

Describe Your Image Files In Their Filenames

John Zimmerman - June, 2022

As genealogists we collect a lot of photographs and documents to support our research. Images range from photos of one person, to photos of groups, certificates, obituaries, headstones, houses, vehicles, animals, etc. It's a real challenge to identify, sort, store and preserve them as physical photos and documents, and doing the same for the digital versions can be even more challenging. This article describes a method for meeting the challenge of how to identify, store and retrieve digital images.

Storing physical photos and documents is perhaps most often done using a folder, binder, or box for each family or surname, with sub-folders, or sections for categories of photos and documents. Images of documents are often self-explanatory, but details describing photos of people, places and things are often written on the backs of those photos, or on a separate document stored with each item. Some people opt to number items, then make a separate listing of what each item is. Items are stored numerically by index number and index lists are kept both numerically and alphabetically by content, with associated index numbers. Either method works fairly well for anyone familiar with the surnames and families, and what system a person uses is simply a matter of personal preference. However, such systems do not work well when we pass digital image files along to others who do not have either the folders, binders or boxes, or the index lists, so I have developed a standard for naming digital image files that describes the image contents in the filename for that image.

The advent of digital imagery challenged us to develop practical ways of naming, organizing and storing digital images. Often genealogists simply transferred the system they were using for physical photos and documents to the digital environment. That had the advantage of being a familiar system, but it had some practical drawbacks. It made for some complex folder structures, could be hard to distinguish between identical family surnames, and it was sometimes hard to determine where to file group photos, etc. An additional challenge was how to know details of what each image contained without looking at the image, and even then, if a person were not fairly familiar with the subject, the image could be baffling.

Several years ago I was asked to organize an extensive family history for a friend. My friend had produced over 70 years of personal journals and had collected family history records going back to the mid-sixteenth century. There were thousands of photos of people, places and things, most of which I did not recognize. Our goal was to produce a menu driven CD of the entire body of work, so each photo and document had to be digitized. Though my friend was fairly methodical in marking his photos, some were unmarked, or tagged with cryptic notes like "Aunt Mary on Porch 53." Who was Aunt Mary? Where was that porch? Was "53" part of the year, an address or Aunt Mary's age? In the beginning my only recourse was to ask my friend to interpret such photos, but once a photo was scanned I didn't want to have to ask again, or go back to the original to get details. Another issue arose when I had to send an image file to someone unfamiliar with the subject. I needed a simple folder and naming system for digital image files.

This article describes my solutions to those issues. It shows how including descriptive details in image filenames makes image files easy to identify, and completely searchable. I can send an image file to someone unfamiliar with the subject and the filename lets them understand the contents of the file.

While the method I describe in this article worked very well for me, and continues to do so, it is not the only solution to organizing and annotating your digital images. Whatever method you adopt must satisfy your personal needs for comfort and usability, however, I believe this method offers some unique advantages in simplicity and organizational consistency. Using the Quick Reference guide at the end of the article provides a central reference to remind the user of the bulk of the rules found in the article. I welcome suggestions for improvement.

A FOLDER SYSTEM

I'll begin with the folder system. **Figure 1** shows an example of a complex folder system. It can be a very comfortable system, particularly if a person's physical files are kept in a very similar storage structure.

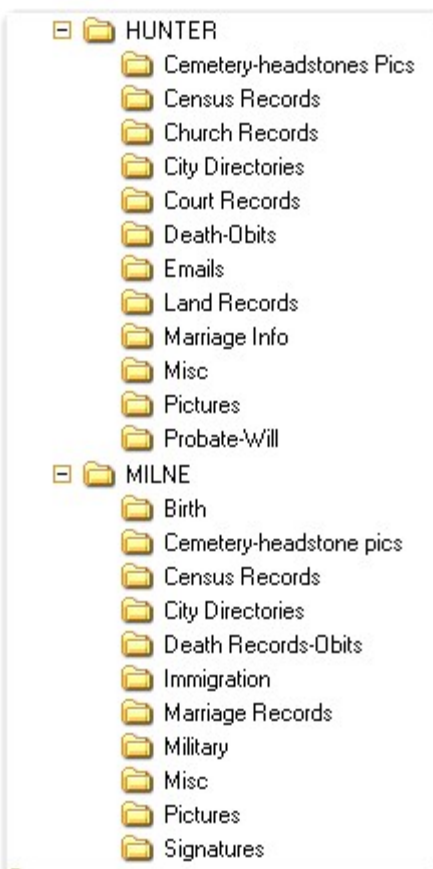


Figure 1 – Surname Folder System With Category Specific Sub-Folders

To simplify my search for a particular image I was interested in minimizing folder system complexity. With a complex folder system such as shown in **Figure 1** I could see myself choosing the wrong surname, then drilling down to a subfolder, only to discover my mistake when I saw the actual image, and having to back out and try again. There were several family groups with identical surnames, some with identical given and surnames, and I didn't need any additional confusion. I had seen folder systems based on dates, where photos taken in a particular year were all filed in a folder for that year, or where the filenames were awarded starting with the date on which the photo was taken. I discarded such systems as they would only work for someone who was very familiar with that family's chronological history.

Early on it became clear that placing all the image files in a single folder would result in such a large mass of files as to make finding anything visually very challenging. I knew that I could search for filenames and tags using File Explorer, but I also knew there would be times when I needed to view a group of similar files (for example only documents, or group photos) in a less exclusive list to evaluate some aspect of those files. Although I wanted to avoid creating a maze of folder categories it seemed logical to pre-sort the image files to some extent. After some consideration I decided that all image files could be separated into one of four general categories; **1) Individuals**, **2) Documents**, **3) Groups** (two or more people), and **4) Places & Things**. I decided to shorten the folder names to **Docs**, **Groups**, **Indiv** and **Places** for simplicity. That folder system made it easy for me to know where to look for a particular type

of photo, and to backup or move those folders. Genealogy programs mostly have a folder for digital images, usually with an obvious name like “Media” or “Pictures.” I simply added the folder group as sub-folders to “Media” and **Figure 2** shows the resulting folder system. Pretty simple, huh?

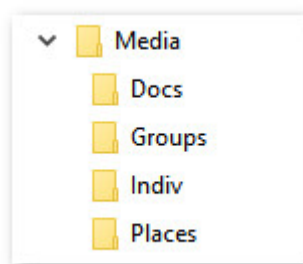


Figure 2 – Folder System Diagram

FILE NAMING PHILOSOPHY

I knew that Windows File Explorer (previously known as File Manager) could sort and search for me with lightning speed if my filenames were logically, and consistently, structured and descriptive enough, so I decided to develop a file-naming standard that supported such sorting and searching.

