



# Using Timelines to Analyze Your Research

Cari A. Taplin, CG® • cat.taplin@gmail.com • www.genealogypants.com

*Timelines are a great research and analysis tool every genealogist should know how to use. A chronological look at the events in an ancestor's life can answer many research questions. Timelines can focus on the whole lifespan of an individual or focus on important events that happened in a particular place. Timelines are an important tool for visualizing our ancestors' lifetimes, giving context to their actions.*

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## What are Timelines?

Typically, timelines are chronological lists of events relating to a topic, usually for a person, a period in time, or a location. Timelines can be created in a number of different ways, organized by different topics, and displayed in a variety of forms.

Timelines for individuals can be organized by life events or by documents collected. They can include historical events to give context to personal events. Genealogy software, standard word processing or spreadsheets, specialized timeline software or websites, or even plain old pencil and paper can be used to create timelines.

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## Timeline Tips for Analysis

When creating your timelines for use as analysis tools, there are a few things you can do to make them more useful:

- Color code the data by county, state, or country to indicate a change in location
- Include citations so you know where the information came from
- Add items of historical or local importance for context
- Include: date, age at event, type of event, location of event (state, city), and source
- Create two timelines side-by-side in order to compare two individuals to determine if they are two people of the same name, or one person.

William Miller	William F. Miller
1850 Census - Wood County, Ohio - age 27	
1855 Tax roll - Wood County	
	1860 Census - Hardin County, Ohio - age 36
1862 - Deed, selling land in Wood County, Ohio	
	1870 Census - Hardin County, Ohio - age 47
	1880 Census - Hardin County, Ohio - age 56

Once you've created your timeline, you can begin to look for gaps in time that need more research. Try to locate one document for every year of your ancestor's life. This may or may not

be possible, but by working toward that goal, many research questions can be answered. When examining your timeline, ask:

- Where (when) are there gaps in the timeline?
- What records might fill those gaps?
- What historical events were happening during those time gaps? Nationally? Statewide? Locally?

For more context, trying adding information on:

- Changes in county boundaries
- Changes in state or federal laws
  - ➡ Homestead Act
  - ➡ Various tax laws
  - ➡ Dower Rights
  - ➡ Age to enlist, marry without parental consent, serve on a jury, etc.
- Catastrophic events affecting the area and/or the records
  - ➡ Fire, Flood – Courthouses
  - ➡ Hurricanes, Tornadoes
  - ➡ Major accidents – trains, planes, automobiles, farming, mining, shipping
  - ➡ Wars, local battles

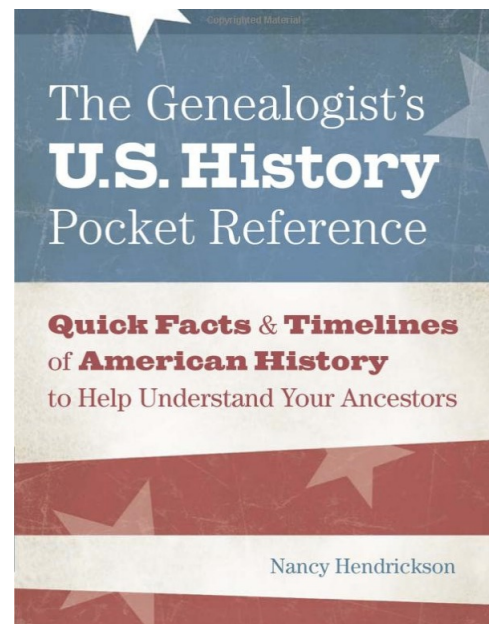
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## Resources for Historical Timelines

Utilize your favorite search engine to help locate a historical timeline for the location and timeframe you are working in. It is likely that a general timeline has already been compiled and published online that you can use to fill in your timeline to give your ancestor's life context. Try searching for "Texas historical timeline" or use the state, county, or city, and/or event of your choice, to examine timelines available. Here are some example timelines of historical events:

- Missouri Digital Heritage – "Timeline of Missouri History: 1673-1799"
- Texas State Historical Association, Texas Almanac – "Timeline of Texas History"
- Arkansas Secretary of State – "Arkansas History Timeline"
- Wikipedia – "History of California"
- FamilySearch Wiki – "Arkansas History"

A favorite quick-reference guide is *The Genealogist's U.S. History Pocket Reference* by Nancy Hendrickson. This is a great little book full of dates and facts of historical significance.



