



STORING & CARING

for Your
Genealogy Data

THOMAS JAY KEMP

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Cover Image: Texas State Library & Archives Commission

About GenealogyBank

[GenealogyBank](#) is a leading online genealogical resource from NewsBank, inc. GenealogyBank's exclusive newspaper archive features over 7,000+ small town and big city historical newspapers across the U.S. from 1690 to present day to help you discover and document your family story. You'll find births, marriages, engagement notices, hometown news, obituaries and much more! [Search today](#) and get a glimpse into the triumphs, troubles and everyday experiences of your American ancestors.

NewsBank, inc. has been one of the world's premier information providers for more than 35 years. Through partnerships with the American Antiquarian Society, Wisconsin Historical Society and more than 3,000 publishers, NewsBank is uniquely qualified to offer some of the most comprehensive genealogical information available – and to provide new content regularly.

About the Author

Thomas Jay Kemp is the Director of Genealogy Products at GenealogyBank. Tom is an internationally known librarian and archivist. He is the author of over 45 genealogy books and hundreds of articles about genealogy and family history. Tom previously served as the Chair of the National Council of Library & Information Associations (Washington, D.C.) and as Library Director of both the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. He began his career in 1963 as the Assistant to the Librarian in the Genealogy & Local History Room at the Ferguson Library (Stamford, Connecticut).

STORING AND CARING FOR YOUR GENEALOGY DATA

Genealogists gather a lot of information.

Family photographs, documents, research notes and heirlooms. These items quickly grow from a desk drawer to filling multiple file cabinets. With ready access to scanners and the Internet, we also have acquired hundreds if not thousands of digital files.

How do we best care for this data?
Once and done.

Storing Your Original Family Papers and Records

Your task is to put these records in archival boxes, acid-free file folders and mylar sleeves to protect and preserve your old photos, letters and documents.

There are several archival supply companies that you can order these materials from, companies like: Light Impressions, Hollinger Corporation or University Products. Visit the Special Collections Department or University Archives at a university in your area and they can show you the archival supplies that they use.

TIP

These archival products are generally not sold in neighborhood stores. Products in those stores might have a similar look to authentic archival supplies, and even use sales terms like “archival,” “preservation” or “secure”—but you will want to look closely and make sure that you purchase these resources from an archival supply house.

Notice that the boxes come in all shapes and sizes. You will want to order a selection of these so that you can group all of your family material together. There are specially-sized boxes for family heirlooms. Use the narrower boxes to house smaller collections of family papers.

Ideally you will want to put each item in a separate acid-free file folder. Family letters could be filed separately in file folders by date or kept as a group. You will want to open the letters and unfold them so that the pressure at the creases will not continue to promote acid deterioration from the paper itself.

Label your folders in pencil so that you can easily sort and arrange them.

Be sure not to overfill these boxes. The folders should stand with enough room to easily remove them as needed. If there are not enough family records to prevent the folders from sagging in the box, take an extra acid-free file folder, curl it, and insert it in the box. The spring-like effect of that folder will hold the rest of the folders rigidly in place in the box without putting extra pressure on the material.

Depending on how much material you have, genealogists will find it easiest to sort these materials alphabetically by the name of the principal person. You can also arrange these by family surname and then by family groups and by household. Arrange these in alphabetical order by the name of the husband.

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Photographs should be stored in archival mylar sleeves. These pages come in all shapes and arrangements so that you can lay out your photos placing each one in the best-sized pocket on the page. These pages also have separate pockets where you can insert the caption and description of each photograph.

These photograph protective sleeves usually come with 3-ring holes punched along the left side. Archivists will sometimes put these in binders and then store the binder flat in a box. You do not want to stand the binders upright on a shelf as over time the mylar pages will sag from gravity and the weight of the photographs. The photographs along the bottom edge are then in danger of being damaged.



Source: Light Impressions

I recommend that you store the mylar plastic sleeve pages in an acid-free folder, standing in a box with your other documents and papers. This is a practical way to organize your family papers. Remember to not overfill each folder, keep the folders snug, and don't overfill the box.

Preserving Your Digital Data

You want to create multiple copies of your digital data and put it on multiple sites to ensure that your data will survive any system failures.

You accomplish that by publishing your data in whole or in part on multiple platforms.

Paper

There are dozens of family history software programs that genealogists use to organize their research. These programs make it easy to incorporate photographs, research notes and commentary into one family tree that can easily be printed in whole or in part and shared with others.

