



The Virginia Genealogical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Have You Published Yet?

Has it occurred to you that all the effort which you have put into research may be lost unless you publish your findings? By getting information in print you not only safeguard it, but in addition you contribute immeasurably to the ease with which it can be located by others. Notes passed down through families seldom survive, and whereas archival storage is safe, materials in such depositories lack the widespread accessibility of the printed word. Keep in mind: your carefully compiled papers can only be in one archives; published, they will be in numerous libraries. The Constitution of our Society specifically prescribes that we search, that we preserve, and that we share. Certainly publishing is the means by which we must fully accomplish the second and third of these objectives.

Do not put off writing because you feel you are incapable of doing it. Others in the past made that mistake, and the information which died with them is the missing key to someone's current genealogical problem. Once the facts are down, a capable editor can give you much of the other help you may need. However, before you begin, an important decision has to be made: Precisely who should you choose as a subject? An ancestor on whom nothing has ever been written? Or a pioneer about whom much is in print, most of it inaccurate according to your research? Either would be a good choice. Before deciding finally between the possibilities, take the time to measure each against the two following criteria. Ask yourself if you have chosen a subject which is (1) remote enough to be historically significant, yet (2) near enough for you to deal with it factually. For most of us amateurs writing about Virginia family history, this means choosing a subject situated in the late 17th or the early 18th centuries. This period is sufficiently distant for our purposes because it goes back to the time when most of Virginia's colonial immigrants were arriving in this country. If taken from this period, your subject is likely to be of wide genealogical significance, since there are individuals in nearly every state in the Union who are descended from these ancient planters. On the other hand, because you have not ventured too far into the past, your topic will usually require nothing but available domestic records to give it a sound factual basis. Although exploring the European antecedents of American pioneers is a legitimate and important line of inquiry, the fact remains that relatively few of the earliest colonists coming to this country left precise indications here of their overseas origins, and consequently the prospects of situating many people firmly within the jurisdiction of a specific British or Continental borough, county, or parish are, at best, slim. Once we accept this, we are spared the empty consequences of culling unlikely forebears from compendiums such as Burke's Landed Gentry, of ending up in the ludicrous position of implying a blood relationship to remote figures like Edward the Confessor through a family line that, in moments of candor, we have to admit is simply a genealogical dead-end. If you feel an irrepressible urge to boast, let it be that in your work you appealed exclusively to the honest principles of common sense and sound scholarship.

The form you select for getting your subject down on paper will be limited only by your skill and experience. If neither is extensive, keep your work simple and base it on a sound model. Observing a conventional order of events-- birth, baptism, followed by marriage, military service, parenthood, old age, widowhood, and the like-- is probably the safest course for the novice to follow. Besides simple structure, such an approach will give your paper verisimilitude, even if it lacks the finer literary merits. On the other hand, you need not feel compelled to limit yourself to a strict recital of demographics alone. If in the course of your research you have uncovered unusual sidelights on the

