

# Researching & Writing Local History

Timothy Swenson

**Published by**

Museum of Local History

190 Anza Street

Fremont, CA 94539

[www.museumoflocalhistory.org](http://www.museumoflocalhistory.org)

Copyright 2011  
Timothy Swenson



**Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0**

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work
- to make derivative works

Under the following conditions:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Attribution.</b>   | You must give the original author credit.   |
| <b>Noncommercial.</b> | You may not use this work for commercial purposes.  |
| <b>Share Alike.</b>   | If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one. |

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder. Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

# **1. Introduction**

For the last 11 years I have been researching and writing about local history. Over the years I have come up with set of tools and a list of sources that I use for my research. As I start a new project, I make sure I run through each source seeing if it has any relevant information to my research topic. This way I don't miss a resource that may have some important information.

I thought others might find it useful if I documented my tools, sources, and the process of writing. For those getting started in researching local history, I hope this document will be a good starting point. For those that are active in researching local history, this document might contain some tip, trick, or resource that might be useful.

This paper will cover both the tools and source materials for doing historical research, issues with using the materials and creating the final document based on the materials.

## **2. Why Write about Local History and What to Write About**

Most people research local history because they want to know more. They want to know more about who, what, and when. Once they know this, it is a short step to writing about it and documenting what was discovered. Writing it down can help organize the history that has been discovered. Sometimes the full story can only be told with bits and pieces from difference sources. One newspaper article may only have one interesting bit of information, but a whole group of newspapers articles can make a nice story. Adding additional information from census records, old maps, and other sources, add more to the story.

If you have found a lot of information about a particular historical subject, then why not document what you have found and share it with others. I have found that many people are interested in local history, but very few are interested in researching. If you have spent hundreds of hours researching a subject to answer your questions, why not take the time to document it for future generations.

As for what to write about, the subject can be as large as the entire history of a town, or it can be as detailed as the history of one ethnic group or local business. Further examples would be a famous event, famous local people or groups, local buildings, local transportation, and so on.

The wider the scope of history, the longer the document will be, or the briefer it will touch on each individual subject. If the subject is very specific, then the resulting document will be more detailed.

## **3. Tools**

Having the right tools can help tremendously in making the work of historical research much easier. One theme that you will find in most of this paper is "going digital", meaning using a computer through all stages of your work and using it to solve a number of problems. Modern technology can be very useful in both research and writing. It makes it easier to find information, easier to store information, easier to recall the information, and easier to organize information.

### **3.1 Computer**

Computers are a good tool and are very useful in almost any hobby, including local history. Taking notes on paper is easy to do and comes natural to most of us, but it is hard to find this information when we need it later. If someone else is referring to your notes, it could also be difficult for someone else to read your writing (well, I have this problem). By keeping notes in text files, they can be easily searched, updated, passed to others, and read by others.

Storing information on the computer will provide a number of benefits: take up less room, easier to carry, easier to search, easier to access, and easier to copy and distribute.

When getting a computer, I strongly recommend getting a laptop. Portability is critical in doing research. Since not all research will be done from home, having the ability to take the computer on the road increases its usefulness. If you have the funds, then get a laptop that will connect to a docking station. The docking station allows the laptop to connect to a full size monitor, keyboard and mouse. The larger monitor should be easier to use than the smaller screen on the laptop.

### **3.2 Scanner**

In the “old days”, when doing research, using a photocopier was a cheap and easy way to make copies of sections of books, newspaper clippings, and even photographs. Most libraries have photocopiers for patron use. The problem is that the photocopy is never as good as the original, and over time, as a photocopy is made of a photocopy, the end result can look pretty bad. Photocopies of photographs is just a bad idea. It can document what the image looks like, but it can not reproduce the photograph. Keeping paper records is useful, but it is not the most efficient.

By using a scanner to copy material digitally, the end result will be just as good as the original, it will be easier to store (on a hard drive), easier to manipulate (crop, rotate, etc), and easier to distribute (send via e-mail, etc). A scanner is the easiest way to get old documents and pictures into a computer.

