Basics of Writing and Publishing Your Family History

Planning & Organizing
Decide: Who is your audience?

Choose a publication type and genealogical format

Electronic/digital:
- o Blog
- o Website

Printed:
- o Booklet
- o Photo book
- o Paperback book
- o Calendar
- o Hardcover book
- o Journal or magazine article

- Look at other family history publications to get ideas.
- ***Register*-style** and ***Ahnentafel*** are genealogical formats; not every book has to follow a genealogical format [see "Structure & Writing" below]
- Every book *does* have to include narrative to record the stories of the people in the book. Family history is all about *people*!
- If you have a lot of illustrations, you can place all the source citations at the back of the book as **endnotes** rather than footnotes at the bottom of every page. (Keep them as footnotes while you are writing, however, so you can "cite as you write" more easily.)
- Illustrations and subheads / short sections make your work more accessible to all ages.

Define the scope by making a table of contents
- Don't try to do it all!
- Material that doesn't fit elsewhere can be put in an appendix.

Organize your research
- Paper files and digital files should be organized into folders that match your table of contents.
- Make notes to yourself in your Word manuscript, e.g. <NOTE:> or <ART:>
- Try exporting a *Register*/descendancy or *Ahnentafel* report from your genealogical software.

Gather your tools
1. Your paper files
2. Your electronic files
3. Your family tree / genealogical software
4. Online and print writing references
5. Your stylesheet
6. Online dictionary
7. Microsoft Word or other word-processing software

Things Word can do:
- o *Register* template
- o Sequence numbering
- o Change tracking
- o Index tagging

American Ancestors
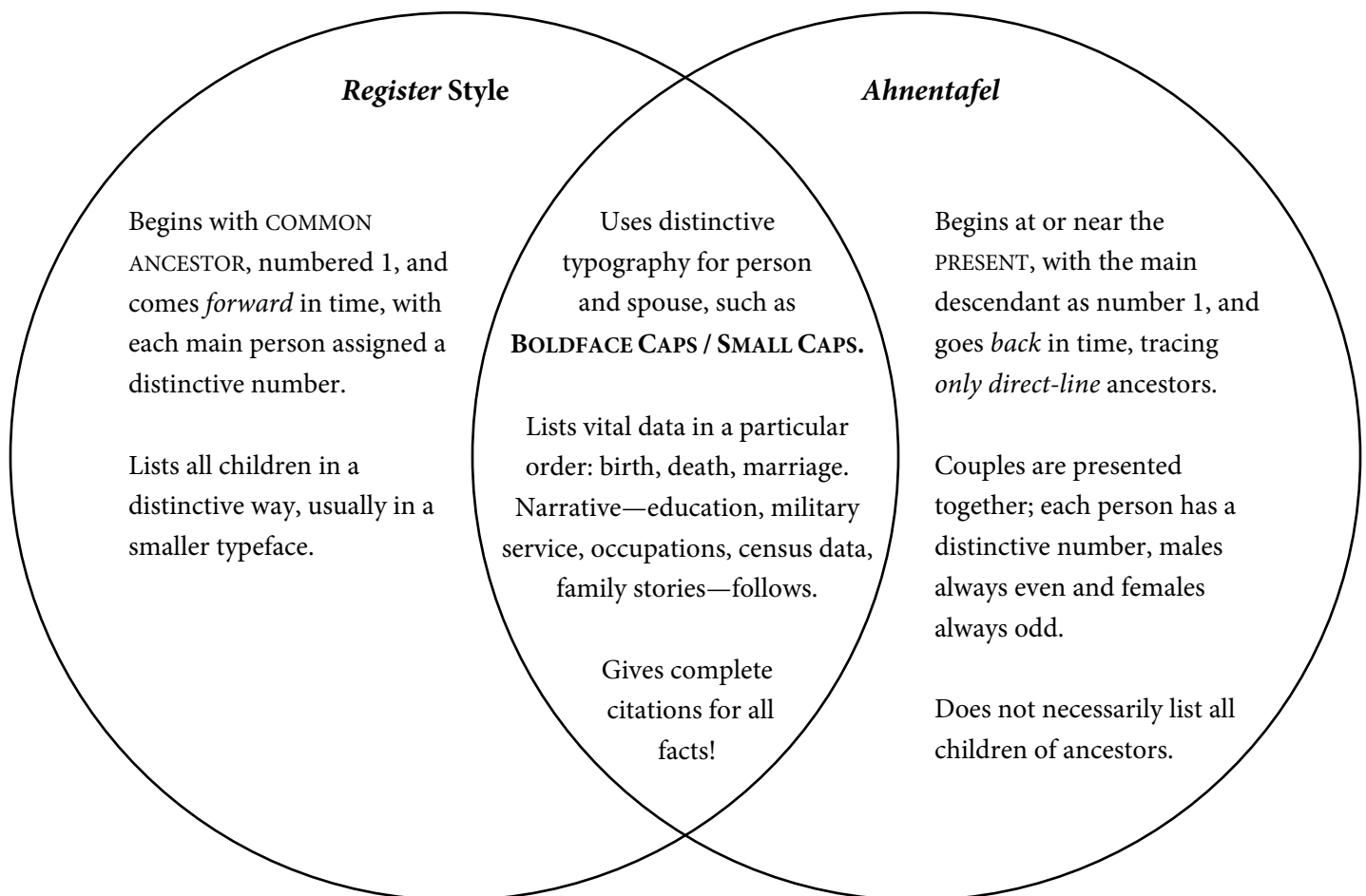*by* NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

