



Researching and Writing about Skeletons in the Family History Closet

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The Research Like a Pro Genealogy Podcast

<https://familylocket.com/byu/>

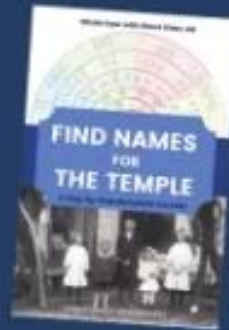
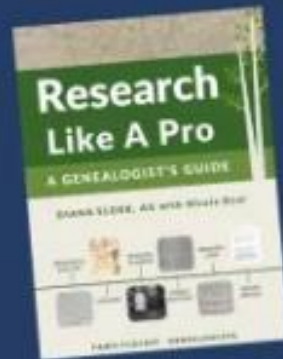
Family Locket Genealogists



Mother & Daughter
Professional Genealogists

Finding ancestors and keeping
them close to the heart

Diana Elder, AG
Nicole Dyer



“Accidents will occur in
the best regulated
families.”

~ Charles Dickens



What types of skeletons in the closet can be uncovered in our family history?



- ▶ Misattributed parentage events discovered by DNA testing



Criminal activity:
thievery, murder,
abuse





Complicated relationships:
premarital, extra marital,
desertion, divorce, bigamy,
etc.

MENTAL
ILLNESS OF
ALL TYPES

PHYSICAL
ILLNESS OR
DEFORMITIES



The background features a stylized illustration of two raised fists, one in each hand, which are encased in metal shackles. The fists are crossed at the wrists, and the chains extend outwards. The entire scene is set against a dark teal background with a large, faint circular arc behind the fists. A solid red rectangle is positioned in the top right corner.

Slave owning
ancestors

Ancestors
who were
enslaved

Emotions that Might be Invoked

- ▶ Denial
- ▶ Disbelief
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Sorrow



A dark, grainy photograph of a John Deere excavator. The excavator's arm is raised, and its bucket is filled with human bones. The excavator is positioned in a dirt field. The text "Choice to Make" is overlaid in white at the top. The text "Bury the skeleton and hope that no one else discovers it." is overlaid in white in the center. A solid red rectangle is in the top right corner. The excavator's arm has "392E LC" written on it, and the body has "JOHN DEERE" written on it.

Choice to Make

**Bury the skeleton and hope that no one else
discovers it.**

Choice to Make

Take the skeleton out, examine it
and put it to rest.

A ALWAYS
S SEEK
K KNOWLEDGE

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Dealing with a Family History Skeleton

SEEK
UNDERSTANDING

D.H. "Dock" Harris

- ▶ Born 29 December 1886, Cameron, Milam, Texas
- ▶ Married to Alice Frazier 20 November 1904, Pike, Love, Indian Territory
- ▶ Children: Bert born 1905 and Ettie born 1907
- ▶ Death 20 August 1957, Vinita, Craig, Oklahoma





1

Objective

2

Analysis

3

Location

4

Research
plan

5

Source
citations

6

Research
Logs

7

Write
conclusions

The Genealogy Research Process

Create an
objective

Identity

Relationship

Actions



Research Objective: Ancestor Actions

- ▶ The objective of this research project is to discover more about the mental illness and institutionalization of Dock Harris from 1940-1957. Dock Harris was born 29 December 1886 in Cameron, Milam, Texas, and died 17 August 1957 at Vinita, Craig, Oklahoma. He married Alice Frazier on 20 November 1904 at Pike, Love County, Indian Territory.



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Do a timeline analysis



REVIEW FAMILY
STORIES



GATHER RECORDS



TAKE NOTE OF
QUESTIONS

Timeline Analysis for Dock Harris

- ▶ Family Story:
 - ▶ Grandpa Harris went crazy.
 - ▶ He died at the hospital in Vinita, Oklahoma.



Form 1 *578* *692* REGISTRATION CARD No. *2*

1 Name in full *Dock Harris* Age is *30*
(Given name) (Family name)

2 Home address *Pike* *Ala*
(No.) (Street) (City) (State)

3 Date of birth *Dec* *29* *1886*
(Month) (Day) (Year)

4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? *natural Born Citizen*

5 Where were you born? *Santaba* *Tex*
(Town) (State) (Nation)

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? *Farmer*

8 By whom employed?

9 Where employed?

10 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? *Two Children*

11 Married or single (which)? *yes* Race (specify which) *Caucasian*

12 What military service have you had? Rank *none*; branch
years; Nation or State

13 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? *Family Support*

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Dock Harris
(Signature or mark)

Timeline Analysis for Dock Harris

► Sources:

- 1900 Census
- 1904 Marriage record
- 1910 Census
- 1918 World War I Draft Registration
- 1920 Census
- 1930 Census
- 1957 Death Certificate

Questions from Analysis



What kind of mental illness did Dock Harris have?