In my opinion the most important aspects of any filing system are clarity and simplicity. I believe that filenames can, and should, clearly indicate what each file contains, so that anyone reading that filename will know what the image portrays. In almost all cases there should be no need to view the image, read additional written explanations, make reference to an external list, understand a cryptic numbering system, or to wade through a complex folder system. If I send an image file to someone they should understand what that file contains simply by looking at the filename.

I’m going to step into the technical side of this subject now, but only very shortly. Windows 10 allows long filenames (32,767 characters), but long file names must be specifically enabled by changing a setting within the Registry or filenames will be limited to a maximum length of 260 characters, including the full path to the file. Path is the combination of the filename, plus the drive names and directories that lead to where a file is stored. To enable long filenames:

1. Start the registry editor (regedit.exe) by right-clicking on the Windows icon in the bottom left corner of the screen, then left single-click on “Run,” enter “regedit” and click on “OK.”
2. Navigate to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\FileSystem
3. Double click LongPathsEnabled
4. Set the value in parenthesis to 1 and click OK
5. Reboot

I decided to take advantage of that available length and name each image file to describe **who, what, when** and **where** right in the filename whenever practical. Here is an example of the path for a file in the Groups folder of Legacy on my computer. Both lines are part of the path and should be viewed as if they were on a single line.

K:\Legacy\Media\Indiv\MILNE Joan Esther -MORRISON- 1915-1985 Wedding 1938 Dec 10 Detroit Wayne Co MI.jpg

The path shown above is 104 characters in length. That includes all symbols and punctuation. The filename starts with Joan’s maiden surname, followed by her given names, married surname, birth and

death years, occasion of the photo, the year, month and day of the photo, city, county and state where taken, and file type. All of the words and numbers in the filename are searchable. I purposely have not mentioned Windows versions prior to 10 as they are no longer supported by Microsoft.

Because a genealogist's primary focus is people I reasoned that any file naming system should place the greatest emphasis on names, not documents, dates or places. Filenames would start with surname (maiden surname for the ladies, if known), then given name(s), married surname(s), year of birth and death (if known) to help distinguish among people with the same names, then events (or type of document), then dates and finally places. In other words, **who**, **what**, **when** and **where**. That way electronic files sorted in alphabetical order and would group files for a particular individual together. I developed my image file naming standard based on that simple pattern. Anyone viewing a list of file names would be able to see at a glance all files pertaining to a surname or individual, and they would be grouped by event or document type, then by date, and finally by place. Because file management programs that are part of both Windows and Mac operating systems, and those operating systems can search on any part of a filename and display the results in a list, I found it unnecessary to create complex folder systems. If (for example) I wanted a list of all the Smith census files in my Documents folder I could simply search on "smith census" and have the resulting list in a heartbeat because the words "SMITH" and "census" would both be part of the filenames for those files.

Exceptions

Of course there are exceptions. Often we have a photo of an individual but little other information. Sometimes the only information we have is a name, or only how the person was related to a known family member. I have one photo of a scholarly looking lady for whom the only information I have is that she is, "Aunt Lou, daughter of Conrad Zimmerman's brother." The filename for "Aunt Lou" reads:

ZIMMERMAN Lou -Aunt- Daughter Of Brother of ZIMMERMAN Conrad C.jpg

If I find more information I can change the filename. Another exception is group photos, which require a special solution for inclusion of many names, etc., and that is covered in a later section in this article.

WHO

People Names

Entering a person's name the same way in each filename pertaining to them ensures that their image files sort together in a file listing, thereby eliminating the need to search for several variations of their name. Grouping all the files for a person together also makes it easier to change those entries if necessary. Such changes are not unusual. A person known by the name "John Smith" when research began might later be identified further as "John Whitney Smith." Including all given names also makes it easier to tell one "John Smith" from another. Where known the years of birth and death, separated by a dash (-), should be added following names to help identify the individual except in group photos where I felt such year entries would take up too much space in the filename. If the year of either birth, or death are not known then include whichever is known, preceded, or followed, by a dash, **but is not entered for living people**.

FLOWER Horace 1805- Census 1800 & Hannah Prairieville Barry Co MI.pdf

Including events, spouse names, dates and places, etc. in file names also helps tell one person from another. If a person's name shows up in records with a variety of spellings, choose one combination of those names and stick with it for naming their image files. A simple workaround for including various

spellings of a surname would be to include both variations in the filename, but lead with the variation you choose to identify them with and add the alternative spelling after all the given names for a person, enclosing it in dashes to call attention to it being the exception. That is also a way to include married names of ladies. More about that in the next section. Naming image files with a consistent surname sorts them together without changing the entry in the actual document. Here's an example of someone whose surname started out as "Smythe" and later changed to "Smith."

SMITH John Joseph -SMYTHE- 1825-1898 Census 1850 Trenton Wayne Co MI.jpg

Searches on either SMITH or SMYTHE will result in showing this file in the search results.

Maiden Names

Genealogy programs file ladies under their maiden surnames, so use those maiden surnames whenever practical in naming their image files. Of course sometimes the only name known is a lady's married name, such as on a headstone, or in a Find A Grave (FAG) memorial, or a census entry. It is beneficial to enter both maiden and married surnames when both are known. Enclose surnames with a dash (-) when they occur other than in the first position in the filename. For example headstones for a lady seldom included their maiden name, so image files of such a headstone are named using the surname on the marker because that is how we would find them in a search at a cemetery, or often online. Enter the lady's married surname followed her given names and then, enclosed in dashes, her maiden name. In the following example the lady's married name is BEITEL and her maiden name is BARTOE.

BEITEL Donna M -BARTOE- 1941-1988 Headstone Greenlawn Mem Cem Akron Summit Co OH.jpg

In the second example SMITH was Susan's married name at her death, Susie was how she was known, GILLESPIE was the lady's maiden name and MILNE was name when married to her first husband. The first surname in a filename is always either the lady's maiden name or the surname on her death records or headstone. In that case the first surname after her given name(s) will always be her maiden name, followed by other married surnames in the order of those marriages.

SMITH Susan Anne -Susie- -GILLESPIE- -MILNE- 1860-1947 FAG Memorial 39725085.jpg

Place & Thing Names

Filenames for places and things are somewhat problematic, as not every place or thing is associated with an individual, or even a family name. Some place or thing filenames work best when preceded by preface words. For example, I spent twenty years in the United States Air Force, and much of the following thirty years working in the aerospace industry. I have collected many images of aircraft, and other aviation-related places and things. If I used filenames based on the numeric designation of the aircraft (e.g. B-2, F-15, etc.), or their official, or nick names, they would be filed all over the place in the file listing. For my own convenience I chose to precede their filenames with the word "Avi" as an abbreviation for Aviation. Using a preface keeps them together in the file listings and makes them easy to find. Certain other things lend themselves to the same treatment and I have created a list of "preface" words, to identify such items. I add to that list as I find it convenient, and you will most likely have your own list. For example:

Animal – entered as **Anim**

Aviation – entered as **Avi**

Heraldry – for patches, badges, crests, etc.