When purchasing a scanner, I recommend getting a small, light, full page scanner that is powered by USB and does not require an AC adapter. This allows it be run from the laptop battery, making it very portable and able to be used in libraries or a persons home. A number of institutions and individuals do not want to let photographs or documents out of their control. By having a portable scanner and a laptop, the photographs and documents can be scanned on site.

### **3.3 Digital Camera**

History is not just something in the past, history is being created today. A digital camera can be used to document the present, be it how a building looks today, or what people look like today. The pictures can be useful for current research, and very useful to someone in the future. All historical photographs were taken for some other reason than historical. They only became historical because of how old they are.

Older newspaper or books document the present by using definitions that are well known to people in their time, but not the future. Many times older writing will state something like “next to the house owned by Mr. Smith,” knowing that everyone knows who Mr. Smith is. By taking current photographs of buildings or landmarks and documenting this way it will be clear exactly what building or landmark is being referred to in the future.

A digital camera is useful in documenting historical objects in a collection. The pictures can then be used in a research paper discussing the object.

A number of the newer digital cameras can record video and this can be very useful in interviewing people. Most of the cameras save the video in a format that is easily transferred to a computer. The older tape-based video cameras needed a special cord to connect to the computer and software to transfer the video to the computer.

Using film cameras would work, but I'm stressing an overall theme of being as digital as possible. Film cameras are cheaper, but there is a constant cost of film and processing. There is the additional work of scanning the photographs to digitize them. With a digital camera the photographs go straight from the camera into the computer.

### **3.4 Microphone**

Getting people to write their remembrances of the past is not as easy as it sounds. Some don't want to take the time, some are not interested, so a researcher has to be a bit more proactive. Oral histories are a great way to make it easier to get information from people. Most will find it easier to talk about the past than to write or type it. The downside of an oral history is that it needs to be transcribed to be useful. The upside is that you now have a permanent record of what that person sounded like at the time. Future generations of that family will probably be very interested in hearing the oral history.

### **3.5 External Storage**

There will always come a time when the hard drive space on the computer is never enough. Scanned photographs and documents take up space. Once the hard drive on the computer is close to being full, it is time to get an external hard drive. An external hard drive is a hard drive in a case, with its own power supply, and is connected to the computer via a USB cable. An external hard drive is a great place to back up all of the data files on the computer and to keep files when the computer hard drive is getting full. It is fairly easy to copy the files from the computer to the external hard drive. This does mean that the files will not be available when taking the laptop on the road, so keep the most vital and important files on the laptop.

### **3.6 CD/DVD Burner**

There will come a time when someone will ask for copies of photographs or documents that have been uncovered during historical research. The best way to get lots of files to someone is to burn them to a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM, and this will require a CD or DVD burner. Most newer computers come with one of these built in. If it is a DVD burner, it will burn both CD-ROM and DVD-ROM. A CD-ROM can hold 650 MB and a DVD-ROM hold about 4 GB (4,000 MB).

Using an external hard drive as a backup is great, but it is always a good idea to backup the files to a DVD-ROM for long term and off-site storage. If the external hard drive is stored close to the computer and there is a house fire, both will be lost. By copying files to a DVD-ROM, it can be stored away from the house. Sending copies of DVD-ROMs to an interested party, such as a local historical society, is a cheap form of off-site storage. If the data is lost, the DVD-ROM can be retrieved and the data can be restored.

## **3.7 Applications**

To get anything useful done with the computer, applications are needed. It is possible to purchase a lot of applications, spending hundreds of dollars, but there are quite a number of Open Source applications that are free to download and are just as good as commercial applications. All of the Open Source programs listed below are available for Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems. Some of these applications will take time to learn, so search for online tutorials or manuals.

