

What's New in Family History Online

This presentation looks at what's new in Internet web sites as well as what's new in the area of technology for making things available online. See my presentation at this workshop on FamilySearch for several new items from that site.

- More online records (digital) – <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html>, ancestry.com, findmypast.com, footnote.com, heritagequestonline.com, worldvitalrecords.com, www.lib.byu.edu/fhc/, www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, www.genline.com, and many individual societies, groups, and institutions.
- Projects to index records (may offer free access to indexers?) – www.familysearchindexing.org,
- Indexes to records (not the records themselves, but an index) – many US state vital records such as Arizona and Minnesota (see www.progenealogists.com/genealogysleuthb.htm for list), www.1911census.co.uk, many more
- Research help online through community projects – <http://wiki.familysearch.org>,
- Research results stored through community projects -- www.werelate.org, www.biographicalwiki.org, and more
- Google Books – many older, out of print books which are useful to genealogists are being placed online. Google is attempting to index the contents. See books.google.com.
- Maps, atlases, etc. – see http://www.familyhistory101.com/map_county.html, <http://maps.familysearch.org>, www.old-maps.co.uk, http://geo.lib.umn.edu/plat_books/stateofmn1916/index.html

Several technology advances may have an impact on family history online.

Device Integration. The iPhone was a dramatic advance for the cell phone. It's not so new anymore--smartphones, cell phones, and camera phones are old news. However, it is a step in the direction of making it so people can do all their communicating on one device. It's a computer that can handle web searches, email, and texting. It's a camera that takes quality photos. With GPS technology, it can even annotate photos with date and place taken. Oh yes, and it makes phone calls. The Google G1 and others have introduced a variety of windows mobile devices to compete with the iPhone.

Several companies are releasing projectors for cell phones (Optoma, 3M MPro110, and ShowWX). Samsung has upstaged them with their announcement of the AnyCall Show phone, which will project its own cell phone screen. Have a white wall nearby? Turn your small cell

phone screen into a wall-sized projected screen, truly suitable for web browsing or even graphics-intensive gaming. Throw in [slideshare](#), Twitter, [Facebook](#), YouTube, and the like and you have instant film festivals and group sharing in person or remotely. Could this be used for genealogical instruction or training? Could it help a family reunion?

3D & Virtual Reality. Over the past few years, there has been speculation about a virtual world called Second Life. In this virtual world, avatars (figures representing individuals) are controlled on your computer. You move your avatar, interact if you choose with other avatars you pass, and interact with stores, libraries, and other institutions online. There are even librarians who serve reference shifts on a Second Life reference desk in a virtual Library. There are some other changes taking place now. One is the Internet project Croquet, which intends to change the way the Internet works. The other is the launch of several new virtual reality sites. From the Facebook game cite Yoville to the ubiquitous ExitReality 3D, the idea is catching on.

ExitReality takes any web page and makes it into a display in a virtual world. The idea is that people can wander through a building, looking at the web pages they want to see. They can look around virtually and see if someone else is looking at the same page. If so, they can “tap” that person on the shoulder and initiate a conversation. What’s potentially radical about it is the interactivity with people who just happen to be browsing the same page on the web. This creates some unique opportunities and warrants paying attention to virtual world technology. See <http://3d.exitreality.com>.

Community projects. Why should each family member be responsible to store genealogy, photos, documents, etc. for all of their family? Over the past few years, many efforts have sought to move the storage of genealogical data to the Internet, with the option for individuals to store their own copy on their own computer, but with the master stored on the Internet and freely shared. OneGreatFamily, new FamilySearch, AppleTree, and many more have sought to bring this vision to the masses. Why not extend this to research advice? Why not extend this concept to community storage of photos, stories, **and** family trees?

See www.livinggenealogy.com, www.genseek.com, www.photoloom.com and <http://horowhenua.kete.net.nz/>. The New Zealand project attempts to create a community place where history and family history are gathered cooperatively by the community as a whole, including photographs. The entire project has been converted to an Open Source Wiki, with support available from LibLime. This may or may not be the product which gains widespread support, but the concept is an idea whose time has come.

