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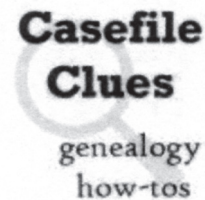
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Ready to go?



BY MICHAEL JOHN NEILL

The Editor's Introduction:

I recently noticed Michael John Neill's new venture with his *Casefile Clues*, which looked like something I might find useful in my quest to better understand how to do U.S. genealogy, and became a subscriber. Among the first issues was the following article, which I found thought-provoking. So I asked for Mr. Neill's permission to reprint it in SAG, which he gave me.

Here comes the article *Ready to Go?*

This week's *Casefile Clues* originally appeared in the *Ancestry Daily News* on 15 November 1999¹ and takes a look at the future instead of our typical trip into the past.

As morbid as it sounds, when I go I want my death certificate filled out accurately and my mother's maiden name (Ufkes) spelled correctly in my obituary. It would be deeply ironic if such information were incorrect in the final records of a genealogist. However, a family historian needs to think about more than having a correct death certificate and obituary.

If, heaven forbid, you were to die in the next few days, what would happen to your genealogical materials? Can you even locate them? Could anyone else? Are they somewhat organized? Could your spouse or someone else step in and figure out what you were doing and what was what?

If you live far from family members, do you have important informa-

tion where it can easily be located? Would someone be tempted to "dump" your genealogy information rather than ship it to a person or a place that would take it? The author barely had twenty-four hours to go through his grandmother's home in Florida and decide what to ship home, what to donate, and what to throw out.

Is there anyone who would even want your collection of information? Are your materials in such a disorganized state that anyone would even bother with them? As you have researched, have you indicated where you obtained copies of various papers, or have you gathered and piled? Would someone receiving your files have any idea where you obtained your information? Or would your materials be simply a collection of photocopies, printouts, and digital scans from unknown sources?

Have you done something with your genealogical information besides collecting more of it? Are your photographs, newspaper clippings, and other materials inventoried and organized in a fashion that someone else could determine what your collection contained?

Do you have a preference for what will happen to your materials when you are no longer among the living? You may need to stipulate such information in your will or estate planning. And remember that someone settling your estate is really more concerned with dealing with finances than with a box of papers or a disk full of information. Do you really trust and expect your executor to handle your genealogical materials

the way you want them to be handled?

Find out if the person or group you wish to have your materials actually wants them. Some libraries and archives are facing space constraints and may have to turn down material, especially that which is undocumented and unorganized. This type of material has a greater chance of being refused. If your material is organized, have you considered digitizing it as a way to preserve it for future generations? And remember that undocumented information is still undocumented even if digitized. You may have to find other family members besides your children to whom to give your information and files – this may mean splitting up your collection of material.

Have you attempted to preserve old letters or other handwritten materials by transcribing them and donating copies to relevant libraries or archives? This is an excellent way to preserve such records. The transcription should be done accurately, carefully, and thoughtfully. Make certain to use archival safe materials in which to store these relics of your past.

Are you the only one who knows the identity of individuals in certain pictures? Are you the only one who knows what family member made or purchased the antique dresser or table that sits in your home? Share this information. You don't have to give the furniture away just yet, but let others know about it so that its history does not disappear when you are gone.

Have you written or compiled a documented family history and distributed copies on high quality paper to interested persons and relevant libraries? Are you preserving your information in other ways besides electronic media? It won't last forever and there's little guarantee that the file format you use today will be readable in twenty years. Are you sharing your data responsibly in an attempt to preserve it?

It is not just death we should be concerned about. What if your home burned? What if there was a natural disaster? Have you shared some of your information with others so that re-obtaining it would not be onerous? Are there any personal family artifacts that you may wish to store somewhere besides your home? Are some of your materials at risk of being flooded in your basement?

No one likes to think of that time when they will no longer be among the living. Yet it happens to all of us. Genealogists should leave behind more than boxes of unorganized papers and digital media. No one can get their material organized in one day. Start slowly, one family at a time to make the process more manageable.

Consider too that simply submitting information to Ancestry.com or

another commercial site does not necessarily guarantee long-term preservation of your information. Companies go out of business and web-sites go down.

All of us need to give some thought to these issues to ensure that the genealogical information we have worked so hard to collect actually outlives us. There is not necessarily one answer, but do not let your family history work die with you.

Remember: Genealogist—preserve thyself.

Footnote:

1) Michael John Neill, "Ready to Go," *Ancestry Daily News*, 15 November 1999, accessed 20 March 2010, <http://www.rootdig.com/adn/readytogo.html>.

About the author:

Michael John Neill is a well-known genealogist and lecturer on the local and national level. He lives in Illinois and is a mathematics teacher.

He presents himself like this: "I write *Casefile Clues* a weekly genealogy newsletter focusing on genealogy research methodology and interpretation. Every week I look at a record or a problem from one of the many families of my children scat-



Michael John Neill.

tered across the U.S. and Europe. *Casefile Clues* does not try to "scoop" the latest news, rather I focus on using and interpreting records. My goal is to give you ideas to help you with your own research. Since 1995, I have written over 600 genealogy columns for both *Ancestry* and *Eastman's Online Newsletter*. My new columns for *Casefile Clues* are distributed only through direct e-mail."

To find out more visit his web site at <http://www.casefileclues.com/> or search for *Casefile Clues* at *Facebook*. Mr. Neill's children have 1/16 part of their ancestors from Sweden, from Östergötland.

The Royal Wedding



On June 19, 2010, Crown Princess Victoria will marry Mr. Daniel Westling of Ockelbo, Sweden. Mr. Westling has been a gym owner, and was the private trainer for the Crown Princess, who turned out to be the love of his life. The couple got engaged in February 2009, and now it is time for the big wedding in Stockholm Cathedral (*Storkyrkan*). At this occasion Mr. Westling will become Prince Daniel, duke of Västergötland, as the Crown Princess is already the Duchess of Västergötland. The newlyweds will reside at the Haga Palace in northern Stockholm.

It might also be noted that Princess Madeleine has broken her engagement to Mr. Jonas Bergström.