### **3.7.1 OpenOffice**

OpenOffice is the Open Source version of Microsoft Office. It contains a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation graphics, drawing graphics, and database. It is fairly compatible with MS Office and is able to read and write MS Office files. OpenOffice can create Portable Document Format (PDF) files, whereas MS Word can not. This allows you to easily create documents in the standard format used for electronic distribution. OpenOffice can be found at <http://www.openoffice.org/>.

### **3.7.2 GIMP**

GIMP, or Gnu Image Manipulation Program, is the Open Source version of Photoshop. It is used for manipulating graphics, be it photographs or digital drawings. It can be used to clean up digital documents and images. I've used it to clean up Sanborn maps that had artifacts, such as blotches, from being photocopied too much. GIMP can be found at <http://www.gimp.org/>.

### **3.7.3 Scribus**

Scribus is an Open Source desktop publishing program. Open Office can be used to create report documents, but Scribus provides more control of the content and can provide a more polished and professional look. Scribus can be found at <http://www.scribus.net/>.

### **3.7.4 Audacity**

Audacity is an Open Source audio editing tool that is very useful for recording oral interviews. It is capable of full audio editing. It requires an add-on library to save files in MP3 format. Audacity can be found at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>.

### **3.7.5 GenealogyJ**

GenealogyJ (or GenJ) is an Open Source, Java-based, family tree program. It is designed to create and edit GEDCOM files, which are the standard files for storing family tree information. The program

requires Java to be installed, but if you have Open Office installed, then you have Java. GenJ can be found at <http://genj.sourceforge.net/>.

### **3.7.6 IrfanView**

IrfanView is free for non-commercial use program for Windows that was written to display graphics from a variety of different formats. It also has the capability to edit graphics, with commands that can resize, crop, adjust colors and even use some Photoshop filters. For simple tasks, IrfanView is easier to use than GIMP. Some USGS maps are available in a SID format and IrfanView is one of the few programs that can handle that format. I also use IrfanView as the main application with my scanner. IrfanView is used to call the software for the scanner. The image results of the scanner is put into IrfanView where I can tweak it and then save it. IrfanView can be found at <http://www.irfanview.com/>.

## **4. Sources**

The bulk of historical research is going through a variety of historical resources and finding information that relates to your particular area of interest. Different sources can provide small bits of information, but after searching a variety of sources, these individual bits can be combined to form a mostly complete story. There will always be some gaps in research, you just have to accept this and document what you have found in a search. Later research may fill these gaps, so any published version of the end research can be updated and republished.

### **4.1 Get thee to a Library**

Libraries were originally a way to make expensive books available to the population at large. They still continue to do this, but most libraries have taken up the duty of being a focal point for research. Get to know a reference librarian, as they will know what sources are available at the library.

#### **4.1.1 Books**

The local library should have a good selection of local history books. Some libraries have a whole section dedicated to local history. Talk with a reference librarian to help search for books. Local history books are a great starting place for research and provide additional topics for further research. Check the bibliography section of the books to find references of other local history books.

See if your library has an inter-library loan service with local universities. University collections are more expansive than a local library, but unless you are a student at the university, you will not be allowed to check out books. Through an inter-library loan service, your local library will request the book for you and allow you to check it out for a short period of time.

#### **4.1.2 Newspapers and Periodicals**

The main branch of a library usually has the periodical section that contains an archive of local and national newspapers. Archived copies are usually on reel-to-reel microfilm and microfilm readers will

be available. There is usually a cost associated with making copies from microfilm and there is no way to scan the microfilm with a scanner. The quality of the material and copies can be less than desired. Do not rely on microfilm for old photographs that can be reproduced.

Check to see if there might be an index of the local newspapers. My local main library has a card catalog index of articles of local interest in the local newspaper.

Besides newspapers, periodicals, like magazines, might have material relevant to local history, especially older magazines. There are a number of indexes that cover national magazines and the local library should have access to either an paper or electronic copy of the index. Look for periodicals specific to history, such as newsletter published by a state historical society.

