

# FRIENDING YOUR ANCESTORS

The screenshot shows a Facebook profile for 'Private Washington J. Berry'. To the right is a 'Historical Facebook' form with the following fields and instructions:

- 1. Insert a picture of your historical figure. (A small portrait of a soldier is shown in the top left of the form area.)
- 2. Historical figure's name
- 3. Where the historical figure spent most of his/her life
- 4. Whether he/she was single, divorced, or married
- 5. Historical figure's date of birth
- 6. Historical figure's hometown
- 7. Place a dot on all of the places that historical figure traveled over the course of his/her life. (You can use any tool for this one)
- 8. List four people that the historical figure would have been friends with on Facebook.
- 9. Make up two Facebook groups the historical figure would have joined.
- 10. List one school he/she attended and one place he/she worked.
- 11. Make up two wall posts the historical figure would have made.

The form fields are filled with: Network: 16th Mississippi Infantry; Relationship Status: Single; Birthdate: November 9, 1839; Hometown: Harrisville, MS. A world map is shown for step 7. The wall post for step 11 reads: 'Hey little brother, heard you got discharged today! I've been sick in camp but don't worry the family when you get home.'



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## Sharing Your Family History via Social

May A. Lott just updated her Facebook status from single to married on March 2, 1908.

Did I neglect to mention that May A. Lott is my great-grandmother?

You already know that the internet offers a variety of opportunities for family historians: creating family trees, storing photos and searching for records in digital databases. But what about Facebook?

Status updates, photo albums and “likes” enable people to share information about the present, the future...and the past. Not the “ten seconds ago” past, but the distant past.



DID MRS. HOWE REALLY ATTEND THE PARTY OF THE CENTURY?



HOW GREAT WAS THAT HOMECOMING?



WHERE DID THEIR CLASSMATES GO?

Facebook can be a great place to share your family's history. Designed as a social network, Facebook allows family members to be in contact across the generations and around the globe. It also allows family members to share your genealogical research.

There are several ways you can use Facebook to do genealogy and a few ways you cannot. One is on the real Facebook website. To avoid confusion about the different Facebook options, you will need to learn the lingo. There are three basic formats:

**Facebook Page** is a public presence designed for public figures, businesses and organizations to communicate with a large number people. Anyone can view the Wall and receive updates by becoming a fan. Only an "official representative" can create a Facebook Page.

**Facebook Profile** is your

personal profile that allows you to post photos and random thoughts, send messages to your Friends and share information about yourself. You cannot create a Facebook Profile for your ancestor because it violates the agreement that you sign when you join not to "provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission." You may have his or her nose, but you are not your ancestor.

**Facebook Group** is designed for a small number of "members" to communicate and collaborate with one another. Similar to a listserv or mailing list, Facebook Group allows members to create and contribute to original content as well as comment on other people's posts.

They can join or leave the group at any time. If you create the Group, you are the administrator



WHAT HAPPENED AT THAT PARTY AGAIN?



DID THE COUSINS HAVE A GOOD TIME?

A screenshot of the Facebook "Create New Group" form. The form has a blue header with the text "Create New Group". Below the header, there are three sections: "Group Name:" with a dropdown menu, "Members:" with a text box containing the question "Which people do you want to add to the group?", and "Privacy:" with three radio button options: "Open" (selected), "Closed", and "Secret". Each option has a brief description of its privacy settings. At the bottom of the form, there are two buttons: "Create" and "Cancel".

and you can determine who can join and participate.

Just like a Facebook Profile, you can exchange photos and post stories on the Group's Wall. Unlike Facebook Pages, Facebook Groups have three different privacy settings: Open, Closed or Secret. The default is Closed (other Facebook users can see a list of the Group's members but not the Group's posts or photos

The Group format is ideal to connect with relatives already on Facebook and share content specific to your genealogy.

Be aware that some family members might be hesitant to discuss stories or share photos with others on Facebook and sharing personal information online always should be done with caution. Cousin Jane may find it hilarious that Great Aunt Olive is listed on the census as living in a brothel, but Uncle Frank may not.

Facebook Groups have the benefit of allowing for easy consolidation of your ancestry-related posts and photos and it keeps them separate from other current albums and messages. You can even edit shared documents.

If you are still concerned about privacy or want to create the look of a Facebook Profile for your ancestor, there is an alternative. Historical Facebook-like pages can be created using a document template.

There are a couple of options, depending on how web savvy you are. Simple templates are easier to use. More enhanced templates require a greater familiarity with document editing but produce a higher quality, more detailed end



## SARA BRADSHAW'S LITTLE BOY

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY WAS GREAT AND LITTLE VICTOR LOVED THE TOY RABBIT.



## TWO SISTERS

THEY WERE NOT ALWAYS WILLING TO FRIEND ONE ANOTHER.



## WHERE DID THEY GO ON VACATION?

NO ONE WAS SEASICK ON THE BOAT!

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product. You could create your own template from scratch, but why reinvent the wheel? If you have a Google account, you can take advantage what is available in Google Docs' public template gallery.

But wait!

There are few things to consider before you update your great-grandmother's relationship status from single to married. Be aware of technical specifications. Some templates can create large files when exported, either as an image (jpg) or document (pdf).

Most templates have been created by teachers, who use them to help students engage with the past and learn about historical figures. While the guidelines provided are meant for students, they can help you brainstorm what type of information to include.

Once you select the template you want, you can customize it with your ancestor's information. In addition to his or her name, date of birth and residence, you can include status updates that offer a sense of chronology. You may want to focus on a specific series of events, such as those detailed in your ancestor's compiled military service record.

Fake historical Facebook pages are great for personal details. They can be used to illustrate an ancestor's personality and relationships. Written in first

person, the mock Facebook profile allows you to explore the era in which your ancestor lived as well as how she interacted with the people, places and ideas of her time.

Whether you use the real Facebook or a mock version, this exercise can help you to share family history in a fun and easily accessible way. You probably will not include everything about your genealogy or every photo you ever collected. Instead, you might discover new questions that come from connecting names, dates and places in a way you had not before. Your relatives may be able to help you identify mistakes or suggest new avenues for research.

Public or private, online or offline. Social networks like Facebook can offer new opportunities to explore your ancestry.

Remember, you have done the hard part already. You have found your great-great grandfather. So have fun sharing that information!

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