What was the hospital at Vinita like?

Do medical records exist?

What was Dock's experience in the hospital?

Why did the family institutionalize him?



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Locality Research



Culture

History and
Laws

Record
Collections

Living
Relatives

Learning about the location

Types of medical
records for mental
health institutions

Oklahoma laws
pertaining to
release of medical
information



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Make a Research Plan



Hypothesis



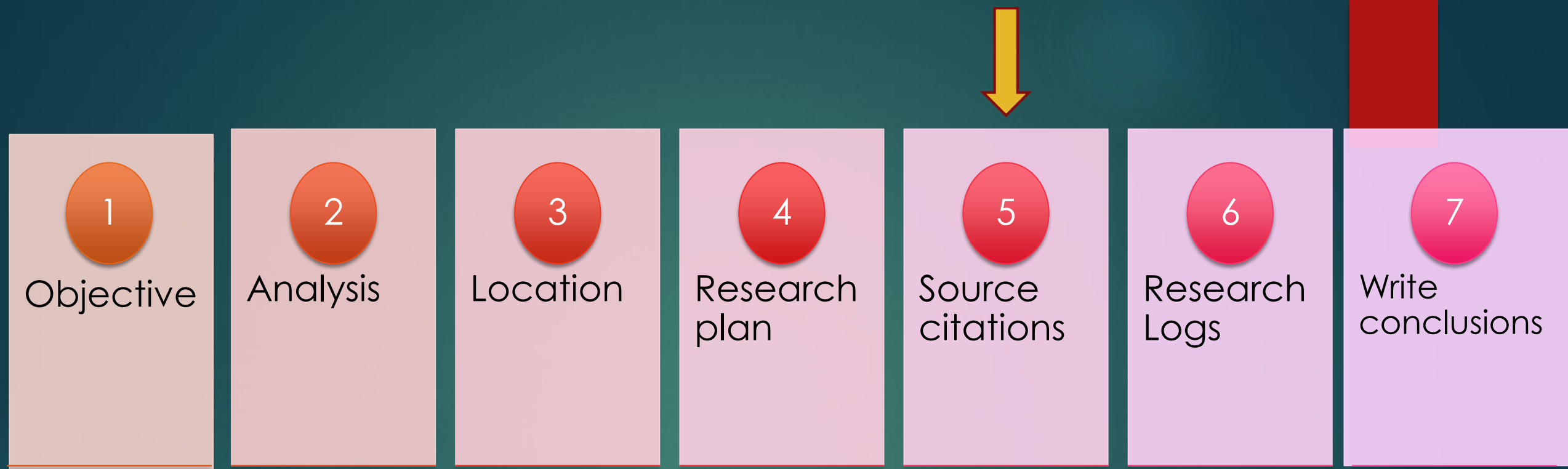
Source List



Prioritized Search Strategy

My Research Plan

- ▶ Send for medical records of Dock Harris, patient at the Eastern State Hospital at Vinita, Oklahoma
- ▶ Research the conditions of the Eastern State Hospital from 1940-1957.
- ▶ Search the 1940 census for Dock Harris as a patient at the Eastern State Hospital.
- ▶ Research the dust bowl and depression era for localities where Dock Harris lived: Colorado, Texas, and Oklahoma.



The Genealogy Research Process

Source Citations

Who created the source?

What is the source?

When was the source created?

Where is the source?

Where within is the source?

Source Citation

- ▶ Who: Eastern State Hospital, Vinita, Oklahoma
- ▶ What: Statistical Sheet for Dock Harris, admission
- ▶ When: 22 November 1937,
- ▶ Where is: Medical Records Director, Oklahoma Forensic Center P.O. Box 69 Vinita, OK 74301, 901-256-7841.
- ▶ Where within: personal files of Diana Elder, Highland, Utah.