## **4.2 Get thee to a local Historical Society or Museum**

A local historical society will have lots of information on local history. Use a phone book or a Google search to find a local historical society. It is possible that there could be different ones, based on a particular interest. One might focus on rail history or a local landmark. Each one is worth visiting and seeing if they have any relevant material.

Each historical society is different and will focus on different types of collections and information. At the very least they can detail what they have and possibly provide pointers to other sources of information, including locals that might have some familiarity with a particular area of interest. Here is a list of material that a local historical society or museum might have:

- photographs
- books
- personal collections
- newsletters
- old business directories
- old phone books
- old maps
  - local
  - historical
  - Sanborn
  - USGS

The historical society or museum might connect you to other people with similar interests. If your period of interest is recent enough they might be able to provide a list of people that were around during that time period.

## **4.3 Get thee to the Internet**

Having Internet access and searching the web is probably one of the best tools a researcher can have. A lot of historical material is available online and a lot of material not online, but there is a good chance that an index to the material is available online. Universities are indexing their collections and putting

those indexes online. Seeing the material will require a visit to the university, but knowing what the university has and where it is located will save time and effort when you are doing the search in person.

### **4.3.1 Google**

Google is a great search engine for what can be found on websites on the Internet. Finding the right historical material might take some time and there might be a large number of non-related links, but there is a good chance that something will be found. It might be necessary to use a variety of search words to find the material. Think of words related to the area of interest and use them. Using quotes around words will help narrow the search by only finding those web pages where the words fall in that exact order.

### **4.3.2 Google Books**

Google is in the process of scanning a huge number of published books. Google Books is the search engine for all of these books. Besides titles, Google Books allows for searches in the content of the books, making it far better than searching the card catalog of a library. For books published before 1923 or known to be in the public domain, the search engine should show the contents of the book and the location of the search words. They should also be available as a downloadable PDF file, which means they can be saved locally. Books that are still under copyright will show up in a search, but the page of the book where the search words were found may only be shown in a short section. For those books still under copyright, once you find them, then you can check the library to see if they are available.

### **4.3.3 Genealogical records**

If you are searching information about individuals, using genealogical sources can provide some good information. Two of the primary online resources are [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) and [www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com). Both of these sites are maintained by Ancestry.com, but Ancestry.com is the commercial website that not only has family trees but also includes other sources of genealogical information. Rootsweb.com is the public side that is free for all to use. The family tree information is uploaded by users. There are also some other free sources, such as state death indexes and the Social Security Death Index, where you can find out the birth and death dates of individuals.

Another source is [www.usgwarchives.net](http://www.usgwarchives.net). US Gen Web is a genealogical website created by genealogical researchers to house genealogical data from the United States. It has information by state, and then by county, and it is all free.

### **4.3.4 Census**

Genealogical researchers also document older censuses. Using a Google search, you might find some local census records. Older censuses are available via microfilm at the National Archive and its branches. Volunteer researchers obtain copies of a census, transcribe it electronically, and make it available. Census records will document who lived where, what their occupation was, state or country of birth, age, and family information. Ancestry.com hosts census information, but it is a pay site. The National Archives web site says that there are computers at regional archives sites that have free access

to Ancestry.com. If you live close to a regional archive it might be worth the effort to visit them. See if the information can be saved locally to a USB drive so you can take it home.

#### **4.3.5 Cemetery records**

Genealogical researchers also document a number of cemeteries. Using a Google search, you might find a listing for a local cemetery. These listings should document birth and death dates and might show some family relationship information. This can also be found on usgwarchives.net.

#### **4.3.6 Youtube**

If you are researching a subject from the last 50 years, you might find some video uploaded to Youtube. There are some websites that, when given a link from YouTube, will access the video and save it to your hard drive. You can contact the person that posted the video and ask for a copy. Odds are, they might have some more information on the research subject than just the video.