Keepsake – entered as **Keep**

Map – for maps and charts

Ship – for ships

Structures – entered as **Struc**

Vehicles – entered as **Vehic**

Here are some examples of filenames for places and things.

Avi F-104s Webb AFB 1965 Big Spring Howard Co TX.jpg

Keep MILNE Spoon Monogrammed From BOWDEN Florence Lee Nora 1888-1986.jpg

Map Fayette Twp Lawrence Co OH 1887.jpg

Struc Kriders Lutheran Church Westminster Carroll Co MD.jpg

WHAT

Photo-types, Events, Things & Document Types

This is the place to enter the nature or purpose of the image event. What makes it different from all the other images of that person, place or thing? That could include the type of photo, the type or name of the event or thing depicted or the period during which it was taken (e.g. Headstone, Death Cert., Reunion, FAG Memorial, Obit., Wedding, Civil War, etc.). If all you know about the photo is that it was taken on the porch, then "On Porch" is appropriate. I enter photo type, or document type at the end of a filename as often there is more than one photo with the same name, but of different types (e.g. Headshot, Standing, In Tuxedo, Transcription, etc.). That allows images with the same name to be sorted together, but allows for easy distinction by endings.

WHEN

Dates

This entry further distinguishes the image from others like it. Enter dates in the order year, month, day so that they sort by year, thereby providing a convenient chronological listing. Dates should be entered in the format YYYY Mmm DD, with months entered as three-letter abbreviations, so 12 January, 1857 would be entered as 1857 Jan 12. Although such entries sorts the months out of their natural order it avoids any possible confusion between month and day. Enter census by year only to make reading easier (e.g. Census 1850).

WHERE

Places

Places should begin with the least significant place name, such as a cemetery name, followed by city, county, and state, and/or country, or the equivalent, if any. Here are some examples. For a census entry, when the spouse is known, enter the spouse's given name, preceded by an ampersand (&), after the census year to keep census files sorted in order by year.

BARTOE Donna M -BEITEL- 1941-1988 Headstone Greenlawn Mem Pk Cem Akron Summit Co OH.jpg

BUZZA William G Census 1861 & Mary A Saint Cleer Cornwall England.jpg

SMITH John Joseph & JONES Mary Marriage Cert 1847 Jun 2 Detroit Wayne Co MI.jpg

MARTIN Johan Eberhard 1718-1784 Bap Reg 1718 Notzingen Wurttemberg Germany.jpg

Additional Information

Finally special information, such as copy 2 of 3, “Trans” for Transcription, “Enh” for Enhanced, etc., can be added at the end of a file name. For example:

BOGGS Susan Caroline 1842-1913 1907 Enh Colorized.jpg

CHRISTAN Lamanda -BOGGS- 1842-1916 Cp 2.jpg

GILLESPIE Raymond Barraccliffe 1898-1943 WW I Draft Reg Card Pg 1 of 2.pdf

HART John & TAYLOR Sarah Marriage Reg 1905 Nov 4 Ogeman Co MI Trans.pdf

DOCUMENT FILES

Naming most documents is pretty straight forward, with little chance of mistaking one for another. Start with the surname of the person, or family for whom the document is concerned, followed by the given name(s), the type of document, etc. Census document images are a challenge because we need to tell apart heads of households with the same surname & given name. Including year of birth and death, and the spouses given name by placing them after the year of the census, helps solve this challenge. That placement also allows for sorting of the files into groups by surname, given name, type of file, year and spouse's name. Where I know the full name of a person I enter the full name to help keep my listings consistent and sorting together, even though (for example) a census entry might only include the given name. Some documents should be filed by their type, for example Articles from newspapers. I suggest you precede the file name of such documents with the word “Article,” which results in sorting all of the articles together

SEARCHING - A Powerful Tool

You can search on any component of a filename by entering the desired component (or components) in the search field. The "Search" field will have a second word in the field after "Search." That second word is the name of the active folder that you have selected to search within. If you enter "census" in the "Search" field in the upper-right corner of the screen with File Explorer in Windows 7-10, **Figure 3, red arrow**) then the word "census" will take the place of "Search Docs" and you will be presented with a list of all files with the word "census" in their filename. A partial result list may be seen in **Figure 4**. Result lists may need to be sorted by clicking on the Name column. It's easy to see which census documents you have.

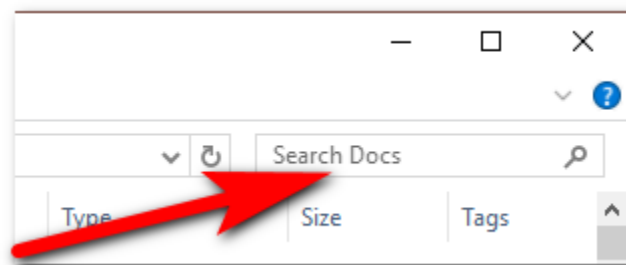


Figure 3 - Search

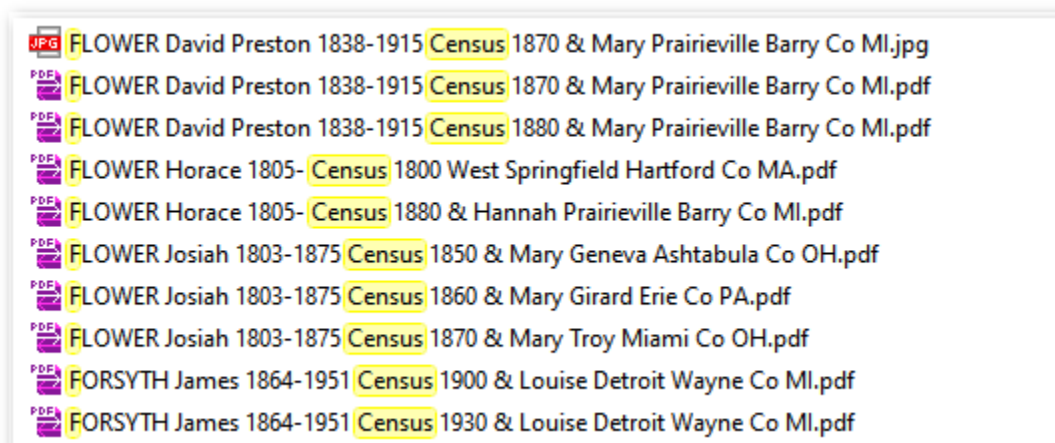


Figure 4 –Census Search Results - Partial Listing Example

Note on name consistency - entering given name spellings as you know them to be, as opposed to how the census taker entered them on the documents, sorts them all together. For example, Katherine, wife of Ralph G. Forsyth, was entered in the 1930 census as "Catherine", but I know her name was spelled with a "K" not a "C" and I entered the filename using "Katherine". **Exception** - If a document contains a record that your are not sure pertains to that person, and the name is slightly different in spelling or inscription, that would be a good reason to name the file as it appears in the record, so it will stand out in a listing.

