

## Timelines for Genealogy Research

Practicing genealogy is like working on a great big puzzle. Finding the right piece to fit, can be very exciting and satisfying.

One part of the puzzle is historical context. Timelines are a good tool for viewing your ancestor's life in a larger perspective. Researching your subject chronologically using the framework of the social, religious, moral, economic and political conditions that marked their time gives us a deeper appreciation of who they were. We can better understand why an ancestor moved from one location to another or migrated at a certain period in history. If your subject had several marriages, with children from each marriage, a timeline view provides additional clarity about relationships. Understanding the great shifts in population, wars and natural disasters that have affected the lives of our ancestors adds richness and detail to their story.

To illustrate, say your great uncle left Wisconsin in 1849 and relocated in San Francisco where your great grandfather joined him in 1850. You might conclude that both of these men came west to join the gold rush. If your great grandparent died in the United States in 1918 to 1919, he or she may have been a victim of the Influenza Pandemic. Perhaps someone moved from Nebraska to California in the early 1930's. Was their move a result of the Great Depression and Dustbowl migration?

I recently discovered that my father fought at the "Battle of the Bulge" in 1944-45. As part of the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, they went on to meet other troops at Buchenwald Concentration Camp where American GIs were the first liberators. My father rarely spoke of his World War II experiences, and we understood not to discuss this topic at home. Consequently, I never knew the real details of my father's service. Now discovering this information so much later, after his death, I understand how these experiences could have affected a young man of 19 years. Knowing these facts gives me insight and appreciation of the man beyond the guy I called, "Dad."

For a very simple free timeline Excel template and for further information on genealogy research tools, check out Beth Foulk's Genealogy Decoded website <http://genealogydecoded.com>