#### **4.3.7 Newspapers Online**

Newspapers are a great source of information. There are very few newspapers archives available online, but one free one is the Chronicling America collection from the Library of Congress (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>). It has a number of newspapers from 1822 to 1922. It is keyword searchable and newspaper pages can be saved locally. Another source [www.newspaperarchive.org](http://www.newspaperarchive.org), but this is a pay website.

#### **4.3.8 USGS Maps Online**

Some USGS maps are available online, depending upon where you live. A Google search should find links to them. Adding the state name in the search would eliminate those that are available outside of your state. One source of USGS maps stores the maps in SID format. IrfanView is a freeware graphics application that will display SID files. From within Irfanview the maps can be saved in a different format, such as TIFF or JPEG, so that they can be used by other applications.

#### **4.3.9 Sanborn Maps Online**

Sanborn maps are fire insurance maps that go back to the 1880's. The maps document the buildings in an area, including the use of the building, be it a saloon, livery, or general store. The online source for Sanborn maps is [sanborn.umi.com](http://sanborn.umi.com). This is a subscription service that universities libraries subscribe to.

#### **4.3.10 Online Maps**

If researching an area of a town, it can be useful to have a map that you can edit and publish. Using maps from Google Maps or Mapquest is possible, but there is always an issue of copyright. The website [www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org) works like Google Maps, but the maps are freely usable. For older maps, there is a variety of online sources and most should be found via Google.

### **4.3.11 Library of Congress**

The Library of Congress has digitized some of its collections. I've been able to research old newspapers, old Civil War maps, old photographs, etc. Check out their collections page to see what is available: [www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html](http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html)

## **5.0 Using Reference Material**

Getting material for research is fairly easy in the legal sense. Copying sections of books falls under the Fair Use provision of the Copyright law. The difficult part is using these sources in a document that will be published.

### **5.1 Copyright of Source Material**

The ability to quote source material depends on copyright. Material that is under copyright can be quoted, under the Fair Use provision of the copyright laws, but only small sections. Material that is no longer covered by copyright and considered to be in the public domain, can be used with no restrictions. The toughest problem is determining what material is in the public domain. Anything published before 1927 is almost certain to be in the public domain.

The following web page lists the different rules for determining what is in the public domain, based on the year that the material was published and if the copyright was renewed.

<http://copyright.cornell.edu/resources/publicdomain.cfm>

Google, as part of their Google Books effort, has researched what books

<http://booksearch.blogspot.com/2008/06/us-copyright-renewal-records-available.html>

### **5.2 Image Reuse policies**

Even if an image is old enough to be in the public domain, a lot of institutions have rules regarding using images from their collections. Most institutions want to charge a fee for using the image. If creating a publication that will be freely distributable and not for sale, some institutions will wave the fee and allow publication as long as the source of the image is cited. If an image is from a private source, then arrangement should be made with the individual that owns the original photograph, making sure that they give permission to use the image for publication.

## **6.0 The Writing process**

Once the research process is completed, or mostly completed, the process of writing can start. The idea behind the writing process is to take the facts from the research process and put together as complete a

fully story as possible. Given the nature of research, there will probably be gaps in the research, but this is to be expected.

## **6.1 Highlighting what is important.**

Review the research material and see what information is important to telling the story. If you have printed out the material, then you can use a highlighter to mark the important information. At this point, the information can be typed or cut-n-pasted into a document. It is easy to move sentences around a document once they are typed in. One process of writing is to type all the information into a document and then move things around to organize them.

## **6.2 Putting it in Chronological order**

Most stories are told best when in chronological order, so organizing the research material in chronological order is a good way to start. If your notes are out of order, just start typing the material into a document and then cut-n-paste to arrange into the right chronological order. Some events might tie in with other events over a long period of time, so you might need to group these events together.

Any way that you gather and group the material must make sense when you read it. Grouping by subject and then chronological might be better than a pure chronological layout.

