

Box Styles and frames

Some other family tree charting programs offer a few choices of "box styles" that have rounded corners, etc. The Master Genealogist and Family Tree SuperTools accomplish the same thing (and more) with "frames."

You could think of a frame as an outer box. There is an inner box that is always rectangular and contains the data about each person. Outside and around that box can be a "frame." It might be a simple line pattern, a colourful design, or an elaborate artistic drawing that is not necessarily rectangular. (When a frame is in use, the border of the inner box is typically made transparent, so that both are not visible at the same time.)

The exciting thing about frames in TMG and FTST is that you can design your own! So there's no limit to the number of "box styles" from which you can choose. Several dozen frames are provided by default. To see the available frames choose Ancestor Box Chart, Descendant Box Chart, or Hourglass Box Chart from the Reports menu. Then click on Options, go to the Boxes tab, and choose Frame > Other file. Click on the [...] button on the right to see thumbnails of the "Simple Frames." If you chose them during installation, there is also a tab of "Fancy Frames," which are much more elaborate.

By using frames in a box chart, you can dramatically affect its appearance. No more boring rectangular boxes! For many examples of box charts that use frames, see:

<http://www.whollygenes.com/samplerreports.php?type=ancestorboxchart>

You can even use the Accent feature on charts to apply different frames for different people based on their flag values.

In the next issue of the newsletter, we'll walk through the design of a custom frame.

Creating a Custom Frame

Warning: This topic is for advanced users.

In the previous issue of this newsletter, we discussed changing the box style on a wall chart by specifying that it should use a "frame." A large collection of simple and fancy frames are provided in TMG and Family Tree SuperTools. (The installer option for "Fancy Frames" is turned off by default, however, because of their size. You may need to reinstall to get them).

You can see some of the default frames in these sample reports:

<http://www.whollygenes.com/samplereports.php?type=ANCESTORBOXCHART>

Note: if this URL (or others below) wrap in your e-mail reader, be sure to paste it all onto one line in your browser.

A frame is simply a graphic design that has been stored in an Enhanced MetaFile (*.emf) format. While many graphics editors and utilities can save an file in an EMF format, all of the sample frames were created in Visual Chartform, the charting module that is distributed with TMG and FTST.

You can use the same simple process to design your own frames. The process is generally as follows:

- 1) Run Visual Chartform ("VCF") from the Start button (Programs > The Master Genealogist > Visual Chartform).
- 2) Use the powerful drawing features of VCF to create a graphic design.
- 3) Save the design in its native VC2 format.
- 4) Export the design as an EMF file (i.e., frame).
- 5) Select that frame to be used for boxes on a subsequent chart.

Step #3 is not technically necessary but it is handy to be able to review the original composition of a frame in VCF, make changes if necessary, and re-export the file to EMF. (You cannot edit an EMF file directly in Visual Chartform).

For your benefit, the original (VC2) format of the sample frames are downloadable from:

<http://www.whollygenes.com/files/sampleframes.zip> (1.2 Megs)

Unzip that file and use Visual Chartform to open corners.vc2, for instance. You will see that this simple design is comprised of a two drawing objects: a blue box and a black line. The file was then exported (File>Export) to create the sample frame that was distributed as FRAMES\CORNERSBLUE(30T).EMF. After slight modifications, the same design was used to create CORNERSGREEN(30T).EMF, CORNERSRED(30T).EMF, and CORNERSYELLOW(30T).EMF. These are considered "Simple Frames" because they contain only simple drawing objects and are therefore relatively small in size. With Simple Frames, you have the option (with a check box on the Report Options > Boxes tab) to treat white space as transparent.

Other default frames were built by pasting a pre-existing graphic file (jpg, bmp, etc.) into Visual Chartform and then exporting it as an EMF. Because they contain bitmap graphics instead of simple drawing objects, these "Fancy Frames," as they are called, are much larger in size. Also (unlike Simple Frames) white is honoured within a Fancy Frame and cannot be made transparent.

For an example of a Fancy Frame, use Visual Chartform to look at wanted.vc2. In this case, an interesting graphic was drawn by hand using another program (or perhaps it was provided by a friend, purchased online, etc.) It was then pasted into Visual Chartform and exported to WANTED(60F).EMF which you will find in your FRAMES folder. That frame (and the report Accent feature) was then used to create the sample report that you will find here:

<http://www.whollygenes.com/samplereports.php?type=ANCESTORBOXCHART&sample=FRAMEEXAMPLE6>

For a third example, look at indentedcorners.vc2. Although it is included in sampleframes.zip for demonstration purposes, it was not distributed with either TMG or FTST. The graphic was drawn by hand, pasted into VCF, exported as an EMF file, and used to create the sample report that you will find here:

<http://www.whollygenes.com/samplereports.php?type=DESCENDANTBOXCHART&sample=CUSTOMBOXFRAMES>

A final example, template.vc2, was provided so that you might use it as the foundation for creating your own custom frames. Draw some patterns and colours outside the red box, leaving the inner rectangle white. Then export the file as:

MYFIRSTFRAME(30T).EMF.

Be sure to save the file into your existing FRAMES folder so that TMG or FTST can find it. Now create a chart and select your new frame from the list (Report Options > Boxes > Frames > Other file).

What's the deal with the file names, you say? Here's the scoop. Frame file names must be in this pattern:

cccccccccc(nnx).EMF

where:

cccccccccc = any descriptive file name (any length).

nn = the default "frame width" or distance in pixels from the outside of the frame to the beginning of the space allocated for text. x = "F" (Fancy Frame), "T" (Transparent), "S" (Use As Shadow), or nothing. The parentheses are required.

For more information, see the topic called "Chart Options: Boxes" in the TMG or FTST help file.

Now put your artistic talents to work! Once you've created some interesting custom frames, we'd love to see them at samples@whollygenes.com. We will choose some to share with users in a future edition of the newsletter. Thanks!