

The Cultural Impacts of the Covid Pandemic: Lessons for Genealogists

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The importance of stories

Genealogy is the study of families, family history and tracing lineages.

However the studies of family lineages and histories can be greatly improved by providing historical context and situation in descriptions of your roots.

- What conditions led to their decisions about why to migrate?
- What factors contributed to their choice about where to go?
- What can be known about their journey, the hardships encountered?

Stories can tie history and genealogy together

How and why did ancestors come to America?

How did grandpa come to own this farm? Did he lose the homestead farm during the Great Depression?

How is it that the family cemetery has so many baby graves?

How is it that two brothers fought on different sides of the civil war?

What happened to our family when the coal mine closed?

It is true that Uncle Jack had to “get married” or go to jail?

Did Grandpa have a gambling or drinking problem?

Upon signing up for the war, Uncle Carl never returned home, why?

The importance of stories in understanding genealogy and adding depth to the historical records

- What were the “**big events**” that lead up to decisions to migrate?
- **PUSH FACTORS**
 - Industrialization resulted in job loss in some industries and gains in others
 - War/conflict that caused people to seek safety
 - Personal/family safety and in some cases to void conscription into military service
 - Corruption/greed from land barons—impoverishment of tenants/serfs/sharecroppers
 - Racism or other forms of discrimination
 - Religious freedom

PULL FACTORS

- Cheap land “The Magnate”
- Following other family members in search of new opportunities
- Often decisions to migrate were a community decision....entire groups made the decision to migrate
- Employment opportunities, promises from land companies, railroads, and other industries seeking labor

What are Epochal Events?

Events that are so important and significant they usher in a new set of values, beliefs, behaviors.

Epochal events in migration

- Potato famine in Ireland
- Wars
- Economic collapse
- Religious schisms
- Tribalism
- Hunger
- Drug wars in Central America

Epochal events in understanding Midwest migration

- Louisiana Purchase
- Homestead Act
- Civil War
- Gold Rush
- Great Depression
- WWI and WWII

Epochal events in our lifetimes

- The Depression of the 1930s
- The Vietnam War
- WWII
- Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s
- The Farm Crisis in 1980s
- 911
- The influx of international migrants into the state
- January 6th, 2022 where there was an attempt to block the orderly transition of power

The experiences of the pandemic will be retold over and over to future generations and will shape our future.

- How did the covid pandemic affect your life?
- What things did you have to cope with?
- What are some observations about covid?
- Stories such as postponing weddings, family reunions, high school graduation, funerals, etc.
- Kids not going to school, attending virtually
- Working from home for many became the norm

The Covid pandemic as an Epochal Event

- THE PANDEMIC HASTENED MANY EXISTING TRENDS
- People sought new ways to remain connected
- ZOOM became a dominant mode of meeting
- Workforce
 - Working remotely (generally from home)
 - Telecommuting
 - Hybrid classes
 - The Great Resignation
 - Just as the pandemic came at a particularly bad time in American culture, it has set the course for the future

Putting life into Genealogy

- Through the use of oral interviews, diaries, farm or business records, census data, church records, photographs, newspapers can be supplemented with documented historical accounts to provide understanding of who you are, your values, beliefs and behaviors.
- The railroads emptying out the congested cities of the east coast and the westward movement of people, fleeing poverty of Appalachia, rural to urban migration in search of better jobs, or fleeing racism in antebellum south, the struggles of rural living before modernization (USPS, electrification, farm to market roads, medical care, etc.) during the Dust Bowl, the Farm Crisis add context.

Some examples that tie large scale historical events to one's family biography

- Grandma always raised a big garden surrounded by zinnias, I guess that's why I do the same
- Grandpa left farming after the war because his brother was a steel worker in Chicago.
- After their mother died, the aunt took the kids in
- He lost the farm through drought and grasshoppers in the Depression
- During the 1912 flu epidemic they lost an infant and one small child

- After losing their son in the Vietnam War, their marriage was never the same
- Grandma always played the piano, and her siblings would join around the piano and sing hymns
- Once the coal ran out and the mine closed for good, he had no choice but to find work elsewhere
- They were a good Catholic family but for some reason, they left the church
- They bought their first tractor in 1926 and sold the draft horses

With the holidays right around the corner, it is an opportune time to share stories.

How has the pandemic impacted you personally?

How has the pandemic affected your loved ones?

What have been the community consequences”

Record these stories for those who follow us.

THANK YOU and HAPPY HOLIDAYS!