

Survivor's Notebook

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CONVENTION AFTERMATH

LOOKING BACK on the Lexington gathering, I am convinced that ajayers come together primarily for the pleasure of meeting with friends rather than to conduct business or engage in various processes relating to the nuts and bolts of amateur journalism. Is that bad? No, it is wonderful because amateur journalism is a hobby that encompasses so much more than just the mechanics of “how to do this or that.” Just the fact that ajay has such a diverse following is enough to attract interested people, so why don't we have more recruits? I think it's because we remain largely unknown to the public. Perhaps we need a PR person who will find ways to make our existence known.

Aside from the fun of “talking shop” with those who really know whereof they speak, I have found a true feeling of “family” among convention attendees. There is a satisfaction in seeing familiar faces, hearing familiar voices, and exchanging opinions on a variety of subjects. I am less enthusiastic than some when it comes to the conducting of business per parliamentary procedure, but I bow to tradition and hope that such procedure will not drag out tediously. It would be nice, I think, to spend more time on field trips and informative presentations. We have attendees who are knowledgeable in various subjects which connect with amateur journalism, so why not include more talks from these experienced members? I admit to having a very poor speaker's voice, but then I can't claim to be expert in any subject, either, so I would be a happy listener, content to let others do the talking.

I appreciate the massive amount of work and planning done by Bill Boys, and done under trying circumstances. He made the Lexington convention a memorable one.



JOURNALING—BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

MANY OF US subscribe to the idea of keeping journals but we never actually keep one. Anyone who has done research into family history knows the value of journals kept by ancestors—and the frustration of finding no written accounts of an ancestor's life and times. Given that we will in time be ancestors, would it not be prudent to leave our own records rather than risk the misconceptions so prevalent when future generations are left with assumptions only regarding the life of a family member? Of course it would. Records such as birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, census records, etc., provide good information so far as dates are concerned, but they do little to define the personality.

In the “old days” before TV, when families shared a greater amount of time together, it was common for stories to be circulated about various family members. Some were told about humorous escapades while others dealt with some historical events, and many simply were illustrations of a particular personality. These family tales were handed down from generation to generation and they still provide an inside glimpse at the people who preceded us. Sadly, such verbal records are no longer generated.

Where once it was common for letters to be exchanged regularly between family and friends, that custom also has been virtually eliminated by the telephone and e-mail. The loss of letters also is a blow to preserving some record of the past.

Somewhat by accident I became aware of one source of information that would be worth keeping—and would require essentially no extra effort. For years it has been my practice to keep a calendar record to remind me of important appointments, birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths, etc. These little calendar books could be valuable source documents.

If we want future family generations to know about us as a person with hopes, dreams, and accomplishments, we should leave documents, pictures, and perhaps even tape recordings that will tell our individual history. When family history is written from the viewpoint of one who relates only what he remembers about another, the chances are good that such accounts will be inaccurate in several respects. The only one who can describe a person in terms of his feelings about anything is that person.

One last thought about the documentation we leave is to be certain that it is properly dated and that it includes any pertinent information as to where it was executed. By law, official documents will contain this information, but private journals, diaries, letters, and memos are apt to omit it unless we are careful. The time to preserve a true account of our life is while we are able to do it ourselves in the form of a memoir or journal. #

--Hugh Singleton