General hints

- Leave the indexing to a professional.
- Indexing is always the very last step; no changes should be made *at all* after indexing begins.
- Set aside time to write each day or week.
- Make a dedicated workspace for your writing.
- Don't be afraid to rethink your TOC if what you have isn't working.
- Celebrate your progress!

Structure & Writing

Keep In Mind

1. Audience
2. Table of Contents
3. Consistency leads to clarity!
4. What do you want to tell your readers?
5. Who do you plan to write about?

Genealogical Formats

Register Style

Begins with COMMON ANCESTOR, numbered 1, and comes *forward* in time, with each main person assigned a distinctive number.

Lists all children in a distinctive way, usually in a smaller typeface.

Uses distinctive typography for person and spouse, such as **BOLDFACE CAPS / SMALL CAPS.**

Lists vital data in a particular order: birth, death, marriage. Narrative—education, military service, occupations, census data, family stories—follows.

Gives complete citations for all facts!

Ahnentafel

Begins at or near the PRESENT, with the main descendant as number 1, and goes *back* in time, tracing *only direct-line* ancestors.

Couples are presented together; each person has a distinctive number, males always even and females always odd.

Does not necessarily list all children of ancestors.
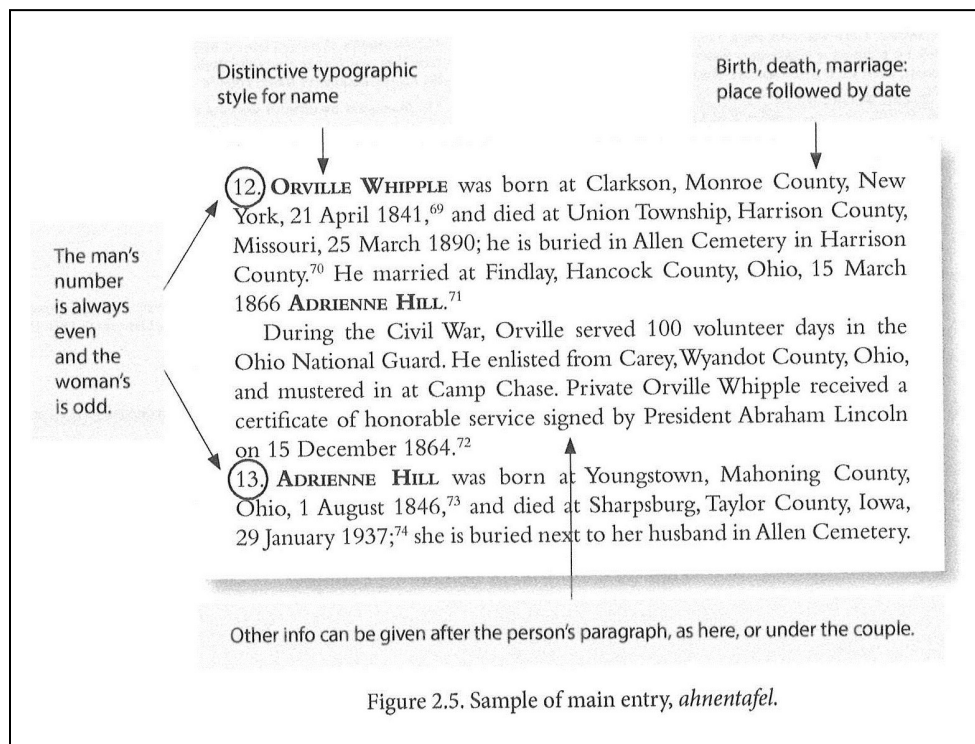
Genealogical Sketches