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The Genealogy Research Process

Research Logs



Track phone calls,
emails, interviews, and
records



Include negative
searches

100

- ▶ Date
- ▶ Repository
- ▶ URL/Call # Microfilm #
- ▶ Searching for
- ▶ Locality
- ▶ Source Citation
- ▶ Results/comments

Ancestor's name

Objective(s)

Locality	
----------	--

[illegible]

Research Log Entry for Medical Records

Date: 17 July 2019

Repository: Eastern
State Hospital

Searching For:
Medical records for
Dock Harris

URL / Call# /
Microfilm # :
Medical Records

Director, Oklahoma
Forensic Center,
P.O. box 69, Vinita,
OK 74301, 901-256-
7841

Locality: Vinita, Craig, Oklahoma



Source Citation: Eastern State Hospital, Vinita, Oklahoma, Statistical Sheet for Dock Harris, admission, 22 November 1937, personal files of Diana Elder, Highland, Medical Records Director, Oklahoma Forensic Center, P.O. box 69, Vinita, OK 74301, 901-256-7841.

- ▶ Comments / Results:
- ▶ Admitted 22 Nov 1937, resident of Proctor, Cherokee County
- ▶ Born Texas, education through 4th grade
- ▶ Church of Christ, farmer, married, mixed race, age 50
- ▶ Dementia praecox, paranoid type
- ▶ Final diagnosis: schizophrenic reaction: paranoid
- ▶ Additional personal and family history on transcription

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Write the Story

Share the facts with
newfound
understanding and
perspective.



Write the Story: What to Include

Historical Events

Culture of the time

Family Relationships



Writing Dock's Story

“Paranoid schizophrenia was the diagnosis, brought on by stress. What could have stressed out Grandpa Harris? Well, the Great Depression of the 1930’s was in full swing and as an older man out of work he struggled to make a living. I learned from census records and family stories that he and Grandma Harris moved around in the Dust Bowl states of Oklahoma, Texas, and Colorado trying to find someplace to farm. According to the records he received government assistance at one time and the stress of dealing with government officials pushed him over the edge.”

Diana Elder, “Do You Have a Skeleton in your Family History Closet?” *FamilyLocket* (<https://familylocket.com/do-you-have-a-skeleton-in-your-family-history-closet/> : accessed 17 July 2019).



Include
perceptions
of other
family
members

“We stopped at Vinita, Oklahoma and saw my Grandpa Harris. He was in a beautiful place – big yard – green grass and he was happy. We asked him if he wanted to go home. He said, No it was best he stay there. We always sent him packages – cookies and candy, clothes.”

Helen Shults Jensen to Nicole Elder,
personal letter, 2001, in possession of
Diana Elder, Highland, Utah.



Not Qualified?



TAKE A CLASS



READ BOOKS



GIVE YOURSELF TIME



Questions to consider when writing

Dawn Parrett
Thurston, "What's
Their Story: An
Adventure into the
Lives of My
Ancestors," BYU
Education Week
2014, Provo, Utah.

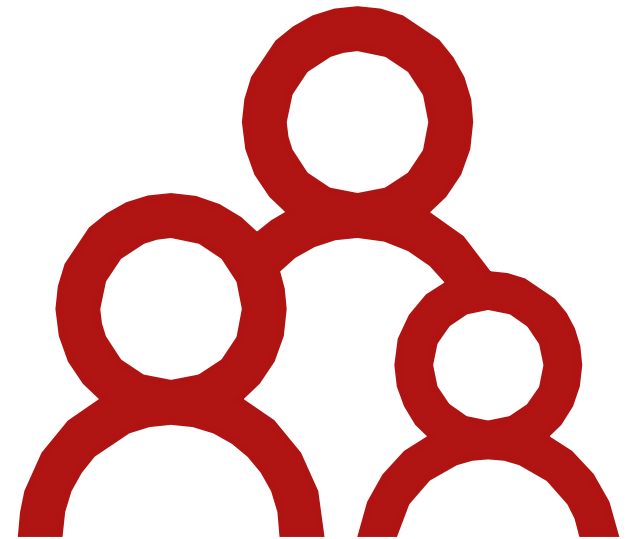
What is your responsibility as a family historian?

Make or break reputations

Decide the truth

Deal with the repercussions

Decide what stays in the closet



What are your Options?

- ▶ Say nothing
- ▶ Tell all
- ▶ Tell a version of the truth



What is the Purpose?

- ▶ Explanation needed?
- ▶ Necessary?
- ▶ Strengthen family members?



Who is your audience?

- ▶ Story known?
- ▶ Family still living?
- ▶ Thick-skinned?
- ▶ Upsetting details?
- ▶ Time Needed?



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What were the motives?



Why did an event occur?



What brought an individual to an action?




