

Mark the Time

By Steve & Carol Ryerson

Learn those dates! Remember what happened and when it happened. Let's see, did World War I start in 1939 or 1941? Oh, wait a minute, that was World War II! Do you remember those days from your own school career? Did trying to memorize seemingly pointless dates zap the fun out of learning history? Did it seem like each individual date was in a vacuum, having nothing to do with anything else? Did it all seem remote from your own life?

Do you find yourself avoiding history in your home school because of your lingering distaste for it? Do you wish there was some way to make it interesting? Over and over again we talk with apostolics who don't like history and teach it as little as possible. We consider that to be a travesty. If we don't know where we have been and how it relates to us today, how will we know where we are now, and where we are headed?

How about considering the lowly time line? Time lines can be extremely fancy or they can be very simple and home made. They can have enough information to keep the most learned Ph.D. intrigued, or they can be kept simple enough for your youngest child.

Actually, in our early years of home schooling we purchased one of those fancy, store-bought ones that could keep the most learned person studying for weeks. It came on four large sheets of paper that were rolled up in a tube. To this day, it is on four large sheets still rolled up in a tube ~ in the closet. Someday when I have a few spare moments, I may even get it out and study it some.

The time line that we actually used, though, was one that we made ourselves. We had some bulletin board paper, but you could use any long paper you have. We cut it into strips about six inches wide. Starting with the right end at 2000 ~ this was over twenty years ago and our youngest graduated in 2001 ~ and marked off each foot at 100 years. Twelve inches to the left was 1900, twelve inches to the left of that was 1800, etc. In between I made small marks every three inches to indicate each twenty-five years. When one strip ran out, I attached the next strip and continued until I had it long enough to go around the perimeter of our room. When we had it up on the wall just below the ceiling, we had a time line that stretched from 2400 B.C. to A.D. 2000.

Okay, you've gotten that far. Now what do you do with it? You can always purchase pictures or cut them out of books. We made our figures ourselves. This does not take great talent in art. In fact, it is probably the fact that I am somewhat art-deficient that I latched onto making time line figures as art class. So, periodically we would sit down and each of us would make figure representing a place, person, or event that we had studied, something that had been important to us. Then we would tape them onto the time line.

Even Mom and Dad found the time line to be impressive and instructive.

Do you think you're pretty important? Look at the four or five "inches" you have lived in comparison to the twenty "feet" of time since Jesus walked on the earth. That will make you stop and think!

And yes, we put Bible characters on the time line. The Bible is too often compartmentalized, away from the rest of our lives. Putting those people we study about in the Bible on the time line makes them real as you also add other ancient history figures.

Aviation has always been a strong interest in our family. I remember well the day one of our sons placed the Wright Brothers' first flight on the time line. Lo and behold, Great-Grandma, who at that time was very feeble but still living, was five years old when they first flew. To two young

boys, airplanes had been around forever. After all, isn't 1903 forever? But when they put it in perspective of a relative who was still alive, it changed everything.

How often do we memorize history dates or science dates, but never put them together? After all, we learn about them in different books. In our minds, that may create a disconnect between the two sets of events. You can gain a much broader perspective on history if you understand which scientists and what scientific discoveries were being made when famous people in the history books were living. Your children can understand in a much more real way that when George Washington was sick, he did not get in his car and zip off to see the doctor who gave him a prescription for an antibiotic which would then be filled at the drug store.

Think about pictures you have seen of the great composers Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederic Handel in their powdered wigs. Have you ever considered that they lived during our colonial period when some of our founding fathers also wore powdered wigs? Of course they died in 1750 and 1759 respectively, well before the American Revolution. Fashions stayed in style in America long after they were passe in Europe. This is a good lesson in communication. In the 1700's and 1800's there was no internet. (I can hear the gasps from the younger ones!) Communication was slow. New styles in Europe did not quickly pass to America. It took a number of years before they would catch on here.

When did Thomas Alva Edison live? When did he invent the light bulb, the phonograph, and multitudes of other inventions? In fact, how did he invent the light bulb just working by oil lamp and daylight? Who were people that lived during those changes? What would their daily lives have been like?

Are you interested in the development of transportation? Put figures on your time line showing the development of carriages, cars, etc.

I hope the ideas are starting to spin in your mind. The obvious question is, "How can you fit everything on one time line?"

The simple answer to that is, "You can't." But you can make more than one time line. American history has always been an area of strong interest in our family. What do map makers do in order to give more detail for cities? You're right. They make insets with more detail. So, we made a time line that just covered the years from 1400 to 2000. Having a shorter time span allowed us to make the scale much bigger. We centered it under the same period on the larger time line, with it extending well beyond the one above it because of its bigger scale. This way we could have more figures in American history. Think of it as a time line inset, just like an inset on a map.

You can do this for any area of interest. What are your children interested in? Medicine, sports, development of religious groups, genealogy? The list is endless. If you have studied your family history, why not put ancestors on the time line. It will be a great revelation to your children to see what famous people were your ancestors' contemporaries. What were the latest discoveries that were changing their lives? What conflicts were going on in the world?

Time lines can help your children (and you) to get a much better grasp of what has taken place before you and how you fit in. You can put political events together with inventions, famous people and your own ancestors. You will be amazed at how a simple time line can change your entire perspective as you truly integrate subjects.