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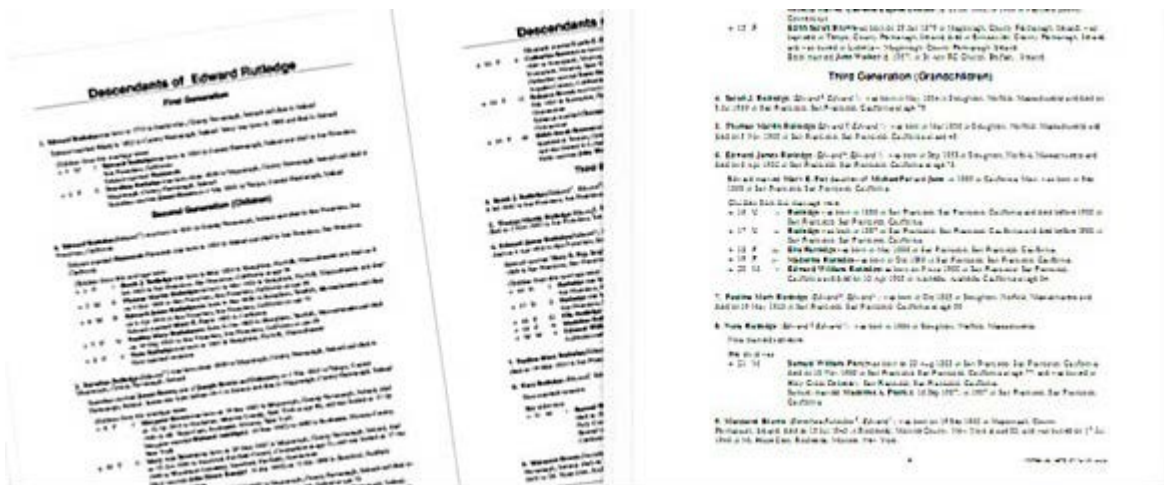
Programs like:

[Legacy Family Tree](#): both free and \$ version

[RootsMagic](#): both free and \$ version

[Ancestral Quest](#): both free and \$ version

With any one of these programs it is easy to record your information and then, with a few clicks, print out the standard family tree charts or reports to communicate the family's history to the other members of the family.



Credit: Thomas Jay Kemp

These programs easily prepare and print out family history reports that name all of the descendants of a designated ancestor forward in time to the present day. You can also do the reverse: take a person from our day and lay out their generations one by one going back in time through both sides of that person's family tree.

These printed paper reports can then be given to relatives at family gatherings. It is common now to save these reports electronically as PDF or Word files that can easily be emailed to interested relatives.

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Scanners

To prepare your family history material for online storage, you want to use a scanner to digitize your photos, letters and documents.



Credit: Thomas Jay Kemp

Flatbed scanners are easy to use and are readily available from the electronics stores in your area. Like in the story of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” you want to purchase one that is not too big and not too small. You’ll find that a scanner priced around \$100 will be just right for your needs.

You have protected your photos by placing them in mylar protective sleeves and lining them in archival boxes. By making digital copies and putting them online, you give greater protection to these photos—ensuring that they are not frequently handled or damaged.

I scan all of my items in color and then use the free photo manipulation software “Picasa” from Google. I generally scan my items at 600 dpi. Picasa is easy to use and lets you crop a photo and sharpen it as needed, before you put it online or in your genealogy software package.

One handy tool is the Flip-Pal Scanner. I am trying to preserve the mountain of records that have found their way to my home – I have a lot of family papers and records that need to be digitized. Among them are a number of recipe boxes. There are a lot of memories packed in these old recipes.



