

# Facebook: A Tool for Genealogy Research

Thomas MacEntee, of High-Definition Genealogy  
<http://hidefgen.com> [hidefgen@gmail.com](mailto:hidefgen@gmail.com)

## Facebook Overview

For purposes of this lecture, we won't be focusing on the basics of Facebook such as setting up an account, "friending" other users, etc. The assumption is that you already understand the basic features of Facebook such as how to post to and navigate to your Wall and your News Feed, how to send a Message, etc.

## Using Facebook's Search Function for Genealogy

One of the most neglected features of Facebook by genealogists, is the search function. By using strategic searches based on place names, surnames and more, you can find new information relevant to your family history research. Facebook's **Search** field is located in the upper left corner. Enter search criteria and click the magnifying glass icon to see search results.

- **Use Facebook Graph Search:** Create specialized and "compound searches" for not-so-obvious results. Example: enter "Friends who like genealogy" and a list of friends meeting the search criteria appears. Key function words include "people" and "places."
- **Explore ALL results:** Click the magnifying glass icon at the top or bottom of the search results list. A new page will appear with results grouped by section in the **Result Type** sidebar on the left.
- **Use See More option:** Facebook limits the number of results shown for each section. Always click **See more** at the bottom of the results list.
- **Explore all Result Types:** Use the **Result Types** sidebar on the left to explore search results for Pages, Groups, Photos and more.
- **Clear Searches:** Yes, Facebook retains a history of everything you locate via Search. To review your past searches, click **Activity Log** in the upper left corner then click **Search** in the left sidebar. Your searches will appear. To delete individual searches, click **Hidden from Timeline** on the right and select **Delete** and then click **Remove Search**. To delete the entire search history, click **Clear Searches** at the top of the page.

## Using Facebook Content for Genealogy

Can you use postings, photos and other information found on Facebook as part of your genealogy research? Why not? Facebook is simply another source of content on the Internet. While a post may not be the definitive source to prove a birth date or location, often it will provide clues to actual source documentation for you to use. Here are some tips for Facebook users on extract the most content from your Facebook searches and postings:

- **Every Post has a link:** Have you ever wanted to link to a specific post on Facebook? To find the link, locate the post and place your cursor on the date/time of the post (below the poster's name). Right click with your mouse and select **Copy Link Address**. Paste the link in a document or email.
- **Ask permission when using photos and content:** Copyright laws extend to postings on Facebook too! Ask the person posting the info for permission, especially if you are working on a family history book or blog post.
- **Citing Facebook as a source:** Treat Facebook the same as any other website source when creating source citations. Ex: MacEntee, Thomas, "Life of John Ralph Austin," posted 24 July 2015, Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com> accessed 26 July 2015).

## Facebook Pages and Facebook Groups – What is the difference?

One of the most confusing issues for new Facebook users is telling the difference between a Facebook Page and a Facebook Group. Using each type is relatively easy; the real confusion occurs when trying to create a Facebook Page or a Facebook Group.

The main difference is interaction of page visitors vs. group members. A group usually requires a user to request membership whereas a page only requires a “like” from a user. A group allows you as the user to post a query whereas most pages only allow the Admin to post content.

Think of it this way: a Facebook Page is more like a news broadcast about a certain topic, company, or even a genealogy society. It leans more towards one-way communication: from the page Admin to those who have liked the page. A Facebook Group, however, allows the group member more options to communicate with the group Admin and the other members.

## Using Facebook Groups for Genealogy Research

Before you can use any of the features of a Facebook Group, you may have to make a request to “join” that group. Most groups have a security setting of Closed in order to ensure that members understand the group’s rules and focus area. Here are some tips for Facebook Group members on how to get the maximum benefit from your membership:

- **Search within the group:** After joining a Facebook Group, scroll through the recent posts. Before posting a query, use the search box (upper right below the Cover Photo) to see if your question has already been posted and answered.
- **Post only relevant info:** A Facebook Group is not a billboard or a place to have general conversations. If the focus of the group is on German Genealogy, only post articles and queries relevant to that topic. Most group Admins will remove irrelevant posts and will go as far as banning members who don’t follow the group rules.
- **Update posts:** When asking for assistance with a problem, if a resolution has been found, return to the original post, click **Edit** and type SOLVED or RESOLVED at the beginning of the post.
- **Add group to Favorites:** On the left sidebar, under **Groups**, click **More**. A list of groups to which you belong will appear. Click **+Add to Favorites**.
- **Manage Notifications:** If you belong to an active group, click **Notifications** and decide how and when you want to be notified of updates.
- **Check Files section:** Locate the Cover photo at the top of the group and click on **Files**. Often, the group Admin and members post templates and downloadable files.
- **Use hashtags:** Did you know that you can use hashtags in a Facebook post and it becomes a search tool for that group? Enter **#genealogy** or **#software** at the beginning or the end of the post. Then click on the hashtag to find similar posts within the group.