Searches work from the active folder down through any sub-folders, but not the other way around. If you structure your folders so that all your image files are in one folder, or in sub-folders of that folder, then you can search them all with one action. If you pattern your image file folders after the example in this article, with a Pictures folder, or Media folder, and sub-folders named Docs, Groups, Indiv and Places under that folder, then you can click to select Pictures, or Media, as the active folder and search all four sub-folders from that position. That is a very powerful capability! You can also find misfiled image files by searching on the Pictures folder for “Census” to see if any census document images are in the wrong folder. Viewing results as Details will tell you where an image is located.

Try searching on other parts of filenames. For example if I enter "Boggs Albert" I get a listing of all the image files with "Boggs Albert" as part of the filenames in any of the four folders (**Figure 5**). Notice in the folder listing on the right in **Figure 5** that the results were found in three different sub-folders. **Note - this multi-folder search will not work if you create multiple surname folders with multiple category folders under each surname folder unless you search from a folder higher than all of the surname folders, and all of the surname folders are sub-folders of that upper level folder from which the search is initiated.**

Name	Folder path
BOGGS Albert Allan 1875-1938 Colorized.jpg	K:\Legacy\Media\Indiv
BOGGS Albert Allan 1875-1938.jpg	K:\Legacy\Media\Indiv
BOGGS Albert Allan 1875-1938 Headstone Alvon Methodist Cem Alvon Greenbrier Co WV.jpg	K:\Legacy\Media\Places
BOGGS Albert Allan 1875-1938 FAG Memorial 16482623.jpg	K:\Legacy\Media\Docs
BOGGS Albert Allan & WILLIAMS Dona Hist Greenbrier Co WV Pg 2 of 2.jpg	K:\Legacy\Media\Docs
BOGGS Albert Allan & WILLIAMS Dona Hist Greenbrier Co WV Pg 1 of 2.jpg	K:\Legacy\Media\Docs

Figure 5 – Search Results Across Folders

Searching A Wider Area

If you prefer to construct far-flung folders based (for example) on Surnames with multiple sub-folders for various content types as seen in **Figure 1**, you can still search those far-flung folders by searching your entire drive, or even your entire computer. Be warned, however, that searching your entire computer can take a very long time. Particularly if you have a backup drive connected to your computer during a search, because all drives will be searched through every folder and sub-folder in a search of your entire computer.

For a search of your entire PC in Windows 10 open File Explorer, highlight “This PC” (**Figure 6 – red arrow**) and type your search criteria into the “Search This PC” field next to the magnifying glass (**Figure 6 – green arrow**). If you do have a backup drive connected, your search will not only take much longer, but will likely result in duplication of results since backups on that drive will duplicate the original files.

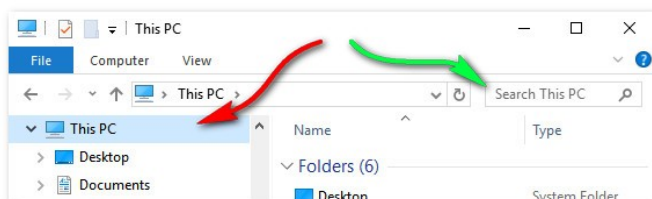


Figure 6 – Searching Your Entire PC – Windows 10

Figure 7 shows the results of a search on "Boggs Andrew" with the location set to “This PC and with no drive, or folder specified. **This is an extremely powerful tool for locating lost files!**



Figure 7 - General Search Results From Multiple Drives & Folders

FORMATTING

I use certain formatting standards that I believe improve filename readability. Here is my rationale for formatting text case, and the use of special characters and abbreviations within filenames.

Text Case

Entering surnames in all uppercase helps them stand out in a file listing. An exception may be made for certain ethnic articles at the beginning of surnames, such as De, La, Le, Mc, Mac, etc. to improve readability. Capitalize only the first letter of given names. Certain abbreviations such as states in the United States, or the abbreviation for Air Force Base, "AFB," are also written in all-uppercase. To improve readability I use Title Case (where the first letter of each word is capitalized) for most other components.

Using Special Characters

Because I planned from the beginning to create an automated CD using HyperText Markup Language (HTML), I knew that there were certain rules I must follow in creating filenames. If you plan to create, or contribute to a Web page your filenames used there must follow the rules for HTML filenames.

HTML rules allow only **characters from the English alphabet**, the **numbers zero through nine**, and the **ampersand (&)**, the **underscore (_)** and the **dash (-)** within a filename. **Periods (.)** may only be used just prior to the file type at the end of a filename. **Backslashes (\)** may only be used to separate folders from one another, and to separate the lowest folder from the filename contained in that folder. Any other characters can trigger special actions by HTML. If you plan to create a webpage for your genealogy it is critical that you use only these characters. HTML filenames may contain **no spaces** anywhere within the filename, or path. The presence of a space within a filename indicates that only the characters prior to that space are part of the filename. I suggest you replace spaces in filenames with the underscore before including a filenames in HTML documents.

Use a dash to separate years where a span is indicated (e.g. **1789-1865**). I enclose certain surnames with a dash to distinguish married names of ladies, or in some instances, their maiden names if the filename started with their married name. Where a lady had been married more than once, and I wish to include all of her married names so they could be searched upon, I enclose each married surname in dashes and enter them in the chronological order in which the marriages occurred.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations can be useful if they are easy to understand and used consistently. They also keep the letter count down when working to avoid overly long filenames. Abbreviations should include the minimum number of letters that will avoid confusion, otherwise write the word out. I make some exceptions to using abbreviations. One is that I use the entire word “Heraldry” for things like patches, badges or crests because abbreviating it to “Herald” would confuse it with a the given name, and because using “Hera” might not be clear. I do the same thing for “Memorial” as I decided the extra few letters were worth the clarity that the entire word provides. I also use the two-digit abbreviations for the names of U.S. states, although I might write the state names out if sending a file to someone outside the U.S. Country names might also be abbreviated so long as the meaning is clear. It’s your list, so make it work for you. My list of self-permitted abbreviations includes the following:

& - And
AFB - Air Force Base
Anim - Animal
Avi - Aviation
BW - Black & White image
Cem - Cemetery
Cert - Certificate
Co - County
Cp - Copy
Dir - Directory
Enh - Enhanced

FAG - FindAGrave
Keep - Keepsake
Mem - Memorial
Pg - Page
Pk - Park
Rec - Record
Reg - Register
Struc - Structure
Trans - Transcription
Vehic - Vehicle

GROUP PHOTOS - AN EXCEPTION TO THE FILE-NAMING RULES

While most filenames can easily contain **who, what, when** and **where**, photos of groups can make that very awkward. Even though filenames in Windows can be many characters in length (including path details), trying to explain which person is which in a group photo often requires information better suited to a descriptive paragraph than a file name. Placing group photos in a folder of their own alerts you that these files are special.

