



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set III Number 4

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Set III Strategies for Vice-Presidents

Writing a State Guidebook from Cover to Cover

by Connie Lenzen, CG

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

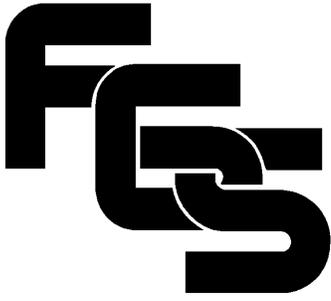
This paper discusses the steps in writing and publishing a state guidebook to the state's repositories, libraries, and research sites of interest. These guidebooks are popular and essential, a worthy project for a society to consider compiling.

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Set III Strategies for Vice-Presidents Writing a State Guidebook from Cover to Cover

by Connie Lenzen, CGRS

INTRODUCTION

Genealogical researchers rely upon state guidebooks. These books list genealogical and historical sources for a jurisdiction and tell how to locate them. The well-thumbed condition of state guides at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City indicates their popularity.

Genealogical society members or professional genealogists are appropriate choices for people to write state guides since they know the records in their area so well.

But what is the best way to write one? To take the potential author from the idea stage to the conclusion, this article gives examples from my experiences in compiling and writing the *Oregon Guide to Genealogical Sources*.

Genealogists know the steps in genealogical research: form a plan, review published literature, evaluate and design the project accordingly, locate new information, evaluate, and prepare a report. Writing a state guide follows the same procedure. In this case, the report is the book.

Research is often a solitary process—just you and

your sources. But when you decide to write a guide, invite associates to assist you with the project. I worked with members of a local genealogical society, the Genealogical Forum of Oregon. We tried out ideas on each other; discarded some, modified others, and kept some.

REVIEW SIMILAR GUIDES

The first step is to review other state guides for format (see References, at end of this paper). This analysis provides an outline of what your book should look like. It also pinpoints areas where you need to locate information. State guides include some, or all, of the following:

- a history of the state
- maps showing counties and their formation
- a bibliography of TITLES, usually arranged by county
- courthouse resources
- Family History Library microfilms
- a list of archives and their holdings
- addresses and holdings of genealogical and historical libraries
- addresses of cemetery associations

Writing a State Guidebook from Cover to Cover

- vital records sources

FORMULATE A PLAN

A crucial step is to decide what the book should look like; size, number of pages, and type of binding. The Genealogical Forum of Oregon has an offset press, so this dictated the page size and binding. Access to other types of duplicators might change the product.

The committee felt the easiest arrangement to read was by county. The initial plan for each county listing included a condensed history of the county; genealogical repositories with a summary of their resources; a bibliography arranged by topic; courthouse addresses and holdings; and a list of Oregon State Archives documents.

We know that it is frustrating for researchers to learn about a source but not know where to obtain it. Therefore, the plan also included a citation for each source listed. The format seemed good; we would tell readers what was available for each county and where they could find it. We realized something was missing, however.

In addition to county sources, a number of sources are statewide—such as church records, land records, military records and vital records. A new chapter included these. In addition to the types of statewide records available, it included a description of major genealogical repositories in the state of Oregon.

LOCATE INFORMATION

Then we went on to the information-gathering stage. This is the most time-consuming portion of the process. An on-site survey of the catalogs of the major Oregon genealogical libraries and the Family History Library supplied a list of Oregon references.

Letters directed to the presidents of all Oregon genealogical societies resulted in a list of their local publications. The merged bibliography was

then divided into county sections.

Letters sent to courthouses requested information about their holdings. A principle rule of correspondence is to ask short, simple questions. We wanted to know what indexes and records were available and what years they covered. Therefore, those were the questions in the survey.