## Creating and running a Facebook Group

Managing a Facebook Group is a big commitment, much more than managing a Facebook Page. A group requires daily monitoring by at least one Admin to make sure that the topics and group members are staying focused on the group’s topic.

### *Creating a Facebook Group*

- To get started, click **Create Group** in the left sidebar under the list of your favorite groups.
- Add a **Title**, add one **Facebook friend** (required), click **Add to Favorites**, select **Privacy Level** (Closed is recommended) and then click **OK**.

- Next, select an icon representative of your group. This action is not required, click **Skip** or **OK**
- Now customize your Facebook group:
  - Upload a **Cover Photo**. The recommended size is 851 (wide) x 315 (high) pixels.
  - Click **Add a Description** and enter a brief description about the group and its goals.
  - Click the ellipsis (...) and select **Edit Group Settings**
  - In the **Membership Approval** section, select **Any member can add members, but an admin must approve them**.
  - In the **Web and Email Address section**, select **Customize Address** and enter customized info.

Your group is now set up and you can begin adding new members and posting relevant information! Here are some tips for Facebook Group Admins on the best way to set up and maintain a group:

- **Select the right Privacy level:** There are three levels of security used when setting up a Facebook Group: **Open** (anyone can join), **Closed** (an Admin must review and approve the member) and **Secret** (Admin must approve member AND the group cannot be located via Facebook Search).
- **Write an accurate Description:** For Open and Closed groups which can be located via Facebook Search, provide an accurate Description for the group under **Settings**.
- **Create a READ FIRST post:** Many group Admins like to set the “tone” of a group with a brief Welcome post pinned to the top of the Wall. Outline the focus of the group, what types of content is permitted, and how violators will be handled.
- **Claim a vanity URL:** When first created, Facebook assigns a long multi-digit number to your group. In the top-right corner, click **Edit Group Settings** (you must be a Group Admin with rights to change the Settings). Scroll down to **Web and Email Addresses** then click **Customize Address**.
- **Enforce group rules:** If you set out rules for your group, take time to check group member posts and enforce those rules. Otherwise you risk a lack of member participation and members will leave the group.
- **Ask before adding members:** One of the more annoying features of Facebook Groups is the ability to add any of your Facebook Friends as group members. You’ll have a more engaged group of users if you first message or email potential members, and ask if they would like to be added to the group. Better yet, send them the link to the group and let them join on their own!
- **Watch the spammers!:** If you have group security set to Open you will definitely have spammers join; they will post anything and everything much to the aggravation of other group members. For Closed groups, you will have to review each request to determine if the potential member is legit. Things to look for: if the member has been on Facebook for one month or less OR if they don’t have a Profile photo, it is likely they are a spammer. Make sure you click Block when processing these requests so they don’t try to join your group again.
- **Select a second group Admin:** Facebook allows multiple Admins for Facebook Groups. Select a “backup” person who you trust in case you get sick or you no longer want to run the group.

## Using Facebook Pages for Genealogy Research

Facebook Pages have limited use for genealogists and family historians; think of a page as a news channel where you receive updates. Pages don't allow much interaction with those who "like" or follow a page; the conversation is often "one way." Here are some tips for users of Facebook Pages on how to get the maximum benefit from your using pages:

- **Use Facebook Page as an information feed:** Click **Like** on a page to follow any updates made on the page. These updates will appear in your **News Feed**.
- **Use Facebook Pages for vendor customer service:** If you encounter an issue with a genealogy product or service, try sending a Message to the page Admin; most vendors monitor their pages for customer-service related inquiries.
- **Get Notifications:** Make sure you are notified when new items are posted to the page. Click the down arrow next to **Liked** and select **Get Notifications**.
- **Add page to Favorites:** On the left sidebar, under **Pages**, click **More**. A list of pages you follow will appear. Click the "gear" icon for a page and then click **Add to Favorites**.

