - CONOVER AND VIOLA BURKET
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Things can get very confusing very quickly with marriages and maiden names and all that. But this system addresses that in a way that's easy to remember. It's based on how the census works. Census records are filed by head of household, and that's what I do for photographs. I usually include the husband and wife's name in my folder name because often sons are named after fathers like in the case of my Burketts, and also there can be second marriages and so you'd have a folder for the ancestor and their first spouse and then that same ancestor and their second spouse.

I really like to think in terms of families, because in the end we aren't researching an individual ancestor all by themselves. Rather we are researching an ancestor within the context of his familial relationships. And filing in this manner keeps that at the forefront of our thinking.

Photos are filed by family under the head of the household. Both male and female ancestors are filed within their parent's folders prior to marriage, and in their own family folder under the family surname after marriage. You may occasionally have photos with several families in them with different surnames. But often times they are taken at a family's home. And in that case I file them under the family in whose home they were taken. You can always file a copy under the other families as well if you like. I'm not trying to dictate every single possibility here, but rather give you a process and system that works for the majority of your needs, but that is customizable based on your specific needs.

Now you may also be wondering how this system for photos fits in with geo-tagging photos. I recently covered geo-tagging in Genealogy Gems Premium episode 25 (http://lisalouisecooke.com/2012/04/premium-episode-25-geo-tagging-with-ken-watson/). For more information on how to become a Premium member, click here: http://lisalouisecooke.com/premium-membership/.

Well, we have covered a lot of ground in this episode, and I hope that will give this hard drive filing system a try!