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Share a Family Story During the Holiday Season

Sharing family history can be a creative way to give a special gift. After all, the most meaningful gift may not be simply another object. It may be a voice, a recipe, a photograph—one story carefully saved to reach the next generation. The National Genealogical Society has collected five gift ideas that turn family history into something easy to share. Each idea can be scaled from a simple project to a more polished keepsake. **Choose one person. Preserve one memory. Give one story.**



1. Create a Holiday Ornament

Create an ornament using a family photograph or an item related to an ancestral place or surname. Use a decorative ribbon at the top. Add a QR code linking to an audio recording. The recording might tell the story of the photo or item in the ornament or the story behind a family holiday tradition.

- **Easy Version:** Use a laminated photo and QR code sticker.
- **Enhanced Version:** Use wood, fabric, or a clear, fillable ornament with the item placed inside.
- **Gift Presentation:** Put the ornament in a gift box with a card that says, “Scan the code to hear the story.”
- **NGS Tip:** Save the audio file and label it with the story title, speaker’s name, recording date, people mentioned, and location. Upload to a cloud-based folder or your online family tree.

2. Make a Tablecloth Heirloom

Holiday meals create lasting memories. Use the tablecloth to create a family heirloom by asking everyone present to sign their names. Ask children to trace their hands and add their name and age.

- **Easy Version:** Purchase a tablecloth and permanent fabric markers that are used for signatures.
- **Enhanced Version:** Embroider over the names to create more permanence.
- **Gift Presentation:** Gift the previous year’s tablecloth to a family member in a decorative box.
- **NGS Tip:** Keep a record of who was given the tablecloth and the date it was signed. The record could also include a photo of the family gathering with everyone around the signed tablecloth.

3. Make a Family Holiday Movie

Create a short video combining photos, documents, or clips of home movies or audio recordings. Focus on sharing one story. Possible stories/movie titles might be “The Christmas We Were Snowed In,” “The Story of the Family Menorah,” or “How Our New Year’s Tradition Began.”

- **Easy Version:** Put together a video using pictures you’ve scanned.
- **Enhanced Version:** Invite relatives to contribute their memories to make the story in the video more engaging and historically valuable.
- **Gift Presentation:** Share your video privately online to your family tree or cloud program and include a link or QR code inside a holiday card. A USB drive in a keepsake box is also an option.
- **NGS Tip:** Include names, dates, places, and photograph identifications in the credits. Preserve a high-quality master copy without social media compression.

4. Share a Family Recipe

Gift a family recipe with a story about people and memories connected to it. Include a photograph of the cook or a family gathering. Notes about ingredients, special kitchen tools, or the way a specific person made the recipe are also meaningful.

- **Easy Version:** Write the recipe on a card and put it in a gift bag with a photo or a note.
- **Enhanced Version:** Have a custom tea towel or cutting board made with the recipe on it.
- **Gift Presentation:** Pair the recipe with a baking dish or the ingredients. Share a link to a video of how to make it.
- **NGS Tip:** Ask relatives about any recipe changes due to migration, wartime rationing, or the availability of ingredients. Those changes are part of the family story.



5. Gift a Family Story Card Deck

Create a deck of conversation cards to help your family learn about their history. Cards can include family facts, photos, or story prompts. Possible story prompts: What was the best holiday gift you received? What foods are holiday must-haves? What celebration didn’t go according to plan?

- **Easy Version:** Print out pages with images you’ve scanned and cut each sheet into cards.
- **Enhanced Version:** Order a professionally printed custom card deck that will last for years.
- **Gift Presentation:** Put the deck of cards in a gift box with a note explaining how to use it.
- **NGS Tip:** Don’t let the stories disappear. Record the discussion and create a family archive item.