Build genealogical sketches: names, vital data, dates, places.

- Born-died-married
- Place-date
- Blanks for unknown names
- Parentheses around maiden and previous married names
- Superscript generational numbers, starting with 1 for the immigrant

Ahnentafel

An **ahnentafel,** or ancestor table, begins at or near the present and follows a direct line of ancestors as far back as is traceable or for a certain number of generations. The subject whose ancestry will be traced is number 1, and each person is numbered in a particular order from there. The father would be number 2 and the mother number 3. Men are always even-numbered and women are always odd-numbered.

- Person x 2 = Father
- (Person x 2) + 1 = Mother
- Father / 2 = Child

Figure 2.5. Sample of main entry, *ahnentafel.*

Sample from Penelope L. Stratton and Henry B. Hoff,
NEHGS Guide to Genealogical Writing (Boston: NEHGS, 2014), 19.

Register-style

The basic building block of *Register* style is the family sketch, which treats a couple and their children in a standardized way. With a numbering system that organizes the data and clarifies who is who, each main person has a distinct number.

Figure 2.2 Sample main entry, *Register* style.

Figure 2.3. Sample child list, *Register* style.
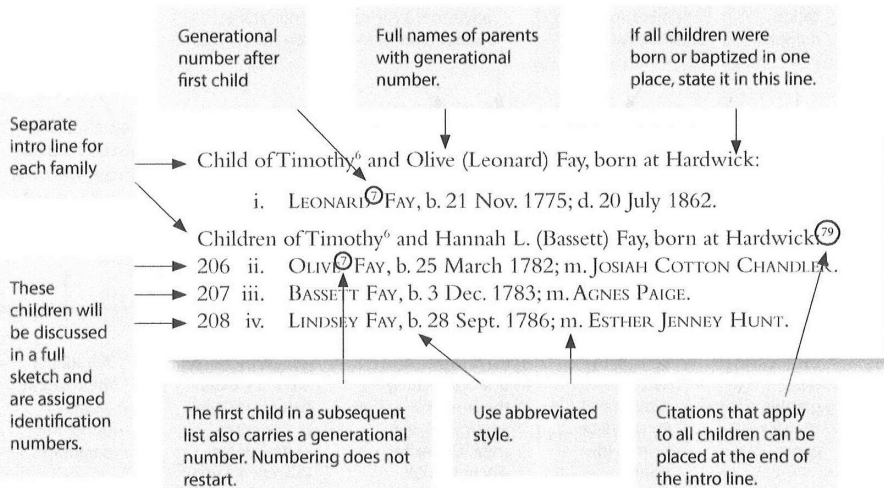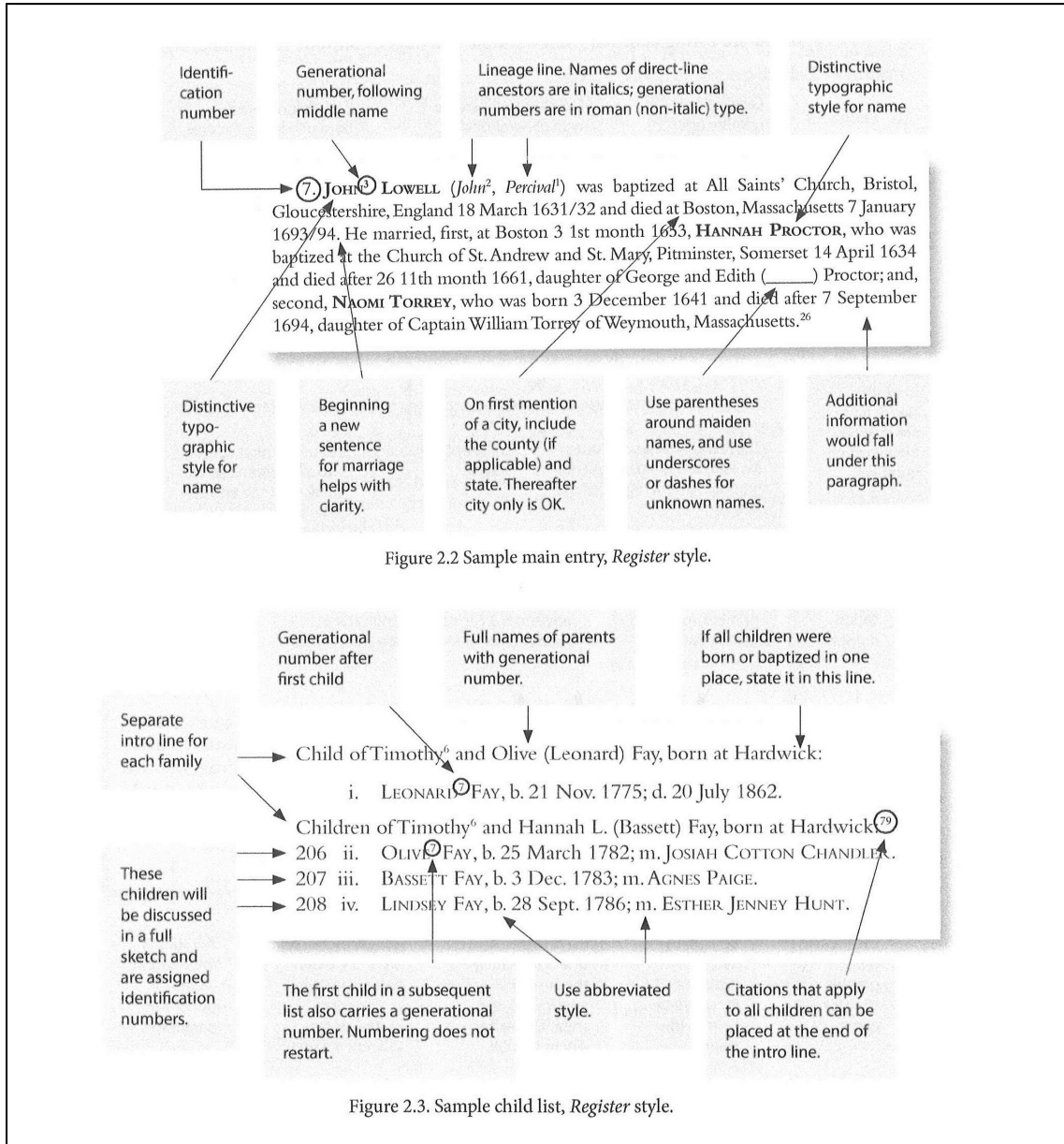
Samples from Stratton and Hoff, *NEHGS Guide to Genealogical Writing*, 15-16.

You can download the *Register*-style template, the *ahnentafel* template, and a sample stylesheet from:
https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates (and on the course webpage)

Citations

Basics
- Anything that is not common knowledge must be sourced.
- The important thing is to allow the reader to find the source you referenced.
  - Indicate the location of the data.
  - Inform readers of anything pertinent to the access and interpretation of the data.
- Base your preferred style on the recommended style guides. This adherence to standard practices will help the reader understand the different elements of the citation.

Best Advice
- Cite as you write!
- Always Be Consistent! – Pick a style and stick with it.

Reference Notes
- Use the footnote function in Word.
- Work with footnotes and convert to endnotes later.
- Use full citation in first reference, include: (hereafter *Short Title*)
- Make a short list to keep track of the short titles.
- Do not use *Ibid*.
- Use abbreviations – like for state names and months over five letters
- Choose between notes by fact or combined by sentence/paragraph.