If the group is sufficiently small (I limit this arbitrarily to five known people in a photo), and arranged in a simple row, or rows, you can include each person's name in the filename. For example:

FINK Emma F SMITH Shirley L & SCHWARTZ Rosa 1922.jpg

JOHNSTON Katrina ZIMMERMAN Conrad THOMPSON Lois ZIMMERMAN David 2012 Aug.jpg

If you do not know the names of each person in a photo you can name the file based on the event, date and place. The first photo in the next three examples contained over 100 people, none of them identified individually. In the second photo only the family surname was known, and in the last photo they were not arranged in the photo in a way that was convenient to.

FRAMPTON Family Reunion 1896 Aug 6 Clarion Clarion Co PA.jpg

MASSIE Families Given Names Unknown.jpg

ZIMMERMAN Family Reunion 1947 Jun 26 York York Co PA.jpg

The best place to store information about an image is as a part of the image file. Any separate listing may become separated from the images. In my current group folder there are 1351 photos but only a few dozen have more than five people in the picture. I considered five options to document the people in those photos. I've used them all to some extent over the years and each one has its uses. I have used a photo of my adoptive paternal Grandparents to illustrate the five options. **A major drawback to the first 4 of these methods is that there is no way to search on the details written on the photo, or in hidden comments.**

Option 1 - Scan Both Sides

Option 2 - Write Hidden Comments Using Windows Explorer or Another Program

Option 3 - Add Printed Captions

Option 4 – Use Pop-up and/or Mouseover Tags

Option 5 – Write Details In A Long Filename

Option 1 - Scan Both Sides

One of the options for preserving descriptive details of a photograph with notes on the back is to scan both sides of the photo, then save each with the same file name, adding something like "Pg 1 of 2" and "Pg 2 of 2)" to the file names (**Figures 8 & 9**), or perhaps “Front” and “Back”. This option has the advantage of preserving the original image and text.



Figure 8 – ZIMMERMAN Family 1930 York York PA Pg 1 of 2.jpg

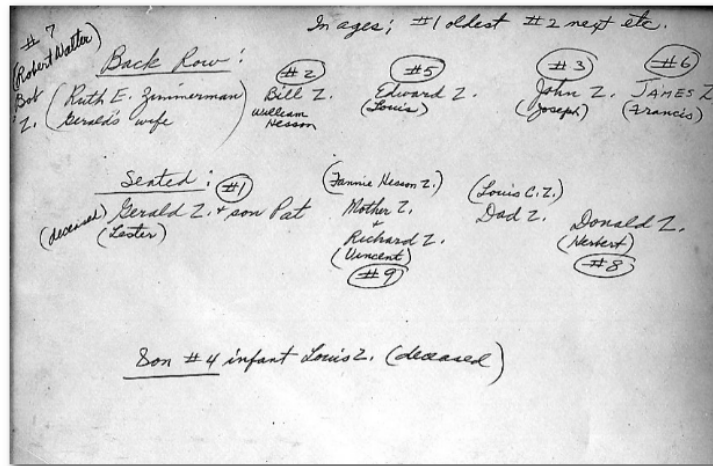


Figure 9 – ZIMMERMAN Family 1930 York York PA Pg 2 of 2.jpg

Option 2 - Writing Hidden Comments Using Windows Explorer or Another Program

Each JPG image file has hidden information, called **metadata**, associated with that file. It is possible to write comments in that metadata using Windows Explorer. To access that metadata open Windows Explorer by clicking on the folder icon on the taskbar. Right-click on a filename, then left-click on "Properties" in the resulting popup window (Figure 13 - red arrow). Click on the "Details" tab (Figure 14 - green arrow), a popup window appears with a **Description** area showing fields for **Title**, **Subject**, **Ratings**, **Tags** and **Comments** (Figure 14 - red ellipse).

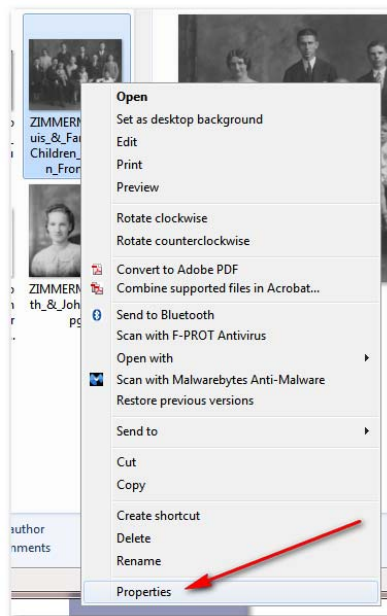


Figure 13

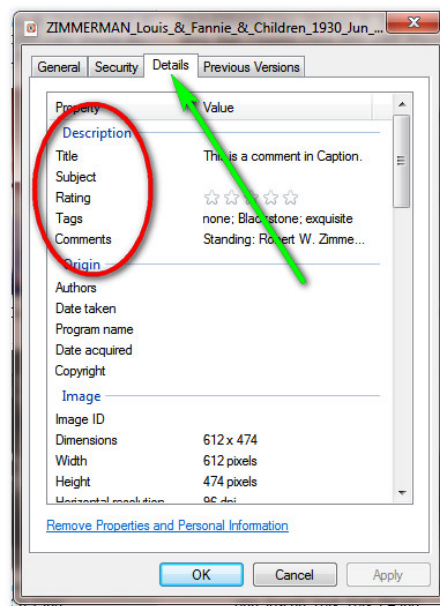


Figure 14

To add comments to a JPG or TIF file click on Comments to select the row then hover the cursor over the right half of the row to open the text box (Figure 15 - red ellipse). I simply pasted details here (Figure 16 - red ellipse) from a Find A Grave memorial I manage, and which contains the same Zimmerman family photo. **Note that none of the text boxes on the various rows (Title, Subject, Tags and Comments) will show up until the cursor moves into the rightmost half of the highlighted row.**

