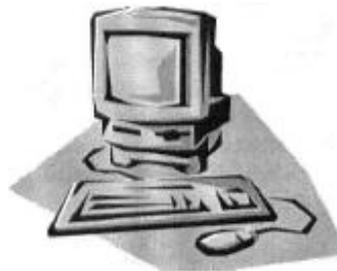


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Genealogy Gifts

By Mike Blackledge.com



The season of gift giving is almost upon us¹, and we as genealogists have a slight edge on the rest of the population. We can use our obsession to give something unique to others, both to our family members and even to organizations.

When one brings up the subject of genealogy gifts, one might start thinking of gifts *for* genealogists. What this column is about is gifts *from* genealogists. How can you utilize your research and your expertise in genealogy to create a gift that is meaningful for an individual, a family, or an organization? Your fellow AGS members have some great gift ideas, which I have chosen to group as: **Thoughtful**, **Legacy**, and **Sneaky**. Of course, some may wander across more than one category – you be the judge.

And less you hesitate with “I’m not ready yet to create a gift,” consider this comment by Pat Eker: “I used to think that I should wait until I had my research well documented and organized into a family history book to give to my family. That is still my “end goal” somewhere in the distant future, but I have found that it is good to share some things in advance. Sharing your finds with your family lets them know what you are doing, can spark interest and input, and it really feels good!”

Let’s examine a few ideas in each of these categories:

Thoughtful gifts: Recently my son sent me an email for my birthday. In it, he declared, “My birthday gift for you this year is my fiancée Suzanne, a fantastic person who I am bringing into our family.” My wife claims that like his father, this illustrates that my son is just cheap – however, as a genealogist, I have to think outside the tie (box) about this. This is indeed a gift, a gift to the entire family. Here are even more thoughtful gift ideas:

E-Bay: My partner in Blackledge research has a son who has established an email alert: whenever an item comes up for auction with the keyword “Blackledge,” he gets an email describing it. Over the years, he has purchased and presented to his father everything from oil paintings signed by a Blackledge, to labels from Blackledge Peach Orchards. Thoughtful!



Gifts in Kind: **Victoria Sullivan** has come up with a gift idea that works for many folks: give a couple of hours of your research to help someone. You can create a “good-for” certificate for such, or just describe in a card what you could do for them – or just show up at a Research Day and do it! A similar gift-in-kind can also go toward helping an organization – e.g., for my school’s 50th Reunion, from the 170 who had died in those years, we had more than 20 classmates for whom no one knew anything about them or what happened, in some cases not even the death date. I did some research to either locate a

¹ For the only time in our life and beyond, the first day of Hanukkah coincides with Thanksgiving this month, on 11/28/2013. It has never happened before, since the last time these two calendar dates coincided was in 1861, and our country did not have Thanksgiving until President Lincoln established it in 1863. It will never happen again, since the Jewish calendar is ‘drifting’ – thus while 11/28 is the earliest Hanukkah can start now, over the years the calendar will drift forward and 11/29 will be the earliest, too late for Thanksgiving. See discussion and counter-discussion on this at Snopes.com

family obituary, or create one from genealogy sources. Classmates were most appreciative, and added their own memories of the individual to our on-line memorials. The best part for me was seeing all the instances of “unknown” disappear from the Memorial Service program before it went ‘final’ to the printer.

Family Reunion A gift that can be sent out this year is reunion plans for the future. **Karen Jones** recounts: “Back in the early 1980s soon after my grandmothers died, I began some serious digging into family history. My grandmothers and mother had given me a great start on my adventures. I became obsessed (as many of us do) with uncovering the past. Then one day an epiphany came to me: I knew more about my dead ancestors than my living relatives! I liked my relatives, and realized that I would only be seeing them at funerals from then on. So I decided to plan a reunion in Missouri where many of them still lived. Over 100 of them came and paid for a weekend in a hotel! It was such a success that it became a tradition. Every five years since 1985, relatives from far and wide have come for a weekend together. Some distant and isolated relatives are the biggest supporters. It’s been fun tracking them down. Activities have included a family trivia contest, fashion show, talent shows, field trips to family sites, silent auctions, displays of family memorabilia, antiques show, contests, karaoke, family worship, and lots of storytelling. I give a presentation of family history at each reunion, with a slide show or video, and posters and charts. I provide copies of what I’ve written about the family. I’ve become the communications center of the family, notifying them of happenings and milestones. Keeping the family connected is the genealogy gift I love to give.”