Note for each fact	Note at end of sentence or paragraph
Source citation follows each fact.	Source citation follows a sentence or a paragraph.
Ideal for genealogical community.	Ideal for more narrative style.
Easy to see which reference goes with which text; very clear connection.	Must be sure to indicate within the citation which source applies to which fact.
Some people find it hard to follow text when note numbers appear frequently.	Consolidates footnotes and space, and decreases the number of notes.
	More time consuming; more room for error.

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- Choose between footnotes and endnotes.

Footnotes	Endnotes	Combined System
Each source citation is a footnote.	Source citations appear at the end of the chapter or book (after appendixes, before bibliography).	Use endnotes for citations and footnotes for explanatory text. Use numbers for endnotes; letters or symbols for footnotes.
Works for all audiences, but gives the book a very scholarly look.	Works for all audiences.	Works for all audiences.
Page layout is difficult. A long footnote may not appear on the same page as its reference. A page consisting almost exclusively of footnotes is daunting to read.	Doesn't interrupt reading or cause layout problems. Can be difficult to locate a particular reference. If you place notes at the back of the book, include headings for chapters.	Puts important textual explanations on the actual page; source notes remain all together. In Word, select the appropriate command for that note: Insert Footnote or Insert Endnote.
Bibliography helpful, but not essential.		

Editing

Macro-level editing: looks at big picture; audience; organization; documentation; etc.; Line editing /copyediting: looks at finer level of detail, including spelling, grammar, genealogical style, editorial style.

- Edit after you have a draft of some or all chapters.
- Edit after you've taken a break.
- Who edits: you *and* someone else

Choosing an editor

- Good speller and grammarian
- Experience with genealogy and family history
- Publisher will handle
- Find a freelancer through Association of Professional Genealogists; Board for Certification of Genealogists; Editorial Freelancers Association (see separate handout).

TIPS:

- One reading is not enough.
- Use Word's change-tracking function
- Exert version control: save edited files under new names.

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Design and Layout Tips

Design and layout pages *after* editing is complete and all images are in hand.

Design/layout decisions

- Trim size (dimensions)
- Where to place photos?
- Margins (ideally 1″ outside and gutter)
- Headers/footers
- Hyphenation/widow control
- Styles: paragraph and character

TIP: Keep each chapter in a separate file.

Design tips

- Justification looks neater than unjustified
- Line length: 63–72 characters
- Use serif face for text and sans serif for display only
- Use 12- or 11-point font size
- Limit yourself to one or two typefaces; use variations (bold, etc.) for hierarchy and emphasis.

Layout guidelines

- Place images and special elements at logical places.
- Be consistent with typographic styles, caption styles, etc.
- Avoid "widows" and "orphans," bad page breaks, and blank rights.

Add Front and End Matter

Possible front matter (those in bold are required)

- **Half-title page** (p. i: main book title only, no subtitle or authors)
- Frontispiece or blank (p. ii: could have an illustration)
- **Title page** (p. iii: book title, subtitle, and authors)
- **Copyright page** (p. iv: must be on the back, or verso, of the title page)
- Dedication (In memory or in honor of…)
- **Table of Contents**
- Foreword (by someone other than the author, explains why one should read the book)
- Preface (by the author, explains why the book was written)
- **Acknowledgments** (thank-yous, can also be part of a preface)
- List of terms or abbreviations (source abbreviations, genealogical or legal terms, occupations, foreign words; can be in an appendix instead)
- Introduction (presents main topics and supporting material so reader knows what to expect, can be first page of body of book, Arabic page 1, or end on the last page of the front matter)

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Possible end matter

- Appendixes
- Glossary
- Bibliography
- Illustration credits
- Index(es)

Indexing

- Takes place after all writing/layout is complete
- Serves as a good proofreading pass

What to index

- Every name in text (or almost every name) *and* in captions
- All iterations of married names for women
- Key place names (optional)
- Topics of interest (wars/battles, ships, colleges/ universities, historical events) (optional)
- NOT: front matter or notes unless substantive, non-reference information in a note.

TIP: Index only what's on the page. If you know of something pertinent that's not on the page, don't include it in the index. If it's important, add it to the text.