Credit: Thomas Jay Kemp

STORING AND CARING FOR YOUR GENEALOGY DATA

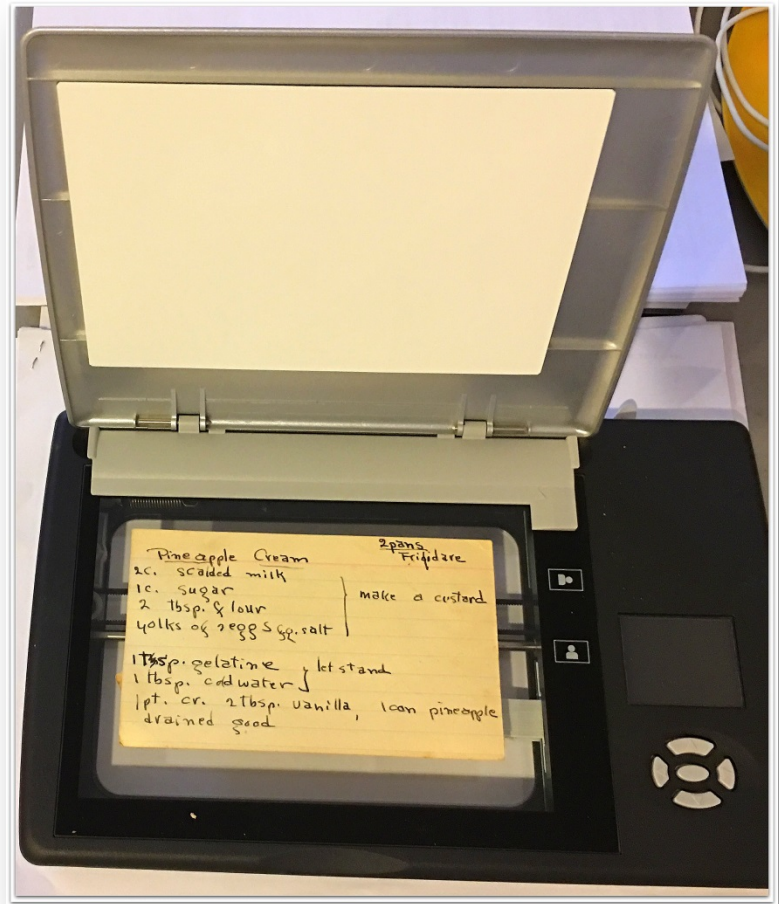
I used the Flip-Pal Scanner because of its handy size. Just place the recipe card on the glass plate and scan. Very easy to use.

Because this tool is compact and very light weight, it is ideal for scanning photos and documents while visiting relatives or archives.

This is very handy for scanning framed photos and documents hanging on the wall. Since these are often older items – and you might not want to remove them from the frames – you can simply hold the Flip-Pal up to the frame and take a series of high resolution (300 DPI or 600 DPI) digital images while they are still hanging on the wall.

Flip-Pal's stitching software easily knits these screen shots into one high quality digital image.

Credit: Thomas Jay Kemp



Credit: Thomas Jay Kemp

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Online Sites

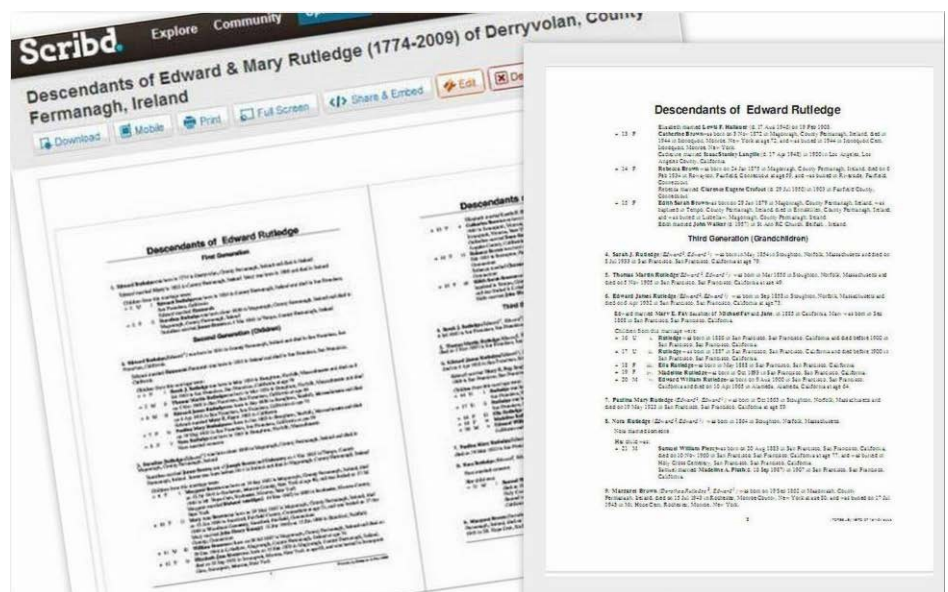
Scribd.com

Genealogists have used online sites like Scribd.com as a convenient free site where they can upload, share and preserve their research findings.

TIP

Be sure to set the reporting features on your genealogy software so that this report will not include any of the information for still-living members of the family. Use that edited report when you upload it online. That way the privacy of your living relatives is protected.