Photos Once you scan old family photos, there is a myriad of gift ideas available to you. **Nancy Henry** has made mouse pads with the photo printed on the front, and a descriptive summary taped onto the backside. She also makes coffee mugs incorporating historic documents or photos. These items can be created numerous places in town, to include Walmart and drug stores. **Vicki Hontas** is well known within the Society for her thoughtful genealogy-related gifts. Vicki uses *ancestry.mycanvas.com* to create calendars with each month highlighted with ancestor and current family photos and dates – no one wants to throw these calendars away! Vicki also uses *mycanvas* to make beautiful family tree charts, framed or printed on t-shirts, as gifts for grandkids. More than one member tells me: “She does really neat stuff!” See the site for more gift ideas and for sample products.

My semi-ambitious idea for this year is to take an historic Navy (black and white) photo with my Dad in the crew, scan it and using a photo editor like Paint Shop Pro, add in another layer that has, say, a green holiday wreath with a red ribbon. Then inside the card, it might read, “*The officers and crew of the USS Parrott wish you a most joyous holiday season,*” and it would be dated, “*December 1930 – Shanghai.*” Would that be cool, or what!

Legacy gifts: A legacy gift is one that might be passed from generation to generation. **Lynda Katonak** recalls: “*Many years ago, Carole Bonda brought in for the December ‘Show and Tell’ the best Genealogist Gift I have ever seen. It was a beautiful quilt with a huge ‘tree’ embroidered on the cover and photos representing each ancestor printed on the spot where they would be on the tree. It was a masterpiece.*”

We all can’t create something quite that spectacular, but there are other legacy projects that we can accomplish. My Uncle Hobert had no children, but he is the one that got me into genealogy – primarily by my inheriting all of his genealogy records, a legacy gift in its own right. However, the way he personalized the family ancestry was when each child in the extended family graduated or reached their majority, he presented them with a one-page summary of their ancestry. It would start with the name of the child bolded, summarize where and when they were born, perhaps an accomplishment and graduation information, and then end their paragraph with: “Michael is the first born son of:” and then began the next paragraph with the next generation, and so on. The summary was just one page, but it had your ancestry as far back as Uncle Hobert had researched it for the family. And it started with you! Back then, he typed his gift with an old-school ribbon typewriter, but today you could do such a gift with special font and colors on card stock or parchment paper, and perhaps even frame it as a keepsake alongside the diploma.

Pat Eker has taken Uncle Hobert's idea from the early part of life, and applied it to the far end: "I make annotated collages (see photo). These are 'This is your Life' collections of photos with notes added on or below the pictures. I did this for my Dad, father-in-law, and mother-in-law for 80th or 75th birthdays. I selected photos showing special events and activities in their lives, scanned them into digital format, and used PowerPoint to make and annotate a collage. I took them to Kinko's² to get large posters made for birthday parties and I printed out 8x10 prints for the whole family."



Perhaps the traditional Legacy Gift is a Family History. **Nancy Greenberg** shares her early experience: "*Using my old DOS-based computer (not even a mouse was used at this time), I put together my first attempt at doing a family book. I had lots of pictures, and I think that I just used Xerox copies (Have things ever changed! Compared to what I can do now, it was really pretty pathetic.) I sent this book to my cousin Judy, who was grieving the loss of her mother. Within a few days, I received a phone call from her. She was crying, and through her tears she told me how much the book meant to her, as she didn't even know the names of her grandparents. Now she had not only names, but biographies of our family going back several generations. Such a touching response let me know how important family research really was, and so I was able to turn around and send a genealogical gift to someone else. Since then, we have solved many of our family mysteries. The relationships formed have been a huge gift to all of us!*"

Other Legacy gift ideas suggested by **Pat Eker**:

Engraved Plates – *I am having little engraved plates made to put on furniture with special memories or family connections. Example: I have a bedroom set that belonged to my sons' great-grandmother that we are refinishing for my granddaughter ... with a small inconspicuously glued plate on the back of the headboard: "This bedroom set once belonged to Great-Grandmother _____."*

"Remember" Stories and Migration Maps – I have written several short stories about my memories of my parents, grandparents, and other family members that I have given to my sons and plan to share with others. We had such fun sharing memories. Similarly, Several years ago I made a "migration map" for my Dad of our family showing where our ancestors in that line have lived in America, from New Amsterdam in the 1600's, through Upstate New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, and into Tennessee. I am now doing maps for other lines that I will give to family members.

