This PowerPoint presentation was part of a workshop given at the Amelia Island Book Festival on February 21, 2014. Much of what I spoke about including many of the references is given on the slides. I post this for those who are interested in historical writing and research as a basic primer on how to get started. For more information, please contact me.
Practical Aspects of Writing History & Historical Fiction

William Rawlings
Amelia Island Book Festival
February 21, 2014
WHY WRITE NON-FICTION?

 The market is less crowded.
 You can write for a specific audience, and often get a publication commitment before you start writing.
 It has a much longer “shelf-life.”
 It can establish your niche, and your career as a writer.
A BRIEF HISTORY QUIZ:

- What was one of the biggest problems facing the transportation system of New York City in 1885?
- How often did a bank clerk change his shirt in 1900?
- How would a ship’s captain, lost at sea, find his way home in 1900, 1950, and 2000?
- Who was the first US President to speak on television, and when?
MY PHILOSOPHY OF WRITING
(As It Applies to Historically-Based Accounts)

- You want to do good work— theoretically it will be here long after you are.
- Good writing is good writing, whether fiction, non-fiction or anything in between.
- Doing good non-fiction writing is difficult and demanding. Fiction is infinitely easier.
- A “Plot” is necessary, otherwise you simply have a list of “Facts.”
- Facts are Facts. You can work with them, but you can’t change them.
THE PROBLEMS OF NON-FICTION

- Dealing with Facts: The search for Goldilocks
- Oftentimes, everybody’s dead...
- Sometimes, folks don’t really want you going there...
- No matter what you think you know, you really don’t...
- It’s all connected....
HOW TO GET STARTED

- Understand fully what you want to write.
- Do preliminary research to see if it is possible to write it.
- Sketch out an outline of where you think you want to go.
- Do your research.
- Write it and sell it....
VARlANTS ON NON-FICTION:

- **Simple Non-Fiction**: The events as they happened, the subject as it is. Interpretation is okay, but the facts must rule.

- **Creative Non-Fiction (Literary Non-Fiction)**: Generally a story set in a real situation with real people, but with details and dialogue supplied by the writer.
Sources and Resources

Definitions:

Sources: Where you get the facts you use in your writing.

Resources: Places you go to find sources.
SOURCES AND RESOURCES

The Internet is both a Source and a Resource, but **REMEMBER THIS:**

- The Internet is your friend.
- The Internet is your enemy.
STARTING THE SEARCH

- Define the Problem (i.e., Read!)
- Take Notes
- Pick the Low-hanging Fruit First
- Start a Filing System to Sort Your Data
- If Pertinent, Make a Timeline
YOUR TOOL KIT
A notebook is necessary and invaluable when working on a complex project.
ORGANIZATION!
Sometimes I’m not as well organized as I pretend to be...
MY “VALUE LIST” OF HISTORICAL SOURCES

1. Witnesses—if available
2. Newspapers
3. Books
4. Magazines
5. Theses, Dissertations and Academic Articles
6. Ephemera
7. Photographs
WITNESS ACCOUNTS:

Quite possibly the best source.

Interview Notes: \textit{Rebbie Wright 12-14-10}

Rebbie Wright is a 89 yo black lady, a patient of Dr. Sumner’s, who worked for Judge Kent, one of the State’s attorneys in the 1925 murder trial. She was born in February 1921, and aged 89 when interviewed. To quote Dr. Sumner, “She’s sharp as a tack,” and indeed, the woman has excellent memory despite her age. She was interviewed at home with a daughter, a friend, and another unidentified relative present. I talked with her for about 50 minutes, and carefully ALL of the quotes to be sure I had things right. I also rechecked to be all the stories straight.

Interview Notes: \textit{Marsha McAfee Moore}

July 29, 2010 at Merlene Thompson’s house. She is a friend of Mrs. Thompson’s daughter who had an interest in this case. Contact no is 478-272-2928 for questions and follow up.

Ms. Moore is a 63 yo retired history teacher, who worked in the Laurens Co. School lives right on the Johnson/ Laurens line, and retired in 2008. Her interest dates back to her days of working on a Masters Degree at Ga. College in Milledgeville. A Dr. F.one time) was her professor. For her thesis, she was charged with finding that required research, like a controversial legal case. She chose to focus on the 1906 Tyre killing and the 1925 RJP approved the project and she started work.

- At the time Dawson Kea (on the state’s 1925 team) records at the Laurens County court house, they pull them all, saying was none of her business.
- She found the verdict page from the JJ Tanner retrial had it seemed that all records from the 1925 case had been sealed.
- “The more I researched, the worse it got.” She got harassing to look into the case.” Someone researched her credit history, applied for credit. The principle of the school where she worked threatened her. She was a family house. 