What is the truth?

Family myth, gossip, or rumor or supported by sources?



Showing how our ancestors overcame a
challenge can strengthen us in our own
time of need.



“If you don’t recount your family history,
it will be lost.

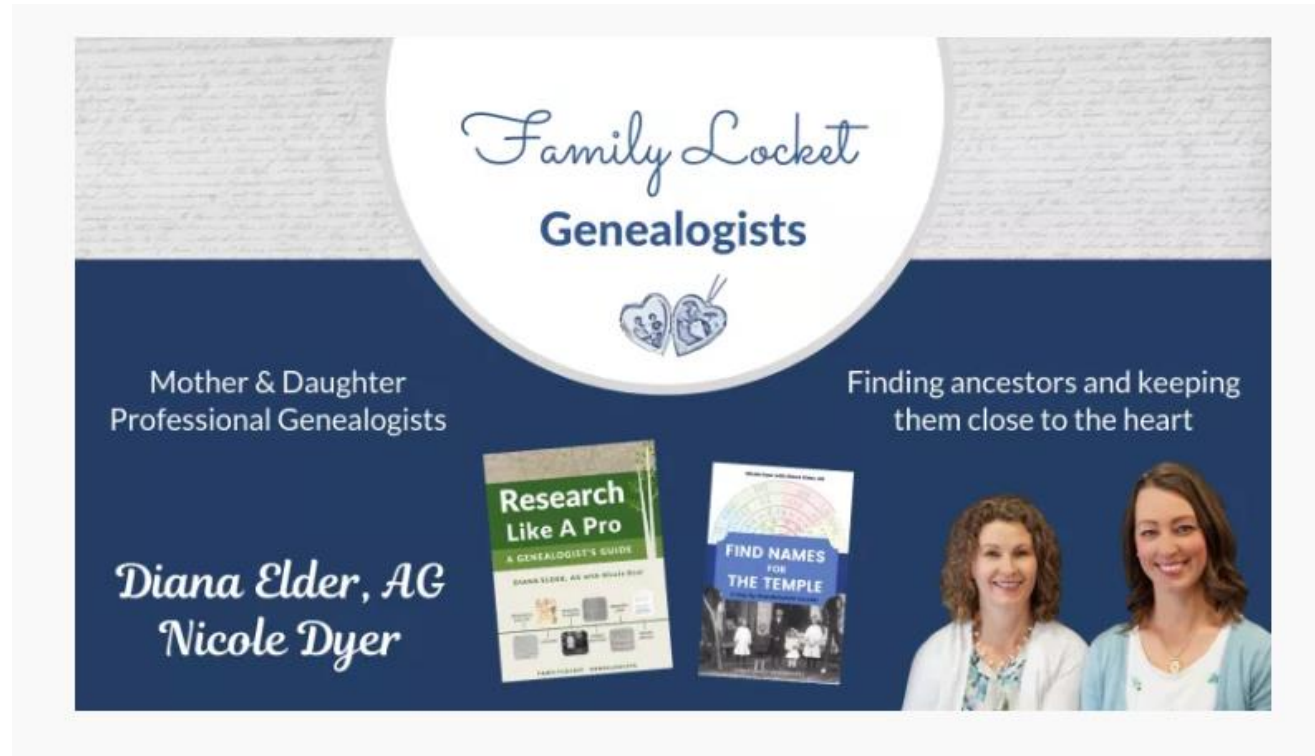
Honor your own stories and tell them too.

The tales may not seem very important,

But they are what binds families

And makes each of us who we are.

Madeleine L’Engle

A banner for Family Locket Genealogists. The top half has a light beige background with faint cursive text. The bottom half is dark blue. In the center, a white semi-circle contains the text "Family Locket Genealogists" in a mix of script and sans-serif fonts, with a small heart logo below it. To the left, text reads "Mother & Daughter Professional Genealogists" and "Diana Elder, AG Nicole Dyer". To the right, text reads "Finding ancestors and keeping them close to the heart". Between the text are two book covers: "Research Like A Pro" and "Find Names for the Temple". On the right side of the banner is a photo of two women, Diana Elder and Nicole Dyer.

Family Locket
Genealogists

Mother & Daughter
Professional Genealogists

*Diana Elder, AG
Nicole Dyer*

Research
Like A Pro
A GENEALOGIST'S GUIDE

FIND NAMES
FOR
THE TEMPLE

Finding ancestors and keeping
them close to the heart

Questions???

<https://familylocket.com/byu/>