Wikis are how individuals can come together to create something which a commercial enterprise could not afford to do. There are several genealogical wikis with varying degrees of success, such as Encyclopedia of Genealogy (www.eogen.com), but the latest are the aforementioned New Zealand Kete and the FamilySearch Research Wiki at <http://wiki.familysearch.org>.

Other Mashups – a mashup is an application which takes information from two or more sources and merges it into an improved display of the information. In the past, I’ve use the real estate site Zillow as an example (see www.zillow.com). Another example uses the popular



instant communication site, Twitter. An enterprising idea is Twitter following – see <http://mashable.com/2009/02/16/twitter-professors/>.

There should be several genealogical examples soon. One is the 1851 England Jurisdictions which should be demonstrated at this conference (BYU Computerized Genealogy March 2009). It will tie to the FamilySearch Research Wiki.

Runkeeper - This free application for joggers (there's an ad-free pro version too) conveniently tracks duration, distance,



pace, speed, altitude, and your path as you go about your typical walk, run, or ride. Should you so desire, you can even auto-tweet your location, data and progress to your Twitter followers, which holds you accountable and potentially motivates them to get off the couch too.

Social Sharing. People are sharing information as it happens. One popular instant communication tool is Twitter. Twitter members can enter notes from anywhere, even by cellphone. When news breaks, people *tweet* the information. Thus, several months ago, I knew that Google's Gmail service was down within 40 seconds after it happened—possibly before most Google employees did. Now, businesses are creating tools to allow people to follow announcements about their business on Twitter, such as the above notice from GroupieGuide. What impact does this have on family history? I'm not sure, but we should be aware of the trend. With time, I'm sure some bright soul will figure out a way that instant social communication will have an important role in our ancestral searches. See more about social sharing in my presentation on Blogs, Wikis, and Social Networking (particularly FaceBook for the Dead).

There's lots of projects out there to deal with photos online. One good new one is www.photoloom.com. Add this to Flickr, Photobucket, etc... Check it out.

This decade is seeing the most dramatic change ever to occur in family history. New opportunities, greater access, collaboration, and social networking make family history a whole new world in this era of technology. We are at the dawn of a revolution in both interest in and ease of preserving our family's history.

Cooperation between websites through APIs. API stands for Application Programming Interface, but basically it's a library of programs which specify how other programs can interact with it. APIs make it possible for Facebook to interact with Footnote, WeRelate, and other upcoming applications. It makes it possible for one site to pull information from another site and include the combined information in one screen. There are still questions about how this works when competitors are each seeking to make a profit from their data, but

there is great potential once details can be worked out. For information on FamilySearch APIs, see my FamilySearch presentation at this workshop.

Personalization through Widgets. Widgets are sets of programming code that can be copied and added to any web site. Thus, a widget allows for one web site's functions to be added to another web site. WidgetBox is a web site that promotes the authoring and sharing of web widgets. Widgets can be search tools, information gatherers, or even games. Thus, a widget might be set to display the weather in the area of the visitor to the web site, or have a search box that would go out to another site or group of sites and retrieve search results. One of the most popular widgets is a SuperBowl commercial widget, which connects to a video site that has all of the SuperBowl commercials. It took me about 3 minutes to create it.

Programmers can create widgets that do specific things then make the widget available for people to put on their own website. Thus, one might have a widget to search the Family History Library Catalog, gather the latest news from Eastman's newsletter, or automatically notify visitors of the latest additions to a web site. Look for a genealogy widget repository in the future. Note: there are several current family history widgets—including Friend Wheel.

Portability and Interoperability through Unique Identifiers. With APIs and Widgets, a lot of possibilities open up. We can make cooperation and sharing of data between individuals, families, websites, and web services by establishing ways to uniquely identify pieces of information they share. Sometimes, sharing is hampered because of slight differences between two items. For example, is Phoenix, AZ the same as Phoenix, Maricopa, Arizona? Is Bunde, Rheiderland, Ostfriesland, Germany the same as Bunde, Hannover, Preussen? Why not have a unique id for every place (many argue that latitude and longitude meet that need)? When you search for an ancestor named Mary, do you have to separately search for Mary, Marie, Maria, and Polly? Why not a unique identifier which includes the name, nicknames and other forms of the name? An early step for place and name identifiers is standard finder on FamilySearch Labs (<http://204.9.231.95/stdfinder/PlaceStandardLookup.jsp>).

