Genealogy Wall Art Using Free Image Editing Tools

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A project to produce something tangible, such as a family binder, photo album, story collection, or, in this case, a wall display, can be a real motivator to showcase your research, as well as learn to work with photographic images. This project used free image editing tools to create files that were then sent to **mixtiles.com**.

Mixtiles was the only non-free expense -- but for about $100 I received 12 framed pictures that will adhere repeatedly to any flat surface. In my own project I designed the 12 tiles to display my wife's family tree to the 2nd-great-grandparents level:

But it's really about images

Whether you use them in a project like this or not, images are to me an indispensable part of genealogy. A photograph or drawing of an ancestor really brings them to life, and images of places, maps, and documents can transport you back to the time of your ancestor!

Four image formats you will work with the most

TIFF	(Tagged Image File Format)	Standard image file format created in the 1980s. Produces very large files; use for master images of heirloom photos, or printing requiring fine quality. TIF is the same as TIFF; comes from when MS only allowed a three-character extension.

JPEG	(Joint Photographic Experts Group)	A raster graphic file that is compressed with some loss of quality (degrades each time it is edited). JPG is the same as JPEG (see TIF above). For scanning important documents and photos, use 600 DPI (dots-per-inch).
PNG	(Portable Network Graphic)	A raster graphic file like JPEG but compressed with lossless compression.
GIF	(Graphics Interchange Format)	Preceded PNG. Is also lossless, but larger than PNG. Can store multiple images, so became popular for simple animations.

Example of file sizes

This picture of my Civil War ancestor was about 3500 pixels wide as a 19 Mb TIF file. I scaled it down to 1000 px wide and exported it as a JPG in GIMP. Then I re-opened the JPG and exported it as a GIF, then a PNG. Here are the relative file sizes:

pelsor-peter-dixon_1865xxxx_IN_cw-uniform	1/10/2022 12:33 PM	GIF File	1,408 KB
pelsor-peter-dixon_1865xxxx_IN_cw-uniform	1/10/2022 12:31 PM	JPG File	343 KB
pelsor-peter-dixon_1865xxxx_IN_cw-uniform	1/10/2022 12:34 PM	PNG File	1,113 KB
pelsor-peter-dixon_1865xxxx_IN_cw-uniform	1/10/2022 11:25 AM	TIF File	18,732 KB

Naming Images

I am starting to name my genealogy images in the format suggested by Denise May Levenick in her book *How to Archive Family Photos*. The format consists of four parts, each separated by an underscore (_):

- Surname-first-names

- Date (YYYYMMDD) I use 'x' where parts are not known

- Place (from largest to smallest, using state / country abbreviations).

- Item name

See the examples above for my ancestor.

The Concept

In 2020, the site MyHeritage.com introduced its enhancing/colorizing tool, and had a link to Mixtiles.com. The genealogist Thomas MacEntee had the concept of producing images from PowerPoint that were sent on to Mixtiles. His publication "Creating a Mixtiles Family Tree using MyHeritage" (see below) was the inspiration for my project.

Many of the links in MacEntee's PDF are no longer valid, but his template file is still available at this time for download. I have also made a template file from my own project, which is listed below along with MacEntee's.

The Mixtiles Project – Step-by-Step

1. MAKE A SKETCH of your display. Decide on how many generations you want to show.

2. SET UP A FOLDER on your computer for your project and copy any images you want to edit.

3. COLORIZE OR ENHANCE up to 10 images for free on MyHeritage (optional).

4. SIMPLE EDITS for single images on a slide can be done using MS Paint 3D on Windows 10/11 or Photos on MacOS.

5. COMPLEX EDITS (combining more than one photo on a slide) - use GIMP on either Windows or Mac.

6. CREATE SLIDES in PowerPoint or Google Slides for each Mixtile in the project. Best to start with a template file from one of the locations below. If you start from a blank file, make sure the slides are in a custom setting of 9 x 9 inches.

7. MODIFY IMAGES in PowerPoint or Google Slides, adding your genealogical information in text boxes. Images should be 8 inches square. Proof carefully, making sure that the genealogical information and gender image for each ancestor is correct.