This handy site lets you upload your family history report and present it as an online version of your family history. Online sites like this are easily searched from any computer, smartphone, iPad or other device. The report uses the standard genealogical report styles. This document has a professional, clean look. And, since it is online, every name—in fact every word—of the report is then searchable online.



Source: Scribd.com

Genealogists often find that as they continue their research, or receive feedback from relatives, they have additional details to add to the family tree. With new information in hand they might regret having published and distributed their research in paper format. That is not a problem with Scribd.com.

With just a few clicks genealogists can update their report, adding their current, most accurate version of their family history and putting it online. Or if you prefer, you can designate this new report as a 2nd Edition with a new publication date. Instantly your latest findings are available to all genealogists and, importantly, preserved online.

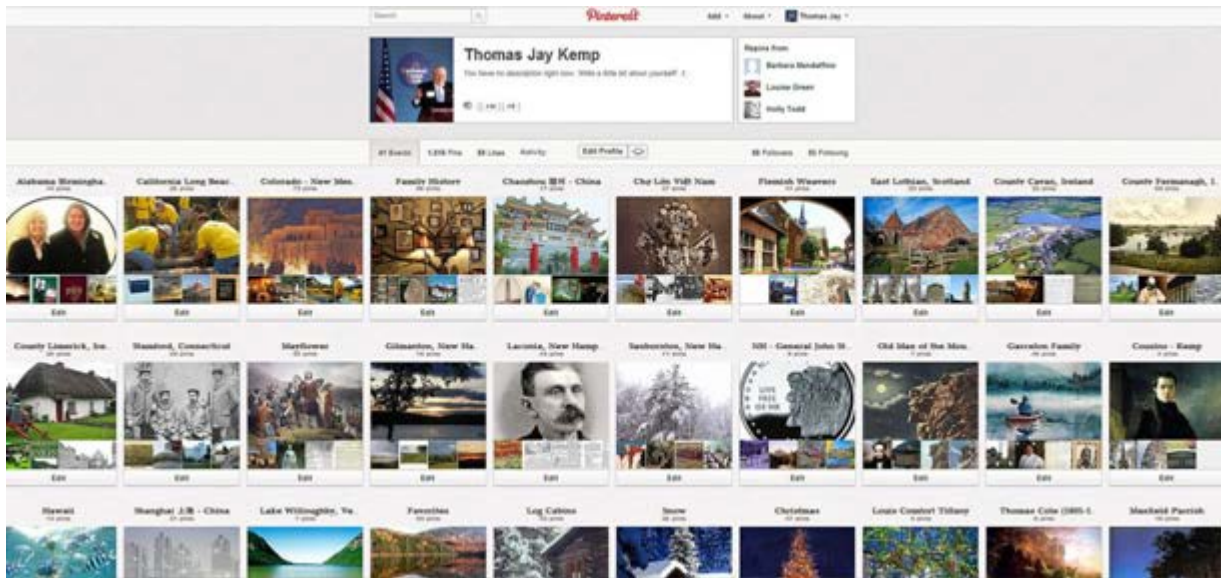
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Pinterest

There are other online sites that make it easy to present and share your family history.

Pinterest.com is an excellent site for sharing photographs about your family and where they lived.