Interview Notes: \textit{Leon Lovett}

Retired—banker, etc. Lives in Wrightsville.

Double Cousin of WH “Hershel” Lovett.

Interviewed by phone 8-5-10 478-864-2387 (also 478-864-2254)

He was closely associated with both old man Hershel Lovett and Fluker Tarleton. He knew them well.

He traveled with Mr. Lovett on business, and he knew them well. He was a master poker player, he could beat most people. He loved to gamble and was very good at it. He made a lot of money gambling. He had no doubt about the facts.

He traveled with Mr. Lovett on business, and knew him well. He was a master poker player. He could beat most people. He loved to gamble and was very good at it. (He made a lot of money gambling.) He had no doubt about the facts.

Leon was closely associated with both old man Hershel Lovett and Fluker Tarleton. He knew them well. He knew him well. He was a master poker player, he could beat most people. He loved to gamble and was very good at it. He made a lot of money gambling. He had no doubt about the facts.

Leon was closely associated with both old man Hershel Lovett and Fluker Tarleton. He knew them well. He was a master poker player, he could beat most people. He loved to gamble and was very good at it. He made a lot of money gambling. He had no doubt about the facts.
NEWSPAPERS—THE 2ND BEST SOURCE

Internet Providers:

- Genealogybank.com ($)
- Newspaperarchive.com ($)
- Newspapers.com ($)
- News.google.com/newspapers
- Archive.org
- Others: e.g., NYT, Atlanta Constitution ($)

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NEWSPAPERS—THE 2ND BEST SOURCE

A Screen Grab from Genealogybank.com
NEWSPAPERS—THE 2ND BEST SOURCE
NEWSPAPERS—THE 2\textsuperscript{ND} BEST SOURCE
With Exceptions, publications copyrighted before 1923 are free of current copyright issues and may well be available online.

Google Books (http://books.google.com) is wonderful!

There are numerous other resources:

- Archive.org
- Projectgutenberg.org
Many older books can be printed out for reference
Great sources of then-current opinion and thought. Often invaluable for interviews and features.

Some sources:
- Oldmagazinearticles.com
- Archive.org
- Subscriber search privileges, e.g., Time
- Search under the individual magazine
THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

An absolutely wonderful source of research on arcane topics, often a gold mine of references. **Oftentimes someone has already done the legwork for you.**

Frequently, their existence is hard to find. In my experience, you find the reference to a thesis first, then track it down through the University where it was written.
Scholarly articles are often a surprisingly rich source of data, especially their bibliographies. The best single site is jstor.org, where you can both search and download articles. The articles in turn have lists of references for further investigation. A “J-Pass” subscription is the least expensive option.

Jstor.org has more that 2,000 journals and thousands of monographs on a wide range of subjects.
EPHEMERA

By definition, you find it in the strangest places:

- Collections, especially in University Libraries
- E.g., Postcard collections
- Websites like the Internet Archive (archive.org)
- Advertisements in old newspapers
Often necessary, but with many pitfalls:

- Need at least 300 dpi for print publication.
- Copyright, permission and release issues can be very thorny.
- Correct identification of photo and/or persons is important.
- The best advice: Stick with reliable sources and double-check permissions.
PHOTOGRAPHS

My Favorite Sources:

- **Library of Congress**: [www.loc.gov/pictures/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/)
- **State Archives**: E.g., in Georgia, UGA's Vanishing Georgia Collection—[http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/vanga/](http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/vanga/)
RESOURCES

- The Library of Congress:  www.loc.gov
  + “Ask A Librarian”  www.loc.gov/rr/askalib/
- National Archives:  www.archives.gov
- State Archives:  Every state has a division with variable degrees of public access
- Local Courthouses  (Deeds, probate records, plus old newspapers)
- Local and Specialty Museums
  + Churches, schools, events
RESOURCES

- **Genealogy Resources:** Websites, museums, research centers.
- **Photographic Collections:** Frequently part of academic, state or national archives.
- **University Collections,** including “papers” of famous people.
- **Local Visits:**
  The site of the foundation of the Ku Klux Klan in December 1865
A BRIEF HISTORY QUIZ ANSWERS:

- 1885 NYC Transportation Problem?
  + Horse manure

- Bank Clerks Changing Shirts?
  + Once a week, maybe

- Lost Sea Captain?
  + 1900 Compass & Sextant, 1950 LORAN, 2000 GPS

- First President on Television?
  + Hoover in 1927 when he was Sec. of Commerce
  + FDR in 1939 is probably the correct answer
Questions?
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