Copies of Old Photo Albums (Digitized and Annotated) – This is one of my biggest gift projects! My Dad left us over 50 photo albums with photos that span six generations; complete with his notes for the photos. That was a very big genealogy gift! I am trying to pass that gift on. I have been scanning the pages, adding more genealogy notes, and creating digital copies of the photo albums for myself, my kids, siblings, nieces and nephews. I completed one for my brother last year and I should have at least ten albums with notes completed for everyone by Christmas. And, I am making copies of the family albums and scrapbooks for my cousins for the Family Reunion next summer.

● **"Little Things" with Notes** – I learned this from my mother-in-law, Ellabell Eker. I have sent small family items with notes to family members and I have learned to put little notes with my cherished heirlooms. Example: Ellabell gave us an old doorknob, used like a tiny vase with dried flowers, and a little note with it explained that it was a doorknob from my husband's great-grandparents home and that his parents had lived there for a short time, too. (Three sentences tell so much history about the family in the house behind the little doorknob. See photo.)



Sneaky gifts: Some gifts are "sneaky" in the sense that these gifts may both help you as well as (hopefully) delight the recipient. Thus "sneaky" here is defined as

² (now FedEx Office)

actions that appear to be for others (i.e., gifts) yet may advance you toward your own goals. These could perhaps also be called “practical gifts” – items or resources that although helpful to the individual receiving them, are also helpful to you as a genealogist in perhaps future or current efforts to obtain family information. Here is an example to illustrate a “sneaky” gift: You give a child, or a family member, a Paid For certificate for a sitting at a professional photo gallery for a family portrait. This works for you, as you get a nice professional photo that otherwise might not have happened. Moving up a notch is the idea to give a gift certificate at a video history studio,³ which will record the relative telling some of the story of their life – this would be a gift that lives forever!

Other thoughts on ‘sneaky’ gifts: When you and I were going to school, do you remember running around, panicking over “Where’s my books? Where’s my notebook, my pencils?” Well, my granddaughter attends Southwest Secondary, a Charter computer-based school, and the other morning she was running around, saying, “Where’s a flash drive? Where’s a flash drive?” Yes, it is a changed world, but hey, that is a good sneaky gift: Flash drives. Easy stocking stuffer, as you can buy a 2 GB (gigabytes) flash drive⁴ at your local ABC Library branch⁵ for \$5.50 each. If you check the Sunday paper, you can probably find some specials at places like Office Max for an 8 GB drive for less than \$10. And to make the kids smile, you can get novelty flash drives (e.g., look like Simpson cartoon characters, or Family Guy characters) for around \$10 each. Even more sneaky, would be to give flash drives to other family members already loaded with some of your genealogy research. This serves two purposes: distributes your research, and gives you remote back-up for some of your hard-worked research.



Do you have a relative who has a collection of family photos? Then a great sneaky gift would be a scanner. There aren’t too many photos where I would prefer owning the ‘original’ over having an electronic version, i.e., a JPEG file. The gift could be a flat-bed scanner, but a wand-scanner is nice for availability, taking on trips. This way your relatives can scan in photos or books or whatever, and perhaps help you with your research efforts.

Many of us enjoyed Karen Jones’ illustrated talk in September on Organizing Genealogical Materials. The talk presented several techniques and a plan for organizing the many documents and items that we collect along our research trails. But what about our friends and relatives? Don’t they need to be organized as well? Of course they do! Since it is not easy to send Karen to go live with them for a week or two, perhaps an alternative is a sneaky gift: a reference on how to organize – or, if you’re really close with this person, an offer to apply some organizing principles on their office area or record-keeping area. Similarly, a book on preserving old photographs is a good, if sneaky, gift for someone who has many old photos, and you are just a bit concerned as to their ability to preserve, or scan, those treasures.

Summary: To whom do we usually give gifts? Friends and family members. Genealogists are in a unique position to present gifts that are meaningful, life validating, and can even become a legacy within a family. The cost beyond expenses may be an investment in time and effort, however most of our members have found great personal pleasure resulting. Thoughtful genealogist gifts might include publications, and even holiday cards featuring old photos of relatives or ancestors. Sneaky gifts might help you as well. What might you give as a gift this year?

³ In the past, AGS has had a presentation from Avista Video Histories; similar services are available in Albuquerque.

⁴ When I asked one volunteer what size the flash drives are, she said “About two inches!”

⁵ If one branch is out of flash drives, try another branch! Or off to Office Max!