

## **GENTREK: Book Review:**

### **Producing a Quality Family History**

by **Patricia Law Hatcher, CG, FASG**

reviewed by **Dae Powell**

#### **Rating Scale:**

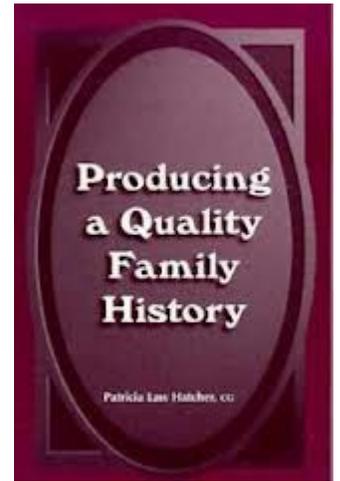
1 = Poor

2 = Below Average

3 = Average

4 = Above Average

5 = Excellent



ISBN: 0-916489-64-7  
Price: \$19.95 USD  
Pages: 278  
Date: March, 1996  
Index: 16 pp  
Bibliography: 14 pp  
Website Refs: None  
Readability: 5  
Primary Emphasis: Publishing  
Writer's Qualifications: FASG and HIGHLY respected Genealogical writer  
Reader's Level: 3, average adult education  
Charts: Yes  
Examples: 5  
Accurate: 5  
Current: 4

Have I read other reviews of this publication? Yes.

Do I agree with them? Yes.

What was their overall consensus? "A must for every Family Historian."

### **Book Description**

For anyone looking to create a useful, lasting history of your family. This is a book that should adorn the library or bookshelves of all genealogists! Whether you're an amateur or professional, chances are the ultimate goal of your research is to produce a quality family history. ***Producing A Quality Family History***, by Patricia Law Hatcher, guides you through the steps required to create an attractive—and functional—family history report. Learn how to organize your work, how to write the narrative, choose type faces, grammar styles and punctuation. You'll also see how to create useful bibliographies and discover ways to incorporate photos and illustrations effectively plus much, much more!

From the above description, it would appear the Editor had other things to do and merely scanned the Table of Contents. Besides, if the book "adorns" a bookshelf, it isn't in use, is it?

The few reviews on Amazon.com were "All Stars" ratings.  
NGS gives a terse nod and a 10% price discount to the volume.

I'd like to show you what the others didn't say . . . Or, at least, what they seemed to avoid.

### Who should **NOT** buy this book?

- ~ The casual Family Historian who is simply collecting names. (I'm not judging here. If that's what a person wishes to do, fine.)
- ~ The lazy Family Historian who doesn't care how accurate or complete the information to be published is. (Now THAT is a judgment, but I'm not going there this time.)
- ~ The "I'm NEVER going to publish" Family Historian. . . maybe. I'll cover why I said "maybe" a bit later.

### Who wrote this book?

I don't know Pat Hatcher personally, although we've met at a GenTech conference. However, she writes in a manner that speaks to ME. Her book is professionally done as are her presentations and articles. Unknowingly to her, she has been a mentor to me since 1999. She is a Certified Genealogist, a technical writer and instructor.

### What did I find exceptionally useful?

- ~ She summarizes the characteristics of a Quality Family History at the outset. This allows you to understand what she's writing about—without all the publisher's hype.
- ~ She presents a checklist at the end of each chapter. It not only reviews the points discussed, but is a short, effective guide when this book becomes your reference work.
- ~ Her topics are offset and bolded, so you know what she is about to cover.
- ~ She asks thoughtful questions—even some I'd not considered before—and answers them carefully and to the point.

### Is this a Manual of Style for Family Historians?

**No.** She references several excellent Manuals of Style, however.

**Yes.** She gives almost enough examples and covers nearly enough Style topics, that it approaches one.

### Does it cover anything about Book Design or Page Layout or Paragraph Formatting?

Yes! All of the above. Even how to organize and present the information in a readable form! In fact, she gives "Pat's Maxim and Corollary":

**Pat's Maxim:** "The purpose of nonfiction writing is to convey information to the reader."

**Corollary:** "Anything that helps convey that information is good. Anything that detracts is bad."

She discusses readability, verbosity, pomposity, active voice and punctuation. If you didn't pay attention to English in high school or at university, you'll get a wonderful (and short) review in this book.

## **I've started publication already. Must I scrap it to conform to this book?**

**No.** You may want to modify it using her guidelines, however.

**Yes.** Not the information, of course. Perhaps you might because of your limited experience in publishing. And, perhaps because she presents so many better ideas and concepts that you'd not considered.

For instance, there is an entire chapter on Genealogical Numbering Systems and how to use them to organize and present your Family's History. She also gives a useful chapter on documenting your sources. This isn't just lip service—she shows how to do it and why.

## **How does the book address documenting different sources?**

Hatcher's book covers several different things, including the following:

- Photographs
- Wills
- Other published sources
- Oral interviews
- Problem or conflicting sources
- Even the Census!

## **What else is included in the book?**

- ~ How to put character, personality and "a life" into those names, dates, places, events and relationships.
- ~ How to present photographs, charts and other illustrations — and where to find some of them.
- ~ How to create a "Door to Your Book"—yes, the INDEX!
- ~ Editing — and the different areas to review.
- ~ Self-publishing and/or getting your document ready for a professional printer.

## **What I learned from this book: (OK then, just some of it):**

- ~ How to approach publishing MY Family History, in a calm, not-overwhelming manner.
- ~ That writing a Family History can be used as a research tool.
- ~ What some of the most frequent criticisms of Family History are. (And how to avoid them.)
- ~ The importance and correct usage of Style sheets in a word processing program.
- ~ How to create a Family History template and what goes into it.
- ~ The five guidelines for good nonfiction writing:
  - 1- Clear
  - 2- Concise
  - 3- Correct
  - 4- Consistent
  - 5- Understandable

Wait! What is the difference between #1. and #5.? The information may be clear, but because it isn't organized well, it may be difficult to understand.

- 6- Try to keep sentence length to 20 words or less for greater readability. "Less is more."
- 7- Avoid hyphenation, as in dividing words.
- 8- How to create an index, when the chapters are in different document files.
- 9- That "gutter" isn't where my publication goes, but the area where the left and right facing pages are joined.

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## **Conclusion:**

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- 1- If you are considering publishing even a small portion of your research, you will find this book indispensable.
  - 2- If you want a GENEALOGICAL WEBSITE to display your efforts, this book will help you, too.
  - 3- If you are "NEVER going to publish," please just read the first 11 pages. I hope they will convince you otherwise.
  - 4- BUT. . . If you want to PRODUCE a QUALITY FAMILY HISTORY get this book as soon as possible! It will help you plan, design, use, and produce a work that will live on after you are gone.
  - 5- By the way, I recently saw it on Amazon.com for \$13.57

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Thank you for being here and for your kind attention. We really appreciate you and hope that this review will give you some ideas about your own Family History publication, whether or not you acquire this fine book.

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