The same need for a unique identifier applies to people and to documents. If each person who ever lived has a unique identifier, then any information which involves that person can be *tagged* with a unique identifier. This would include photos, records, documents, stories, biographies, diaries, etc. Then a tool could search the Internet for information that includes that person's unique identifier and link you to anything that mentions that person. One possible way to address this is with the FamilySearch *person identifier*. There are many sites which use this identifier. For example, see <http://journals.byu.edu>.

Archival Registry Key (ARK) is a system for uniquely identifying documents. It is a strong possibility for use by the genealogical community in uniquely identifying a document. Thus a uniquely identified person could point to a uniquely identified document even when the document is stored on a different web site. The document could also point to the people (by *person identifier #*) who are mentioned in the document, whether as a principal, witness, or other tangentially involved person. When anyone, anywhere in the world tags a document as containing a mention to a unique person, anyone related to that person could be automatically notified that someone claims to have found their ancestor in a new document.

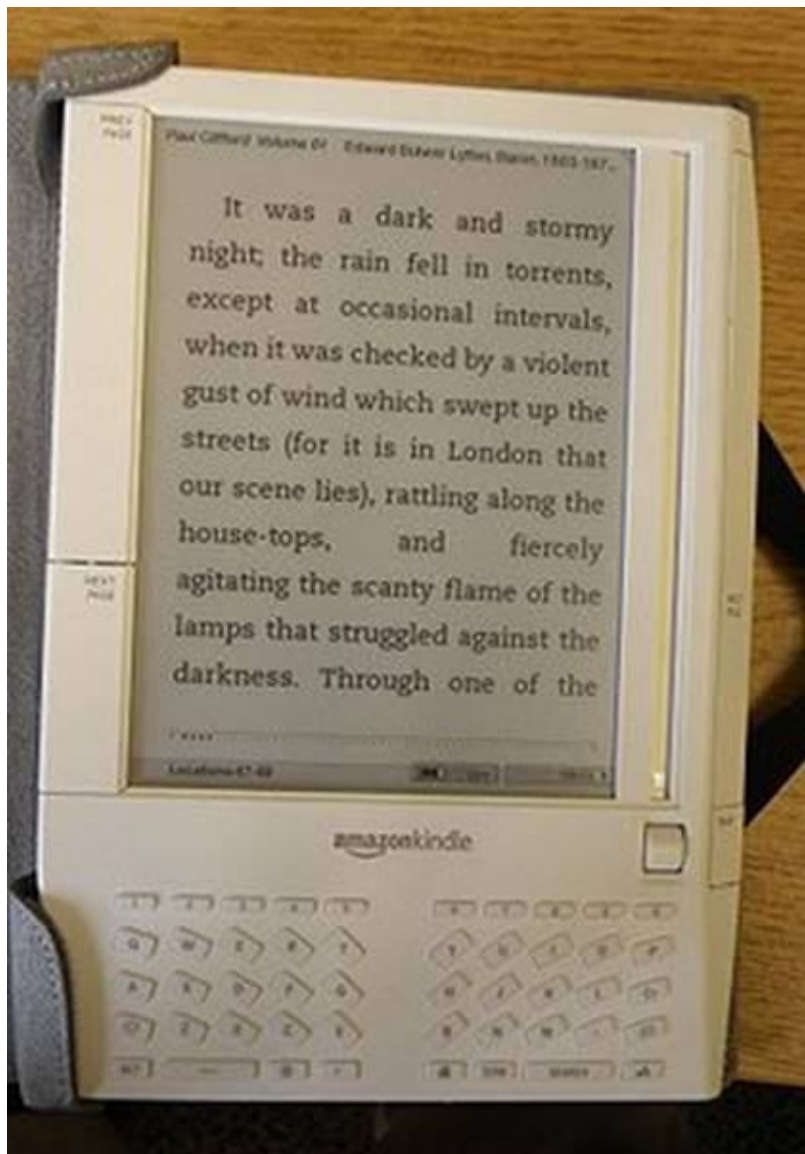
Yet another model for sharing data is being promoted by FamilySearch. Called ICE (Interoperable Citation Exchange). This plans to deliver citation of records using a model which can be read by all genealogy programs and developers of genealogy applications. Thus records themselves would “automatically” include proper citations within its digital image. The genealogy software would grab the citation information and save it into it’s format. The model plans to follow the format promoted by Elizabeth Shown Mills in *Evidence Explained*.

