



Research / Write / Publish

Research

A primary responsibility of every municipal historian is to research and write about their community. You will find facts about your municipality and share them through articles, displays, books, the Internet and presentations.

Do not make the mistake of repeating “facts” from earlier published histories without researching them for accuracy. Source information may not have been available to earlier researchers requiring them to rely on hearsay or supposition. More and more primary documents become available each year, documents that provide the answers you’re looking for.

Research Sources:

- ◆ Historical maps
- ◆ Published histories
- ◆ Universities
- ◆ Contemporary newspaper articles
- ◆ Letters and diaries
- ◆ Town minutes
- ◆ Census records
- ◆ Passenger lists and immigration records
- ◆ Vital records
- ◆ School records and yearbooks
- ◆ Deeds and land records
- ◆ Wills
- ◆ Mortgages
- ◆ Business records
- ◆ NYS records
- ◆ Published genealogies
- ◆ Archived records at the county and state level
- ◆ Photographs
- ◆ Oral histories
- ◆ Office files
- ◆ Internet

Preparing to Write:

- ◆ Once you've selected the topic, collect all the information you can find. Even if you're familiar with the topic you should do research to find any new information that has become available.
- ◆ Evaluate the information you've found. Always look for primary documents; that is, ones created at the time the incident took place by people in attendance. Secondary documents are created some time after the incident and cannot be relied upon to be accurate.
- ◆ Outline the points you want to cover
 - ◆ Introduction—tell them what you're going to tell them
 - ◆ Background of the topic
 - ◆ Important facts in a progressive, logical order
 - ◆ Conclusions
- ◆ Select graphics that help the reader understand the topic and enhance their interest.

Research Example

Topic Chosen—19th Century Local Mill

Research Sources and the Information they provide:

- Oral History—information from descendants, locals who saw the mill
- Newspaper Articles—to learn of fires at the mill, see ads showing prices, stories about owners.
- Deeds—document owners over periods of time, find specific descriptions of mill
- Photographs—that show the mill and employees or owners
- Census Records—tell about the owner's families, proximity to the mill site.
- Account books—showing mill clients and services provided
- Historical Maps—to see the location of the mill
- Letters, Diaries—documenting activities at the mill

Determine which are primary documents, try to verify information and eliminate any discrepancies.

Develop an Outline of the story you want to tell:

- Where the mill was located
- When and who constructed it
- What did the mill look like and what type of power was used
- When was the mill in business
- Who owned the mill over the years
- What did the mill produced (grain or lumber, or both)
- Did any disasters affect the mill or the employees
- Is the mill still there; if not what happened to it, and when.

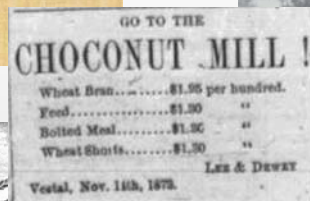
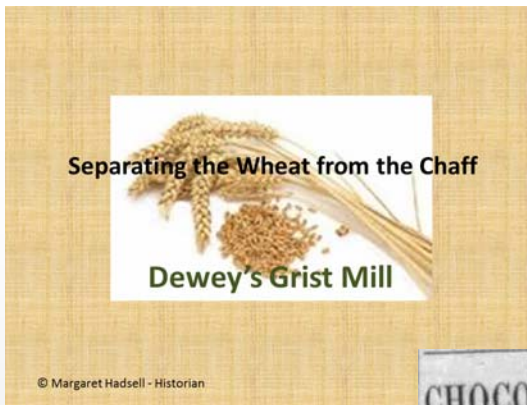
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Selecting Graphics:

- A photo of the mill.
- Photo of the owner and/or employees.
- Photo representing the type of power used (water wheel/steam).
- Map showing location of the mill.
- Illustrations of the type of grain ground at the mill or examples of the types of wood sawed there.
- Actual newspaper ad the mill ran.

Note: You might also check with a museum or historical society to see if any items from the mill exist. For example, a grain bag, grinding wheel, or sign. Ask permission to photograph these items to use for graphics.

Tip: Keep a file of the information you research and compile for the article so you can easily turn it into a PowerPoint presentation!