8. SAVE THE IMAGES as PNG files to a sub-folder.

9. UPLOAD IMAGES to Mixtiles.com and place an order ($$ - only non-free item).

10. LAST STEP - When Mixtiles are received, center the middle tiles for the parents. A small hand level that also has a measure is useful for drawing level lines for the top and sides of the tiles; the level can also be used as a spacer between tiles. Only take off the protective wrapper over the adhesive top side before placing the tile – but it can be moved if the placing isn't quite right at first.

Free Tools

MyHeritage photo enhancement

- Description: Free tool for the first 10 photos; upgrade your free membership to one of the $ types to do more. MyHeritage no longer has the direct link to Mixtiles.

- Good for: enhancing B&W or color photos; colorizing old B&W photos, also has an "animation" feature.

- Go to https://myheritage.com/color

- Instructional Video from Family Tree Magazine (shows many features and caveats): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEC8qaUuiGU

Tools for Microsoft Windows: Paint (older versions), Paint 3D, Photos (Win 10/11)

- Description: Microsoft's long-time Paint application comes with all versions of Windows, but Paint 3D and Photos only come bundled with Windows 10/11.

- Good for: Paint is good for simple cropping and resizing, but Paint 3D is more up to date for image editing; Photos adds video editing, sharing, and creating different projects (such as videos and slide shows) using existing photos.

- Learn more: Search for "Paint 3D" or "Microsoft Photos" on the web or YouTube.

Tools for macOS: Paintbrush, Apple Photos

- Description: Paintbrush is the modern version of MacPaint, which came out in the 1980s. Photos is bundled with the macOS.

- Good for: If you are a Mac user, Photos is a powerful editor.

- Instructional Video: Apple Photos (shows the rich features of this app): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qw5WLo6NHM4

GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program)

- Description: Similar to Adobe PhotoShop, but free! Versions for GNU/Linux, Windows, macOS, and more!

- Good for: Complex Editing – Scaling, Layering, Re-touching, etc.

- Download: https://www.gimp.org/

- First 10-min tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_L_MMU22bAw

- 2-hr tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EPIUyFJ4ag&t=0s

PowerPoint

- Description: Microsoft's venerable presentation product, for both Windows and Mac. If you already have MS Office or Microsoft 365, it is part of the suite; otherwise, download a free trial at the site below.

- Good for: Presentations, of course; but great for enhancing photos, which can then be saved as JPG or PNG. If building file for Mixtiles from scratch, go to the Design tab, Slide Size, Custom Slide Size, and set to 9 in. x 9 in.

- Download: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/powerpoint

- Instructional Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF34-Wu6qWU

Google Slides

- Description: Google's version of PowerPoint – free.

- Good for: Equivalent to PowerPoint. If building file for Mixtiles from scratch, go to File, Page Setup, Custom, and set to 9 in. x 9 in.

- Instructional Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhshNXJtpkE

Mixtiles.com

- Description: Company that produces the framed pictures that adhere to wall (Mixtiles).

- When ordering, note carefully the framing option selection: Clean, Classic, or Bold, and the color of frame.

- Order at site: https://www.mixtiles.com/

- Installing with a level: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCk2yqMudyw

Template Files

- For PowerPoint for Windows or Mac:
  https://genealogybargains.s3.amazonaws.com/SAMPLE+MacEntee+Mixtiles+Family+Tree.pptx
  -OR-
  https://kennethvpeterson.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Mixtiles-PowerPoint.pptx

- Google Slides:
  https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1AZA7X1cUkqXVBFqZi-uJ-Cm-49qHyCGFtrwZWFiwExM/edit#slide=id.p1

Further Reading

Denise May Levenick. *How to Archive Family Photos: A Step-by-Step Guide to Organize and Share Your Photos Digitally*. Blue Ash, OH: Family Tree Books, 2015.

Thomas MacEntee pages:

- Genealogy Bargain$ - https://genealogybargains.com

- Free organizational materials:
  https://genealogybargains.com/free-genealogy-cheat-sheets/

- Original PDF on Mixtiles Family Tree (now out of date, but the link to the template file is still valid:
  https://genealogybargains.s3.amazonaws.com/Creating+a+Mixtiles+Family+Tree.pdf