Letters were directed to “Deed Records,” “Divorce Records,” “Marriage Records,” “Probate Records,” “School Records,” “Tax Records,” and “Voter Records.” The return rate on these surveys was excellent: around 80 percent. Several of the non-responding courts were nearby, so an on-site survey filled in the needed information. The information obtained from Wasco County for naturalization records provides an example of the scope of records:

Office of Circuit Court
Wasco County Courthouse
5th & Washington
The Dalles, OR 97058

- Declaration of Intent, begins 1855
- Declarations, 1859-1989, in Miscellaneous Papers
- Naturalization of Minors, 1894-1903
- Naturalization of Adults, 1894-1903
- Miscellaneous Record, Citizenship Outside Wasco County, begins 1875

Survey letters sent to historical societies and public libraries requested information on the following collections: diaries, manuscripts, and newspapers. The return rate from this mailing was poor, perhaps 30 per cent. The information that did come back was excellent, however, and unknown genealogical collections were uncovered.

Finally, historical maps were obtained from the Oregon State Archives for reproduction in the book. The Oregon Department of Transportation furnished county maps showing roads, towns, and range and section lines.

Writing a State Guidebook from Cover to Cover

PREPARE THE GUIDE

The bibliography was separated into logical categories: biographies and diaries; cemetery records; census records; church records; city and county directories; city and county histories; court records; gazetteers, atlases; maps; land records; mortuary records; naturalization; newspapers; probate records; school records; taxes; vital records; and voters' records.

A code was assigned to repositories. This was added to the bibliographic citation. Exhibit A,

below, uses examples from the Lane County section to show arrangement.

EVALUATION

Evaluation was a continual process. The committee met once a month to review the progress of the book. As I drafted each county section, a person familiar with records for that county reviewed it. A byproduct of this expert review was that we later received few critical letters from readers.

EXHIBIT A

Lane County, Oregon Cemeteries, Vol. II. Eugene, OR: Lane County Historical Society, 1975 (GFL, OHS, OSL) [This means the book is at the Genealogical Forum Library, the Oregon Historical Society Library, and the Oregon State Library.]

Contains: Coburg, Cogswell-Gay, Creswell, Evergreen, Gillespie, Goshen Grange, Laurel Hill, Lower & Upper Mabel, Mohawk (Marcola), Moxley, Oak Hill, Stafford, Valley View, Walker. [The list of cemeteries came from the contents.]



Lane County Probate Journal, #1, 1852-1859 by Mary Lawler. Eugene, OR: Karen's Kopy & Design, 1988. (FHL) [A copy of this book is at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.]



Lane County, Oregon Early Marriage Records, 1852-1879 . Oregon Lewis & Clark Chapter DAR Genealogical Record Committee, 1948. (DAR) [This is an example of a record source found at the Daughters of the American Revolution Library in Washington, D.C.]

Writing a State Guidebook from Cover to Cover

CLOSE



The Genealogical Forum of Oregon printed the Oregon Guide and I kept the copyright. I did not receive payment for the project as it was a society project. There are other rewards, however. There is the thrill of seeing my book used by researchers. The best part is that all my notes about sources are in an organized form that I can use, too.

[Connie Lenzen is a certified genealogical record specialist. The *Oregon Guide to Genealogical Sources* was published in 1991 by the Genealogical Forum of Oregon. Connie revised it in 1993 and 1996 - adding new sources and updating addresses. Connie also wrote *Research in Oregon*, as one title in the National Genealogical Society's *Research in The States* series. This Strategy Paper is a reprint of an article of the same title which appeared in *Association of Professional Genealogists Quarterly*, 10:4 (December 1995):107-08. It is reprinted with permission.]

REFERENCES

Here are the titles of some other regional and state guidebooks.

Lipscomb, Anne S. & Kathleen S. Hutchison. *Tracing Your Mississippi Ancestors*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994.

Norris, Rhonda. *Arkansas Links: A Comprehensive Guide to Genealogical Research in the Natural State*. Kearney, NB: Norris Publishing, 1999. Note: This book follows the instructions in Connie Lenzen's original article.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis. *Chicago and Cook County: A Guide to Research*. Salt Lake City: Ancestry. 1996.

Walsh, Diane Renner. *St. Clair County, Illinois Research and Resources: A Genealogist's Guide*. Belleville, Ill.: St. Clair County Genealogical Society, 1998.

Warren, Paula Stuart. *Minnesota Genealogical Reference Guide*. Warren Research & Publishing, (1869 Laurel Avenue, St. Paul, MN 44104-5983). 1994.

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