eBook Readers (courtesy of Wikipedia) While eBook readers are not entirely new, the Kindle 2 is the first of a new generation of eBook readers which promise to impact the behavior of many of us. The other thing that’s new is the application of this technology to family history. The basic idea is to be able to carry a small device around with us which can hold books, emails, blogs, and just about any time of text, audio, or video content and which is far easier to read than the typical computer screen. Here are links to a variety of eBook readers.

- Kindle 2 by Amazon
- PRS-700BC Reader Digital Book by Sony (October 2008)
- Digital Reader 1000 by iRex Technologies (2008)
- Kindle by Amazon (2007)
- Cybook Gen3 by Bookeen (2007)
- GeR2 by Ganaxa (2007) [1]
- Star eBook STK-101 by Star eRead (2007)
- Hanlin eReader by Jinke (2007)
- Sony Reader by Sony (2006)
- iLiad by iRex Technologies (2006)
- Librié by Sony (2004)

Not yet released:

- Plastic Logic Reader (January 2010)^[8]
- eSlick by Foxit (2009) ^[9]
- Radius by Polymer Vision (Fall 2008?) ^[10]
- FLEPIa by Fujitsu (2007) ^[11]



So just how does this apply to family history? It is now possible for authors to publish directly to the Kindle2. Thus, if you want to publish a family history, you can sign up at Amazon and have your book offered for delivery through the Kindle2. You set the price you want to charge, and Amazon will take 65% of the price you set as compensation for promotion, delivery, payment management, etc. and you get a 35% royalty. This is called the Digital text platform – learn more at <https://dtp.amazon.com/mn/signin>.

Combination of Automation and Volunteer efforts. An interesting idea is SlideMap. This site integrates various photo sites with Google maps using volunteers who tag photos with location information and correct mistakes. Why not have a genealogy photo map? Why not have a genealogy record map using digital records rather than photos? Take a look at www.slidemap.com.

Labs. Some sites, most notably Google and FamilySearch, have public labs where you can take a look at products in development. The address for FamilySearch's lab is <http://labs.familysearch.org>. You will note several items in development at that site, and future projects promise to be introduced through labs.

How to Find More on Your Own

There are thousands more such sites on the internet. It would be impossible to list them all here. Even if I could list them all, there would be more that weren't listed by tomorrow! So how can you find more? There's a lot you can do to be aware of developing technology. I'd suggest:

- Read online newsletters, chiefly Dick Eastman's newsletter (www.eogen.com). See www.cyndislist.com/magazine.htm#E-zines for a list of many others.
- See www.webware.com/8300-1_109-2-0.html for *cool web sites & services*
- Participate in or read technology Blogs (www.mashables.com, www.ldscio.org, www.netvibes.com/techcrunch, www.netvibes.com/familyhistory, <http://beta.tech.lds.org>, labs.familysearch.org, <http://eatlikeahuman.blogspot.com>).
- Subscribe to blogs, podcasts, and searches via RSS (see www.rssgenealogy.com, or my presentation about blogs, wikis, etc.).
- Review Wikis (www.eogen.com) and similar items.
- Attend conferences, workshops & institutes like this one. Check both speakers & vendors.
- Participate in societies with technology topics or publications (such as Blue Chips, www.ucs.org/index.php and Utah Valley PAF, www.uvpafug.org).
- Read industry publications such as Genealogical Computing, [PAFology](http://www.uvpafug.org) (www.uvpafug.org), and Internet Genealogy (www.internet-genealogy.com), and society publications--most include technology articles in current issues.
 - Use search engines _



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