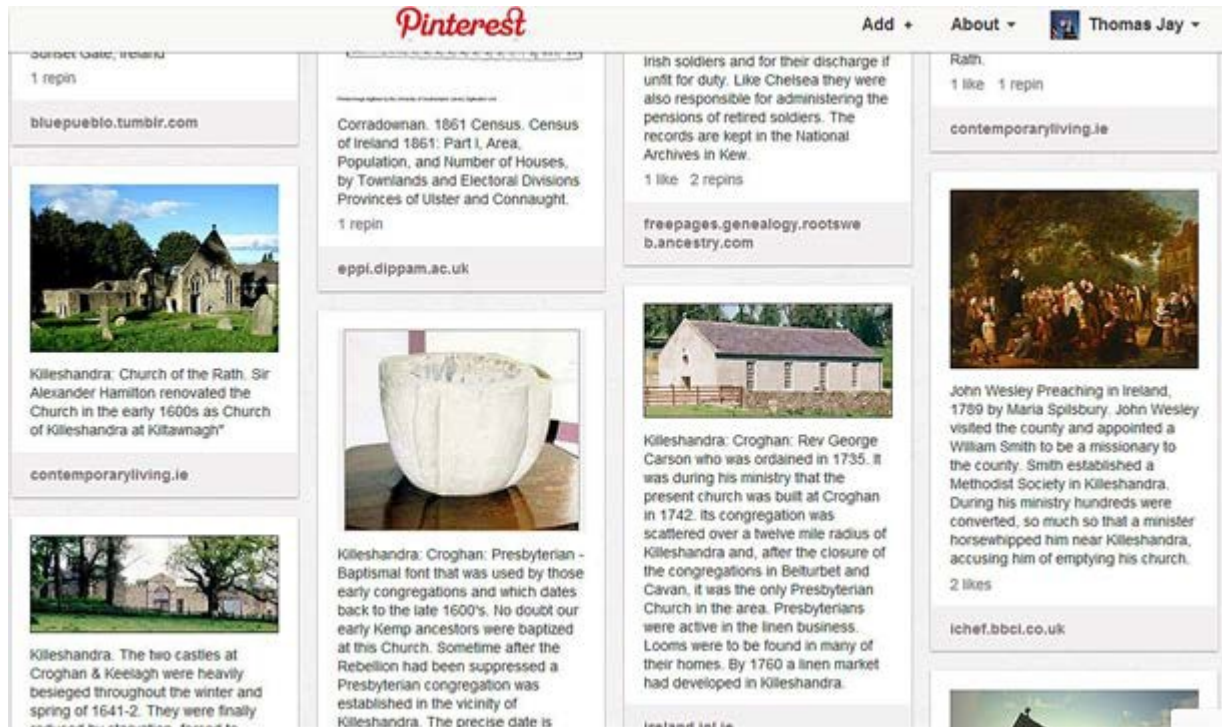
With Pinterest you can create separately-themed “Boards” that illustrate part of your family’s story. I organize my boards by places where the family has lived or by topics that are important to our story.



Source: Pinterest

I then use the notes field to describe each photograph, including the details of why this picture is significant to the family.

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Source: Pinterest

Pinterest is a handy way for me to illustrate my family history in an organized way, all shared online. By adding notes, I can update and give more context to these images, sharing them through this Wikipedia-like source of online photographs.

Online Family Trees

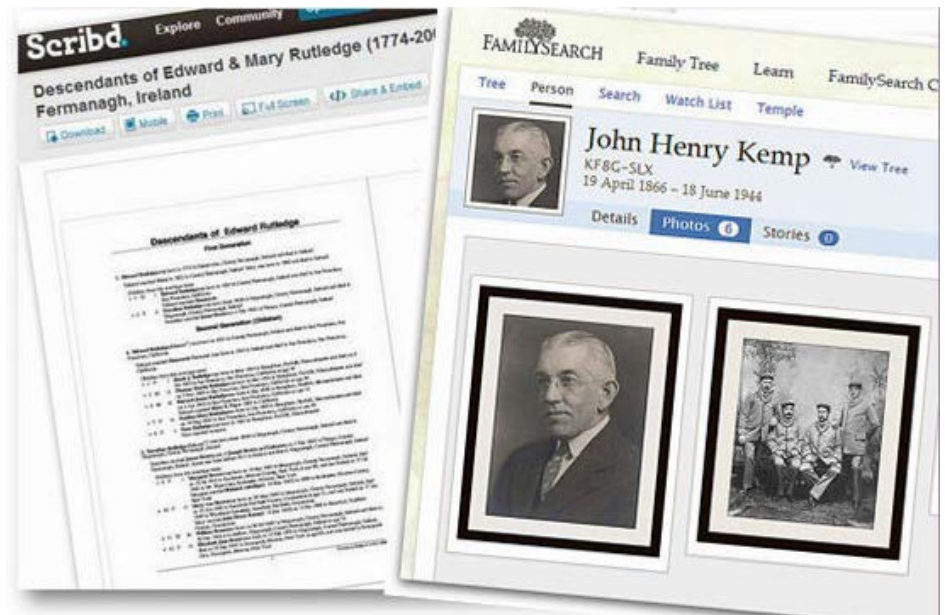
As technology has improved, genealogists are moving to the next step and sharing their family trees online. Genealogists are welcoming the opportunity to permanently store their information in the “cloud” of online family trees. This protects the information from any unexpected loss and puts the information securely online where the rising generation can find it. There are many sites where you can do this: FamilySearch.org, MyHeritage.com, OneGreatFamily.com, Ancestry.com and other sites.

Perhaps the most popular online family tree site is FamilySearch.org.

