

The “INNOVATIVE IDEAS” Contest

In the previous issue of **The Smith County Trumpet** (2013 Edition, Issue 4) we presented an article detailing a suggested method for organizing census and tax records through the use of spreadsheets and timelines. A brief synopsis of this article is included below for reference. We received some good feedback from this article, and the Society decided to seek out others with similar original ideas that have been beneficial to them in their research and that could be of value to other genealogists.

It is with this goal in mind that we are opening the “Innovative Ideas” Contest. Beginning with the publication of this newsletter, we are beginning a friendly contest, the goal of which is the sharing of original and innovative research methods. If you have an idea or a method of organization or research that has been beneficial to you, the chances are that this method could be beneficial to others as well.

The contest details are as follows:

1. Submit your original idea (preferably with a sample of how the method works) to the Smith County, Mississippi Genealogical Society either via email, the website contact page, or regular postal mail.
2. The contest is open to members and non-members. Officers of the Smith County, Mississippi Genealogical Society are ineligible to participate.
3. The contest deadline for submissions is March 1, 2014. The Society’s officers will meet immediately following the regularly scheduled meeting on Saturday, March 8, 2014, to judge the submissions and select the winning entry. The winner will be notified via email or regular mail once the winning entry has been selected.
4. The winning submission (and possibly runners-up) will be included in the upcoming edition of **The Smith County Trumpet** as a featured article, credited to the winner, of course.
5. The author of the winning entry will receive a one year FREE MEMBERSHIP to the Smith County, Mississippi Genealogical Society. If the winning entry comes from a current member, the current membership will be extended for one year free of charge.
6. The winning submission must be an original and “innovative” idea. Please do not share research/organization methods from professional genealogists, books, websites, etc. This is a friendly contest meant to inspire amateur researchers to share ideas that could assist others in their research as well.

Submit entries via regular postal mail to:
Smith County MS Genealogical Society
P O Box 356
Raleigh, MS 39153

Submit entries via email to:

scmgs@smithcountygenealogy.org

Submit entries via the website at www.smithcountygenealogy.org, visit the contact page, and complete the contact and idea information.

We are looking forward to receiving your "INNOVATIVE IDEAS!" Good luck!

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF CENSUS DATA

(Synopsis, edited from **The Smith County Trumpet**, 2013 Edition, Issue 4)

In my research of late - actually my research of several years - I have been ultimately frustrated by the ever-formidable "brick wall" of genealogy infamy. Try as I might, I have been stuck at one particular ancestor, and I have devoted innumerable hours to solving the puzzle of his origins.

I decided recently that I would begin again - in a new direction. I began researching collateral lines, hoping that eventually lines would intersect at some point in the past. Upon beginning this immense undertaking, I did what all researchers usually do. I returned to my census records, expanding my ever-growing collection of census page images and transcriptions. In doing so, I implemented a research method that was shared with me and that has, in the past, helped me to organize my census data and get a clearer overall picture of my research.

I created a spreadsheet, or chart, of each branch of the family I was researching (by last name) and began to enter names, dates, and locations according to the census data. It takes a while to compile this data into a manageable form, but once it is compiled, it provides a much clearer picture of migration and location than flipping through a notebook or folder full of census records one at a time. I also included a column for place of birth recorded on the census record to compare with the information I already had in my research. This is beneficial when a place of birth is suspect. Sometimes, you must take the proliferation of evidence (not proof, mind you, but evidence) to make deductions that are reasonable based on available information. I color-coded the chart also, so that I could easily recognize date changes in census records.

It took a couple of days to compile one chart and do it properly. I played with different columns and fields for data that I might or might not need. Some fields I kept, others I discarded as not necessary for what I wanted the chart to provide. Once the chart was beginning to be complete, I realized how much data I did not have. This gave me new avenues of research. I had never realized, amidst all the paper that I had amassed, that there were lines of research that I had totally neglected or overlooked. And I would not have

realized it until much later had I not used the chart to put my data in a more organized format. Now on to the next step.

Once I had created my chart and input the data I had accumulated, I began the next step in applying this data to my research - a timeline. This is another of the suggestions I received from another genealogist, and it proved to also be well worth the time to create.

A timeline can be very simple or very complex, depending upon what you want to include for your research purposes. The main idea is just to put on paper and visualize the life span of your ancestors, including where they lived at particular times, land transactions, marriages, births of children, etc. Any event in the life of your ancestor that could affect your research can be included for reference.

Don't forget to include major regional, national, or world events on your timeline that could influence your research. Events such as major wars and conflicts, the Great Depression or the Dust Bowl, county and state formation dates (because your research locations could change even though your ancestors were in the same place), and any other significant event that you believe could have affected your ancestor's life can be included. This is a project that is completely personalized to your research and your family.

I am including a small snapshot of my census data chart below to give you an idea of where you might want to start if you choose to create one for your family. I can only tell you that this project has given me tremendous insight into my research and the avenues still left to be explored.

		1816 MS		1820 US		1830 US		1840 US		1850 US		
Name	Birthplc	Location	Age	Location	Age	Location	Age	Location	Age	Location	Age	Birthplc
Moses 1787	Cheraws SC	Wayne MS	21&up	Cov MS	26-45	Jones MS	40-50	Jones MS	50-60	Perry MS	63	SC