Indexing names

- Index every name (or almost every name); reader should be able to find a specific person
- Main entry = surname; subentries = individual names
- Provide identifiers, such as generation numbers, where necessary to avoid confusion.

> **Lowell**
>
> Abbott Eaton[14], 278
> Abbott Lawrence[10], 29, 31, 45
> Abbott Lawrence[13], 142, 142*n*
> Abigail (Coney), 12
> Abigail (Proctor), 8

- Index married women under all surnames they have ever had.
- Create a section titled "unknown surnames" at the beginning or end of index.
- Use blanks for an unknown given name.
- Don't index a completely unknown name! Who would look up _____ _____?
- Conflate alternate spellings, using slashes: Leversedge/Leverage; Mary/Mercy
- If surnames are far apart alphabetically, add a cross-reference: Haines *see* Haynes; Haynes/Haines

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Indexing places

- Reader should be able to find specific place.
- Main entry = country or state; subentries = counties or towns/cities

> **California,** 29, 70, 83, 97, 106, 107
>   Laguna Beach, 94
>   Los Angeles, 83
>   Newbury Park, 119
>   Newport Beach, 70, 85, 96
>   Orange County, 83
>   San Francisco, 77, 117

Working with an indexer

- Check American Society for Indexing; Editorial Freelance Association; Association of Professional Genealogists.
- Make sure the person has experience with indexing a genealogy.
- Give specific instructions.
- You will still need to proofread the index!

TIP: Edit your index. Check alphabetization; spellings; other details.

Printing

Ready to print?

- Make PDFs: one for text, one for cover, another for (optional) photo insert(s).
- Complete online form (if using an online printer) *or* send list of instructions to printer:
  - Print quantity
  - Trim size (dimensions)
  - Number of pages, identify blanks
  - Paper
  - Jacket/cover: glossy or matte ?
  - Shipping instructions
- Upload

CONGRATULATIONS—You're done!

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Publishing Help

Publishers/Publishing Services with a specialty in family history

Legacy Books https://legacybooks.com/

A Life in Print https://www.alifeinprint.com/

Genealogy House http://genealogyhouse.net/

History Keep https://historykeep.com/

Otter Bay Books http://otter-bay-books.com/

Stories to Tell Books (Washington, D.C.) http://www.storiestotellbooks.com/ "Self-publishing for independent authors"

Online publishers

Lulu https://www.lulu.com/
CreateSpace https://www.createspace.com/
Amazon's self-publishing arm AuthorHouse http://www.authorhouse.com/
iUniverse http://www.iuniverse.com/

Freelance Professionals

EDITING AND DESIGN: The Editorial Freelancers Association website is a good place to find professionals to help you with editing, design, and page layout. Go to the "Hire a Freelancer" tab, choose "Member Directory" and then "Search the Directory" to check off the skills you are looking for: https://www.the-efa.org/.

Association of Professional Genealogists https://www.apgen.org/index.html Find a Specialist > Editor

Board for Certification of Genealogists https://bcgcertification.org/ Directory > Advanced Search> Services (enter "editing")

INDEXING: A good index is vital to any family history publication. You can find professional indexers on the Editorial Freelancers Association website (above) or the American Society for Indexing at https://www.asindexing.org/. Go to "Find an Indexer" then "Indexer Locator" to select Genealogy as a Subject Specialty. A sure way to get someone who is familiar with the intricacies of genealogical publications is to search the Association of Professional Genealogists website (go to "Other Searches" then select "Compiler/Indexer" under "Service Categories"): https://www.apgen.org/.

Resources

Penny Stratton, "Writing and Publishing Your Family History," subject guide,
https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/writing-publishing-your-family-history

Penny Stratton and Henry B. Hoff, eds., *NEHGS Guide to Genealogical Writing* (Boston: NEHGS, 2014).

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Portable Genealogist Compilation: Writing (Boston: NEHGS, 2017).

The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th ed. (Available in print or online at www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/).
The bible of the book-publishing industry, "CMS" will help you with everything from capitalization to punctuation to reference style to guidelines for book production.

Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian* (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1997) and *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 2007). Comprehensive guides to citing genealogical works.

Jane Friedman, "Start Here: How to Self-Publish Your Book," https://www.janefriedman.com/selfpublish-your-book/