## **6.3 Break it up into smaller chunks**

If there is a lot of research material and it seems like a daunting task to understand it all, break it down into smaller chunks. Find a way to organize the information into the smaller and smaller parts and then work on each part. The most logical is chronological, but it can be organized other ways. For longer documents, think about natural breaks for chapters.

Another tool is to use an outline. In short sentences, list the important parts of the history, as if you have 30 seconds to tell someone about the whole subject. Then take each sentence, and add the detail that explain that part of the history. Keep doing this until the structure of the document comes out. As you do this, you might find that you have an inspiration to work on one part of the document. Go with that. Work on the parts that you find interesting at that moment. You can then come back and work on the other parts later.

## **6.4 Get it into the document**

Sometimes the hardest part is getting the words into the document. One way to make this easier is to type the information from your notes into the document. From there, you can edit, re-arrange, and tweak it as necessary. By entering your notes into the document, it gets past the initial problem of where to start and it adds pages to an other wise empty document.

## **6.4 Rewriting**

It can be too easy to type the information from the research material, verbatim, into a document. This can lead to cries of plagiarism and copyright issues. When taking longer passages of information from

a single source, find a way to rewrite the information. Work through the material, sentence by sentence, finding a different way to word the sentence, but keep the same information. If possible, combine two sentences and reword them. If there are unnecessary words or information, leave it out.

There are times when it is fine to quote directly from a source, but make sure to attribute the source. If the source is in the public domain, then using long quotes is valid. If the material is copyrighted, then limit the quote to only what is necessary.

## **6.5 The final clean up**

The last step of the writing process is going through the document and making sure that the writing is clear, concise, and that it flows properly. With a document that started as a collection of bits of information, time must be spent connecting the bits in a flowing manner. Sentences might need to be moved or reworked to make it all fit. Having a second pair of eyes review the document can be a good idea. Writers have a tendency to read what is in their head versus what is really on paper. Someone new to the subject can recognize jumps or gaps in the flow of the document.

## **6.6 Copyright of the Document**

As soon as words are typed into a document, copyright is automatically given to the author. A document does not need to be registered with the U.S. Copyright office to have a valid copyright. Most professional books are, but hobbyist documents really do not need to be.

Standard copyright means that no one is allowed to sell or redistribute the copyrighted work. For some, this might be a little strict. As seen above, I really like using Open Source software. The idea of Open Source is available to documents, and that is the Creative Commons License. The Creative Commons License is a set of licenses that allows the author to keep or give away as much rights as they want. The license that I prefer to use on my documents is Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike. This means that anyone can make copies of the documents, use the contents of the document as long as they state where it came from, it can only be used for non-commercial purposes (meaning that they can't print it up and sell it), and that all generated works from the document must use the same type of license. This means that I'm giving away something for free and I want it to say free, even if someone alters it. For an example, check the second page of this document for the Creative Commons license that is used.

The Creative Commons License can be used on a number of works, including documents, photographs, music, etc. For more information on the Creative Commons license, go to <http://creativecommons.org/>.

## **7.0 Publishing Local History**

Once you are done researching local history, the next step is to write up the research and put it in some presentable format. There are many different ways to publish the material, so you will need to determine that before preparing the final version of the document.

## **7.1 Publishing Source**

Depending on the amount of material and what you can write there are three different ways to publish the results of your research; article, paper, or book.

### **7.1.1 Historical Society Newsletter or Newspaper Article**

An article is usually a shorter piece of writing, something that would take up a few pages, and possibly up to five pages. The article could have a couple of photographs accompany it, but it is not always necessary. The format it is to be stored in will depend on what requirements the publication has. Most will accept a .doc file and the photographs as .jpeg images. If using OpenOffice, which normally saves in .odt format, the Save As file option will allow for selecting the .doc format to save the document.

### **7.1.2 Research Paper**

A research paper is a longer piece of writing, something from about 5 to 30 pages. It is something that would be too long for a newsletter article, but too short for a full book. The paper could be self-published or distributed through a local museum or historical society.