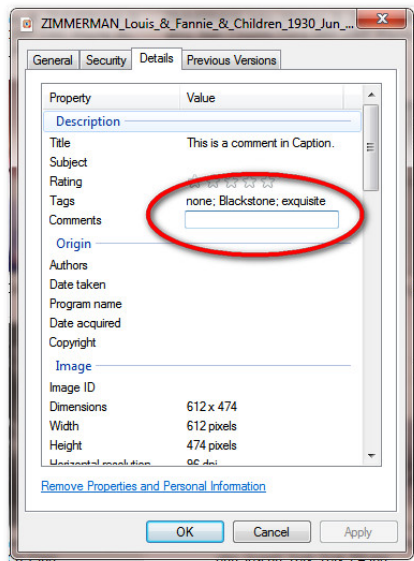


Figure 15 - Empty Comments Field

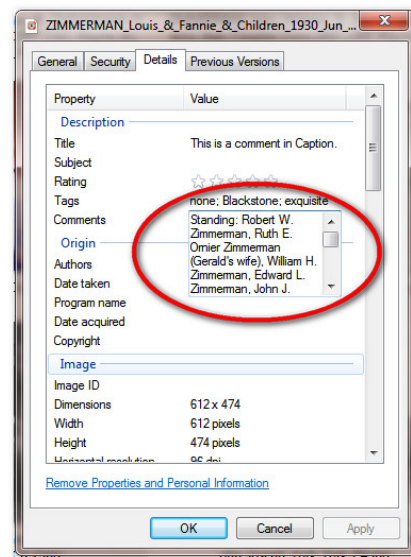


Figure 16 - Comments Field with Comments

The comments shown in **Figure 16** are not in an appealing format, but once they are written and saved, hovering the cursor over the field will show in an expanded format (**Figure 17**).

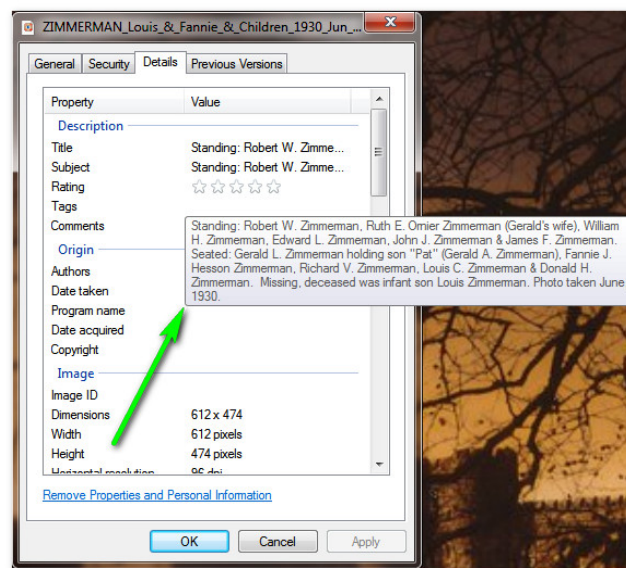


Figure 17 - Comments Expanded Via Mouseover

FastStone Image Viewer (<https://www.faststone.org>), **IrfanView** (<https://www.irfanview.com>), and a few other programs, can also display or write to that Comments field, and they are far more convenient to use, plus they provide many other options for working with your image files. I have used FastStone Image Viewer for years and like it very much. It's a free program and well worth obtaining. **WARNING – comments created with apps other than Windows Explorer cannot be viewed with Windows Explorer, and vice versa.**

Option 3 - Adding Printed Captions

It is possible to add a "printed" caption to a scanned image. The easy way to do that is to expand the margin (often referred to as the "canvas") of the scanned image, adding space in which text may be added electronically. Several photo/graphics editing programs allow enlargement of margins and addition of text. I used FastStone Image Viewer to expand the canvas on the bottom and to add a caption as shown in **Figure 18**.

When I add a caption to an image file I also add “Annotated” to the end of the file name and save the file as an additional copy of the original image, so the filename would appear as below.

ZIMMERMAN Louis & Fannie & Children 1930 Jun Annotated Colorized.jpg



Standing: Robert W. Zimmerman, Ruth E. (Ornier) Zimmerman (Gerald's wife), William H Zimmerman, Edward L. Zimmerman, John J. Zimmerman & James F. Zimmerman.

Seated: Gerald L. Zimmerman (holding son) "Pat," Gerald A. Zimmerman, Fannie J. (Hesson) Zimmerman, Richard V. Zimmerman, Louis C. Zimmerman & Donald H. Zimmerman.
June, 1930, York, York County, Pennsylvania

Figure 18 - Group Photo With Added Caption and Color

This method can be very useful, but can increase the number of saved images in your photo folders if you save both an original and the captioned copy. As with the first option, there is no way to search the details in the printed caption. I tend to reserve this method for special purposes such as publishing, or printing a photo. Another reason to save an additional copy of a photo is to retain a “colorized” or “enhanced” copy.

Option 4 - Pop-up and Mouseover Tags

A particularly elegant alternative for identifying people in complex group photos is to display tags in the photo that identify each person, or all persons, and to be able to display or hide those tags with the click of a mouse. A free program called **FotoTagger** (© Cogitum LC 2006-2008) allowed the user to place tags on people or things in JPG and TIF photo files (**Figure 19**). The lines between the tags and the subjects could be moved around, as could the tags themselves. Colors for the tags and text could be changed, as could the fonts, and there was even an option to display the tags as text balloons such as could be found in a comic strip. The tags could be hidden with the click of a mouse, and once the file was saved by FotoTagger the tags became part of the file. Anyone with FotoTagger could view the tags, or suppress them, and there was a small display program that could be sent with copies of an image to allow those without FotoTagger to view the popup tags. FotoTagger could export a saved, tagged image to an HTML file which could be displayed in a browser where the tags could be switched on and off. Very handy for a genealogy website. Tags could also be displayed or hidden in Flickr. FotoTagger may still be found online for free download, but be warned that it behaves very badly when running under Windows 10. I had to run the program under a Virtual PC in Windows XP mode or parts of it hung up my computer. If anyone has found a more up-to-date program that can do what FotoTagger was capable of I would like to hear about it.