1865	Nov	Putnam Mersereau sells land to H.F. Lee for construction of a grist mill, dam, and raceway.
1877	Aug	Deed reads in part: "...and the part lying west hereof containing 2 and 1/2 acres more or less, the right and privilege of making and maintaining a dam across the Choconut Creek on the farm of the party of the first (Mersereau) near his bridge across the same in the public highway of making and maintaining a raceway or water course from said dam along or near bank west of said highway by the premises aforesaid and of using so much of the water of said creek as shall be necessary for running a grist mill or such other machinery as shall be built on said premises, said raceway to be built and maintained where now staked out, said part of the second part (Lee) not to use said water or make said dam so as to interfere with or damage the proprietor of land above on said stream...."

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Writing

Writing Tools:

- ◆ If possible, write your article using a program such as MS Word.
- ◆ If graphics are incorporated, it is best to use a publishing program that will provide more creative flexibility.
- ◆ Produce a .pdf file to send for publication

Methods to Avoid Writers Block:

- ◆ Don't try to write the article from beginning to end.
- ◆ Sort the information you've found into the major points of your outline.
- ◆ Using that information, write sentences or paragraphs that can be assembled under the key points of your outline.
- ◆ Add graphics where appropriate to provide interest and better understanding.
- ◆ Create an intriguing title that will grab the reader.
- ◆ Cite your sources at the end of the article or tell the reader where at your office they can be found.
- ◆ Remember to copyright your article.

Proofreading Your Article:

- ◆ It's a good idea to have another person proofread and edit your article if possible.
- ◆ If you plan to proofread it yourself, go to a quiet area and read the article out loud. Errors jump out when you read it out loud.



Publishing

How to Publish

When producing a book of a predetermined size (i.e. 8.5x11" or 5.5x8.5"), the author provides the publisher with a Portable Document Facility (PDF) file that is in final page format, including graphics...in other words, it's ready to print.

For articles appearing in a magazine, newsletter, or pamphlet, publishers prefer a Word or other publishing program document that can be manipulated to fit the space available in the publication. Graphics are "keyed" to the text, but sent separately. Keep in mind this format allows them to "edit" your document.

Notes:

1. Be sure to understand ahead of submission which type of document the publisher expects and whether they intend to edit your content. If they edit your content for length, grammar, or punctuation, ask to review a "proof" before it is published.

Read the proof very carefully as errors may have been introduced through typos, misspelling of names, dropped words, and transposed dates.

2. Book publishers and those companies that provide self-publishing services, will obtain an ISBN for your book.
3. You may be asked to write an article of a particular length, say 700 words. Rather than trying to write to that specific number of words, write the article to tell the story, then go back to "tighten" sentences and eliminate unnecessary verbiage to reach the word goal.

Tip: Keep the longer version, you may be able to use it elsewhere!

Where to Publish:

- ◆ Local daily/weekly newspapers.
- ◆ Society newsletters.
- ◆ Magazines with history or travel themes.
- ◆ Your municipal web page.
- ◆ Social media.
- ◆ As a self-published book or through a history book publisher.

Note: If you self-publish your book, know whether you plan to pay the publisher to print a specified number of copies or whether you want the book to be "print on demand" in which case the publisher only prints the book to fulfill pre-paid orders.

Tip: It's always good to talk to someone who has self-published a book to inquire about who they used, what was required, and to see the result.

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Copyright

While copyright law has not changed, it is becoming more common for the public to ignore the law when it comes to music, photographs, and text. It is up to the copyright holder to notify users that the material they are using is copyrighted.

Anyone who wants to use copyrighted material must contact the copyright holder for permission to do so. If permission to use is given, the material must be attributed to the copyright holder.

In general:

- By law, original works are automatically copyrighted when they are created. To ensure everyone knows your document is copyrighted, be sure to mark it as—
—© The year and your name. For example: © 2016 by Jane Doe
- Registered copyright provides an added layer of protection, but in most instances is not needed.
- Photos are automatically copyrighted by the person taking the photo. The photographer can pass his copyright to someone else. If you have permission to use a photo, the photographer is no longer alive, and/or the copyright has expired, you should still attribute the photo correctly. Some examples: “Used with Permission of Edward Aswad”, “ © 2012 Roger Luther”, “ © 1962 Broome County Historical Society”.

Additional information about copyright law is found at:

- <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/>
- Information about ISBNs and how to obtain them is found at:
<https://www.isbn-international.org/content/what-isbn>
- <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#107>

Note list:

1. Books are given an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and a copy is filed in the Library of Congress. ISBN-13 978-0-7385-5773-1
2. Always cite your sources correctly and use footnotes or note lists. “Cite Your Sources” by Richard S. Lackey is a good guide.
3. Understand what is acceptable use of a previously published work.