October 2, 2023

Hello fellow family researchers,
October is "Family History Month". We finally have a "fill in the blank" month that was made just for us! I feel like having a month named for "Family History" should challenge us to do something. Here's what I decided to do.

I use Family Tree Maker software for my family history. I have been using this program since Family Tree Maker started in its current form, about 1995. You can imagine that a lot of my entries and files have gotten to be a mess over all of that time. I'm choosing October to start cleaning up my family tree entries and files. Now, this task will take me more than the month of October. I currently have over 26,000 people in my tree and I have been researching since 1981. What I mean by cleaning up my tree is, unifying the way I enter names and places in my database, and the way I name and organize my media that is attached to people.

I have found that over time, I have greatly varied the way I've entered things, and it makes it hard to find things sometimes. Because of that, I spend more time searching for pictures or census records, or worse yet, I forget I have them, and take time to download and attach them again. No matter how many people you have in your tree, or how long you have been researching, it's easy for this to happen. I started with checking all of my place entries. For example, Evansville, IN or Evansville, Vanderburgh Co, IN or a million other ways. I've committed to always putting city, county – with the word county spelled out, state spelled out, and country. So, Evansville, Vanderburgh County, Indiana, USA. Another must, always list women by their maiden name. I understand that different software may have little points that are different, but good research entries should be pretty standard. The other area I'm working on are my media files. I sync my tree in Family Tree Maker with my tree on Ancestry.com. I can change things in my tree on my computer and it will update my tree on Ancestry. If I change something on my Ancestry tree and then sync that to my computer, sometimes it's not as clean as I would like. Instead of storing it as John Brown 1940 census, sometimes it just comes out as 1940 census (132). I have decided that in order to have all the records for one person in the same place, I'm going to put last name first, then first name, then the record type or picture description, then the date.

I'm hoping that by telling you what my goal is for Family History Month, I will keep myself accountable. I'll check back in with you next month. What will your challenge be?

Kim Van Vorst

President TSGS