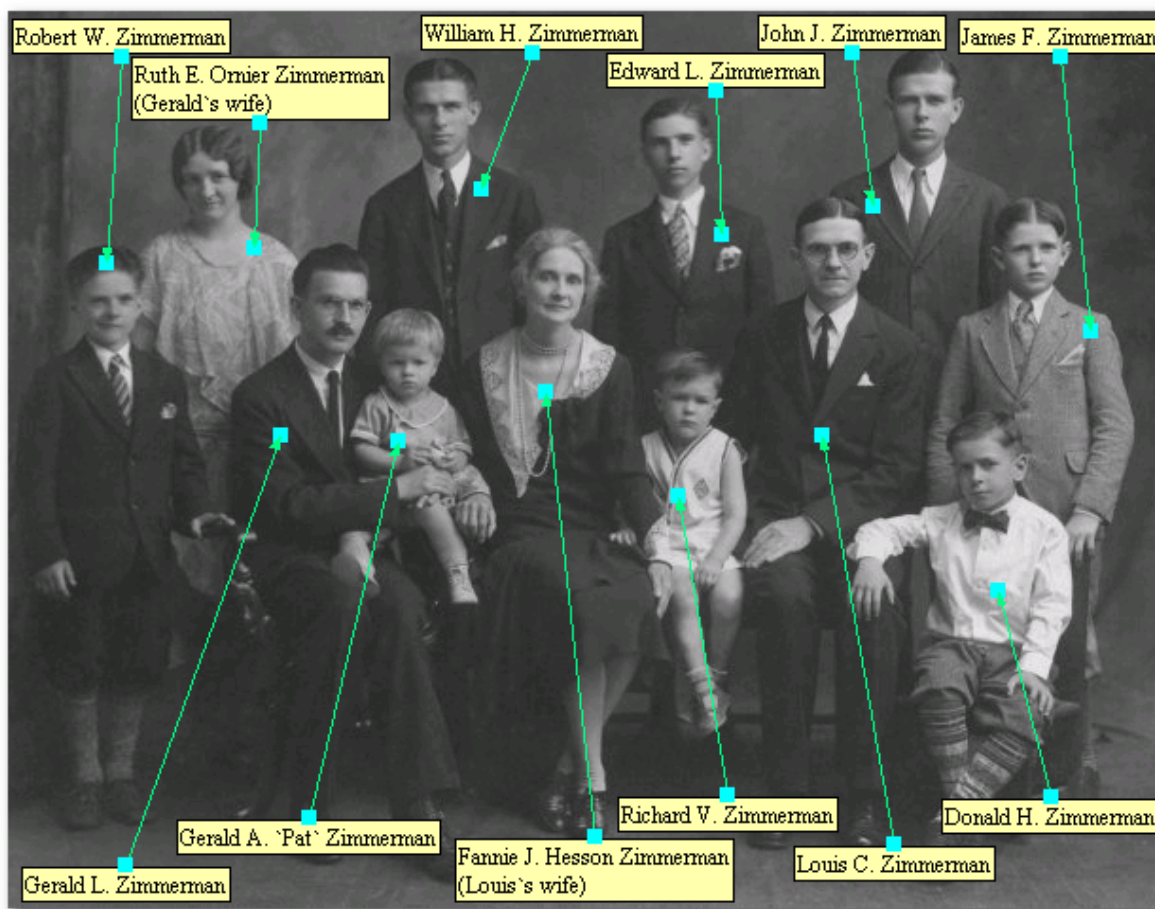


Figure 19 - A FotoTagger Display

Because I found more than one version of FotoTagger online I contacted the manufacturer by phone and asked which version was the last one they released, and whether they had any plans to continue development? I confirmed that the latest version was 2.13 which was released in 2008. Unfortunately the manufacturer confirmed that they had no intention of continuing development of FotoTagger as they were extremely disappointed that the program had not made money. I didn't say it during the conversation, but I wondered how

they expected FotoTagger to make money when it was consistently offered as freeware! FotoTagger offers some unique capabilities. If those capabilities are what you are seeking, and you can deal with the added burdens that program imposes, then I suggest you download a copy of the program while it's still available.

Another program that can do something similar to those FotoTagger displays is **Heritage Collector** (© LifeStory Productions, Inc, 2001-13). I have a version of Heritage Collector and have experimented with tagging people in the example photo. Heritage Collector uses the term "hotspots" to describe how it tags photo contents. In **Figure 20** you can see one option for those hotspots. Heritage Collector allows them to be displayed altogether, or not at all. They can be popped up in timed, sequential order if you choose, or displayed only when the cursor moves over the area you designate as the "hotspot" for each entry. Additionally they can be linked to audio comments. Heritage Collector Suite is not cheap at \$84.95 for the boxed version last time I checked, however it does offer many other capabilities and is definitely worth a look. **A word of caution, do not use Heritage Collector's Import option on your file collection unless you wish all your files to be automatically renamed.** The manual is unclear about how Heritage Collector can be controlled to prevent such automatic renaming and the manufacturer had not returned my inquiries as of this writing.