This free site makes it easy to document your family history online along with your genealogy data, photographs and reports.

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With just a click you can easily bring together your research reports along with your old family photos, and link them to your ancestor's page on the FamilySearch Family Tree.



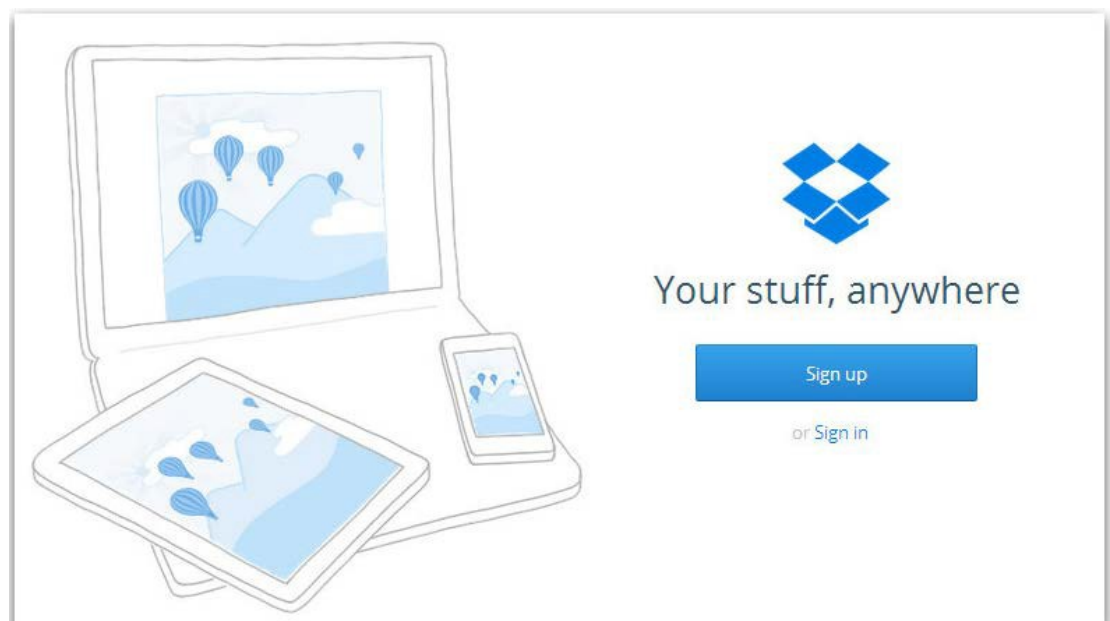
Credit: Thomas Jay Kemp

Cloud Storage

In addition to storing your data on paper or on online sites, you also want to use comprehensive approaches to storing all of your data online using sites like Dropbox, Carbonite and Mozy.

Dropbox

Dropbox gives you the opportunity to save your data online and access it from any computer, iPad or other device.



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Genealogists especially use Dropbox to back up their family photographs and their genealogy research. Genealogy software lets you designate where you want your backup data file. By using Dropbox as one of your multiple backup sites you can easily access the most current version of your genealogy data from wherever you are. Lose your laptop? Did your desktop PC fail? No problem: you can quickly access and restore your family history data to your new computer from Dropbox.

Online Backup

You want to use Carbonite, Mozy or one of the other online backup sites for your data. Do it now.



Source: Carbonite

Popular backup sites like Carbonite make it easy to begin backing up your data. You simply sign up, pay the annual fee, and the service begins immediately to review and back up your files. You can fine-tune your backup to just specific files, or to all of the information on your computer. Usually genealogists do not back up their computer programs since those can be easily replaced. Their focus is more on backing up the family history files that they create: documents, photos, email, etc.

Do it now.

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External Hard Drive

With the low cost of computer accessories it is inexpensive to purchase an external hard drive to back up your files.



Source: Wikipedia

Be sure to purchase one that is large enough to back up all of your files with room to grow. You want to purchase a “plug and play” backup drive. This lets you simply plug it into your computer and it will automatically back up your files.

This handy tool is easy to use to restore your files in case your computer fails.

Summary

You want to use a variety of backup tools and approaches to make sure that your data is preserved. Properly box and protect your irreplaceable original family papers and photographs. Print and disseminate copies of your genealogical data. Back up your digital data files electronically—in your home with an additional external hard drive, and in distant locations by backing up to multiple sites. By using these varied approaches you are protecting your data and ensuring that it will be available when you need it.