### **7.1.3 Book**

When the finished writing has over 30 pages, there should be enough to create a book. To be a proper book, it would normally be printed in hard copy and it would have an ISBN number. Both of these options cost money. There are many formats for hard copy, some that are fairly inexpensive, such as a saddle-stapled soft cover book, and others that are very expensive, such as a hard back book.

## **7.2 Creating the end result**

The end result of this whole process is not just your writing, but the writing and layout. Layout includes creating cover pages, table of contents, indexes, and adding photographs into the document.

Most word processing programs MS Word and OpenOffice Writer can do a decent job of formatting the document. They both allow for the inclusion of photographs in the document. I have found that the exact layout of the photographs is not quite up to the control of the writer, making it trickier to get the layout correct.

Using a desktop publishing (DTP) program like Scribus, gives you greater control of the final product, but it takes more time to do the layout and requires knowing the desktop publishing tool.

## **7.3 Distribution**

Once the document is written, be it a paper or a book, the next step is getting it to the reader. There are many different ways to do this, each with an associated cost. A decision has to be made as to how much will be spent in doing this. It is possible to keep costs low and still get the document to people that are interested in reading it.

### **7.3.1 Hard copy**

The traditional way to get the writing to the readers is in hard copy. There are many methods of creating the hard copy document, from the fairly cheap to the very expensive. The total cost of production is probably more important than the cost per unit. It is possible to get the cost per unit for a soft cover book to be about \$4, but the print run will have to be 1,000 units, making the total cost of \$4,000. Another method might cost \$8 per unit, but have a minimum of 10 units, for a total cost of \$80.

A research paper can be printed on a laser printer and put together with printed card stock covers. Card stock for this is easily found in an office supply store, and the card stock will go through a laser printer. Besides a card stock cover, clear plastic report covers can be used to give a little more professional look. I've got a second hand business laser printer and I use that for printing out documents, using a card stock cover, that I can give away at very low cost.

Talk with a local printer to see what options are available and the costs associated with the different forms of printing. If there is enough interested in the book, it might be worth the more expensive printing options, as the sales might easily cover the costs.

There are a number of Publish-on-Demand (POD) services where they will host the document and those that wish a hard copy can buy it directly from the POD vendor. The POD vendor will print a copy for the buyer, collect the money, and remit royalties to the author. This can be way to get a book published with no up front fees and the buyer covering the costs. One drawback with this method is that the author will not see the book before it goes to the buyer.

### **7.3.2 Electronic**

A distribution format that is becoming more common and more accepted is electronic. Basically, the document is saved as a PDF file and made available through a website. Persons who are interested in the document will connect to the website, download the document, and either read it on the computer, or print it out and read it. The process for doing this is easy and either free or inexpensive.

Both OpenOffice Writer and Scribus will export the document to a PDF file. Scribus has a tendency to create rather large PDF files, so use an option to use a smaller DPI for the images once exported.

Creating a website to host local history documents is relatively easy and Google Sites provides for a free web page for those with a Google Account. Scribd.com is a website that stores electronic documents for free. If a local historical society or museum has a website, see if they might be willing to host the document.

Once the document is hosted, create a press release to be sent to local newspapers letting them know that the paper is released and the link where it can be downloaded. This same information can be sent to the local historical group so they can relay it to their members. E-mails friends and relatives about the document and where it is located. They might be interested.

## **8. Conclusion**

This paper was designed to cover the breadth of researching and writing local history, but not the depth. There are many other books that provide details on each of the subjects that I have covered. Hopefully this paper has provided an overall view of the researching and writing process and provides the reading with a starting point. Hopefully, this paper has shown how easy the process is and that you don't need to be an expert to work on local history.

## **Acknowledgments**

I'd like to thank Janet Cronbach for her feedback on an early version of this document. Thanks to Lila Bringhurst for, again, editing my writing.