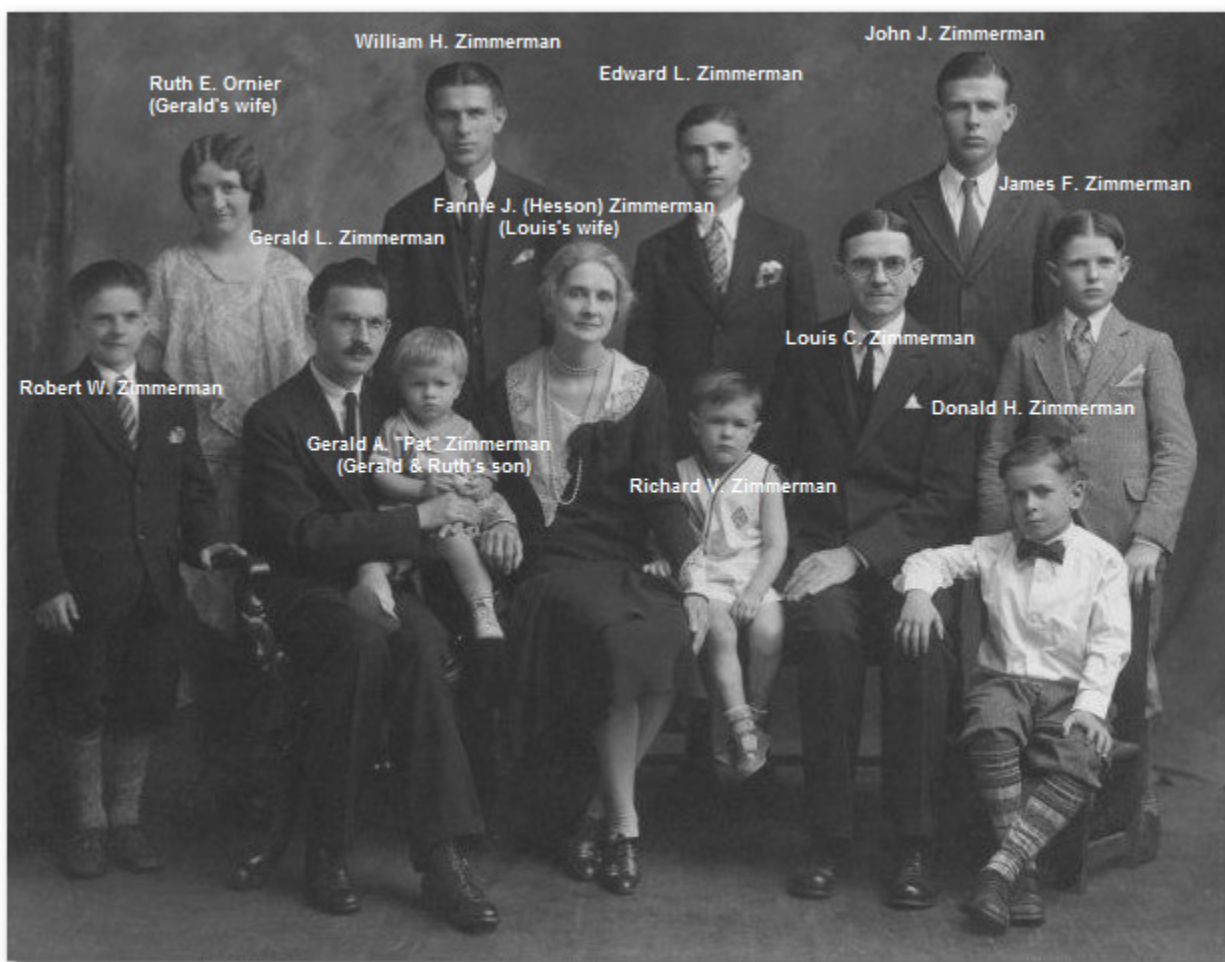


Figure 20 - "Hotspots" Created With Heritage Collector

Option 5 - Write Details In A Long Filename

As you know by now, I believe that naming people and details in the filename is the best option for annotating image files. It works well for most group photos. However for images of large groups, if I attempt to adapt my file-naming standard to a more narrative style to include who, what, when and where along with positional information related to the picture, the resulting filename is a very awkward construction. Here is how that

Zimmerman group photo file in **Figure 8** might be named if I tried to include all the names and where they are located in the photograph. The example in blue is all one filename.

ZIMMERMAN Family Standing Robert W ZIMMERMAN Ruth E -ORNIER- ZIMMERMAN –Gerald's wife- William H ZIMMERMAN-Edward-L-ZIMMERMAN John J ZIMMERMAN & James F ZIMMERMAN Seated Gerald L ZIMMERMAN holding son -Pat- -Gerald A ZIMMERMAN- Fannie J -Hesson- ZIMMERMAN Richard V ZIMMERMAN Louis C ZIMMERMAN & Donald H ZIMMERMAN 1930 Jun York York Co PA Colorized.jpg

Creating such long filenames, while extremely awkward to read, is currently the only searchable solution I know of for documenting the Group images that contain many people.

One more shameless plug. MyHeritage.com offers free colorization and enhancement of image files, and it can be done very quickly. I've colorized many photos manually, and it can take quite some time. **Figure 21** shows what MyHeritage can accomplish in seconds. Not every colorization comes out as nicely as this one, but most are very good. MyHeritage also offers a service to clarify, or enhance photos. Definitely worth a look!



Standing: Robert W. Zimmerman, Ruth E. (Ornier) Zimmerman (Gerald's wife), William H Zimmerman, Edward L. Zimmerman, John J. Zimmerman & James F. Zimmerman.

Seated: Gerald L. Zimmerman (holding son) "Pat," Gerald A. Zimmerman, Fannie J. (Hesson) Zimmerman, Richard V. Zimmerman, Louis C. Zimmerman & Donald H. Zimmerman.
June, 1930, York, York County, Pennsylvania

Figure 21 – ZIMMERMAN Family 1930 York York PA Annotated Colorized Enhanced.jpg

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear to me that some organizational plan is necessary if a researcher is to keep track of the wealth of image files that rapidly collect as they continue their searches. If you take the time to establish a standard that includes sufficient detail for naming your image files, you will be rewarded with the ability to search on any part of those filenames, instantly generating very useful custom result lists without the need of entering additional tags.

That's it. This was far longer than I intended it to be, but I tend to be long-winded, and would rather include more detail than leave something out. ;^) Hopefully this will be of some use to other researchers.

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Mesa, AZ

IMAGE FILE NAMING STANDARD - QUICK REFERENCE

CENSUS PATTERN

{Head}SURNAME Givenname Birthyear-Deathyear Census YEAR & {Spouse}Givenname Place

MARRIAGE PATTERN

{Groom}SURNAME Givenname & {Bride}SURNAME Given Marriage YYYY Mmm DD Place

PHOTOS OF INDIVIDUALS & DOCUMENTS PATTERN

{Maiden}SURNAME Givenname {Married}-SURNAME- Birthyear-Deathyear What Date Place Extra Info

EXAMPLES

Photos of Individuals & Documents

BROWN Charles M City Dir 1897 73 Lawrence Saratoga Springs Saratoga Co NY.jpg

DAVIS George Jay Census 1930 & Anna & -JONES- Mary Meadville Crawford Co PA Pg 1.jpg

HICKS A Elizabeth -LUNSFORD- 1842-1925 Death Cert 1925 Mar 18 Ironton Lawrence Co OH.jpg

GEORGE James & BUZZA Amelia Marriage Rec 1851 Jun 28 Redruth Cornwall Eng.jpg

GOULD Diane Patricia -HALL- Poway City Picnic 2006 Poway San Diego Co CA Enh.jpg

MILNE Patricia -CORNELIUS- 1924-2016 2010 Nov 18 La Mesa San Diego Co CA.jpg

ZIMMERMAN Fannie Jane -HESSON- 1884-1975 FAG Memorial 53866442.jpg

Group Photos

ZIMMERMAN John Judy & Sondra 1968 Big Spring Howard Co TX.jpg

MILNE Reunion 2010 May 15 Ramona San Diego Co CA.jpg

Places Or Things

Struc Church Brick Bldg Built 1885-1887 Tarentum Allegheny Co PA.jpg

QUACKENBUSH Merritt J 1885-1955 Headstone Woodlawn Cem Detroit Wayne Co MI.jpg

1. **USE ALL CAPS FOR SURNAMES & STATE ABBREVIATIONS** - Using all caps allows surnames & state names to stand out from within HTML coding.
2. **USE "&" NOT "AND"** - Using an ampersand (&) in place of the word "and" saves space.
3. **ENTER PLACES IN SMALLEST TO LARGEST ORDER** - Entering places in smallest to largest order allows easy visual recognition of the largest location.
4. **ENTER DATES AS "YYYY Mmm DD"** - Entering dates in year, month, day order allows for sorting by year and using the MMM standard for month prevents misinterpretation.
5. **SEPARATE DATE RANGES WITH A DASH** - Separating date ranges with a dash (as opposed to an underscore) helps distinguish those date entries as a range.
6. **ENCLOSE MARRIED NAMES WITH A DASH** - Enclosing married names with a dash allows them to be distinguished from given names and helps distinguish lady's maiden names. **EXCEPTION** - Name headstones images for the surname on the marker & **enclose maiden names with dashes**.
7. **FOR WEB PAGES SEPARATE WORDS IN FILENAMES WITH UNDERSCORES** - Ensures that filenames can be "read" by web pages.

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