### Timeline for Samuel Cook Dimick

Year	Age at Event	Event	Location	Source	Comments
1835	0	Birth	NH>Grafton>Lyme	Tombstone photo, county history	
1860	25	Marriage	NH>Grafton>Haverhill	Marriage Record	Bride's parents lived in Haverhill
1867	32	Birth of son, Marshall	NH>Grafton>Lyme	1870 Census	
1869	34	Birth of son, Burton	NH>Grafton>Lyme	1870 Census	
1870	34	Residence	NH>Grafton>Lyme	1870 Census	
1871	35	Residence	NH>Grafton>Lyme	NH register, 1871	
1872	36	Residence	OH>Lucas>Toledo	1872 Toledo City Directory	On Water St.
1873	37	Residence	OH>Lucas>Toledo	1873 Toledo City Directory	
1874	38	Residence	OH>Lucas>Toledo	1874 Toledo City Directory	
1875	39	Residence	OH>Lucas>Toledo	1875 Toledo City Directory	
1876	40	Residence	OH>Lucas>Toledo	1876 Toledo City Directory	
1876	41	Land Purchase	OH>Wood>Bowling Green	Deed, Bk 48:123	
1880	45	Residence	OH>Wood>Bowling Green	1880 Census	
1899	63	Land Sale, to Marshall	OH>Wood>Bowling Green	Deed, Bk 125:21	
1900	64	Residence	OH>Wood>Bowling Green	1900 Census	
1901	65	Death	OH>Wood>Bowling Green	Tombstone photo, obit	

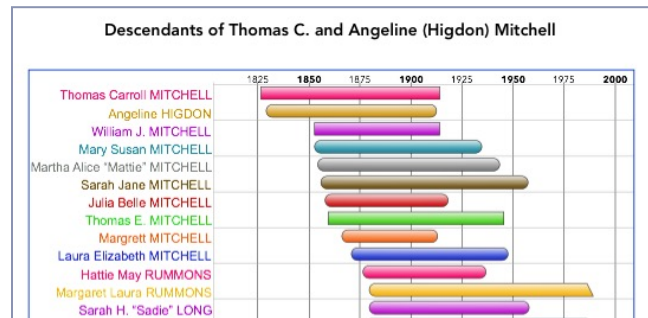
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## Ways to Create a Timeline

There are a lot of different ways one could create a timeline. Most often a simple one is sufficient for analysis. Try using a word processor or spreadsheet for the easiest ways to create, manipulate, and rearrange your data. Spreadsheets have the advantage of being easily sorted by column so that you can sort your data by chronology, but you can also group the data by other types such as record type, event, location, and anything else you decide to include.

Many genealogy programs on the market today have reports that you can run to create a timeline based on your data. Each program might have different features. Some may include any photos or images you attached, whereas other may indicate the individual's age at the time of the event. Some reports can be run on multiple individuals so that you can see how their lifespans overlapped.

There are also a number of software and website sources for creating timelines. Some are drawing programs with timeline templates, while others are specifically for timeline creation. If you'd like to try a more robust or graphic representation for your timeline, you may want to look at some of the following:



Created by Reunion software

Progeny Software  
Timeline Maker  
timeglider

BeeDocs Timeline 3D  
MyHistro  
Time Graphics

LucidChart  
Smart Draw  
draw.io

(Simply search on Google to locate the websites for these.)

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## Resources for Further Study

1. Comas, Angela. "Timelines and Lifelines." Class online at *FamilySearch Help Center*. [familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/223](https://familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/223) : June 2020.
2. Cyndi's List, Timelines – [www.cyndislist.com/timelines/](http://www.cyndislist.com/timelines/)
3. GenDisasters – [www.gendisasters.com](http://www.gendisasters.com)
4. Hatton, Stephen B. "A Genealogical Timeline as a Research Tool." *NGS Magazine*, April–June 2016, p. 49-53.
5. *FamilySearch Wiki* – [wiki.familysearch.org](https://wiki.familysearch.org)
6. Hendrickson, Nancy. *The Genealogist's U.S. History Pocket Reference*. Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2013.
7. "How to Make a Timeline in Excel," *Office Timeline* - <https://www.officetimeline.com/make-timeline/excel>
8. Legacy Family Tree Webinars – [familytreewebinars.com](http://familytreewebinars.com) (Search for "timelines")
9. YouTube – [youtube.com](https://youtube.com) (Search for "timelines genealogy")