## Creating and running a Facebook Page

Managing a Facebook Page is relatively easy compared to a Facebook Group which requires constant "care and feeding." Think of your page as a billboard; check in occasionally to add new content to keep your followers interested in you page.

### *Creating a Facebook Page*

- To get started, click **Create Page** in the left sidebar under the list of your favorite pages. The **Create a Page** dialog appears. Select the type of page you want to create (you can always change the type later). Click **Get Started**.
- Next, customize your Facebook Page using the **Setup** dialog which has four sections:
  - Click **About** and add information about your page, including a **Description** and a link to a **Website**. Also enter a vanity URL for your page under **Facebook Web Address**.
  - Click **Profile Picture** and upload a photo representative of your page topic.
  - Click **Add to Favorites** and then add your new page to your list of **Favorite Pages**.
  - Finally, click **Preferred Page Audience**. Use the various fields to target a specific audience or click **Save Info** and complete the **Set Up** process.
- Your new Facebook Page appears. Click **Add a Cover** and add a cover page. The recommended size is 851 (wide) x 315 (high) pixels.
- Click **About** and add more information to your page under **Page Info**.

Your page is now set up and you can begin posting relevant information and getting other Facebook users to like the page! Here are some tips for Facebook Page Admins on how to set up and maintain a page:

- **Do not set up a separate Facebook account:** Facebook has been cracking down on accounts not connected to a real person. Also, you can set up as many Facebook Pages as you want under one Facebook account.
- **Complete the About section:** Enter as much of the Page Info as possible in the About section. This allows other Facebook users to find your page easily during searches.
- **Use as Page as a broadcast channel:** Share articles, blog posts, coupons, offers etc. all relevant to your Facebook Page topic.

- **Take advantage of Schedule function:** Click the down arrow next to Publish after composing a post. Select **Schedule** and schedule the post to appear at a specific date.
- **Pin important posts to the top:** To maintain the focus on a specific post, click the down arrow in the upper-right corner of the post and select **Pin to Top**.
- **Claim a vanity URL:** When first created, Facebook assigns a long multi-digit number to your page. Click **About** and scroll down to **Facebook Web Address**. Hover the cursor pointer on the right and click the **Edit** icon to make changes.
- **Review Page Insights:** Click **Insights** to see how your page is performing. You can also research trends, demographics, and the best time to post to your page.

## Understanding Privacy on Facebook

Privacy continues to be one of the features most criticized by Facebook users, despite the fact that many users haven't taken the time to understand how privacy works.

- **Get a Privacy Checkup:** Click the padlock icon in the upper right corner and select **Privacy Checkup**. Walk through all the steps to review your current privacy settings.
- **Always check your posting status:** Facebook remember the status you last used for posting. So if you posted an article using Public, it will use that same status for your next post. Always determine the post's audience before clicking **Publish**.
- **Use View As:** Want to know what your Friends or others see when they look at your Facebook Timeline? Click the **ellipsis (...)** on your profile and select **View As**.
- **Control photo and post tagging:** Under **Settings**, select **Timeline and Tagging**. In the section **How can I manage tags people add and tagging suggestions**, click **Edit** and select **On**. This setting will allow you to approve when others tag you.

## Resource List

- **Genealogy on Facebook List**  
<http://socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list/>  
An amazing list of over 5,300 Facebook groups and pages related to genealogy.
- **Facebook for Canadian Genealogy**  
<http://genealogyalacarte.ca/?p=7656>  
A list of Facebook groups and pages for Canada genealogy.
- **Facebook – Customized Web and Email Addresses for Groups**  
<https://www.facebook.com/help/206871819351594>
- **Facebook – How Do I Create a Group?**  
<https://www.facebook.com/help/167970719931213>
- **Facebook – How Do I Create a Page?**  
<https://www.facebook.com/help/104002523024878>
- **Facebook Privacy Basics**  
<https://www.facebook.com/about/basics>
- **Facebook Search**  
<http://search.fb.com/>
- **Facebook Search Basics**  
<https://www.facebook.com/help/460711197281324/>
- **Facebook Tips for Group Admins**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groupadmins/tips.pdf/>
- **Facebook – What Other See About You**  
<https://www.facebook.com/about/basics/what-others-see-about-you/>
- **Five Tips for Running a Successful Facebook Group**  
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/5-tips-running-facebook-group-successfully-jason>
- **How to see (and erase) your Facebook search history or else**  
<http://www.komando.com/tips/12436/how-to-see-and-erase-your-facebook-search-history-or-else/all>