

## Blogs, Wikis, & Social Networking Why they're for Genealogists

Blogs and Wikis are two types of social media. There are other examples. The basic idea of *social media* is in reference to Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings.<sup>[1]</sup> Social media are relatively cheap tools that enable anyone (even private individuals) to publish or access information. The value of social media is the value of cooperative efforts—that many heads are better than one. In the idea of cooperative efforts lies the value of social media for genealogists. Social media promises to reduce the amount of duplication and increase the amount of cooperation and mutual assistance.

### Blogs

A Blog “is a website in which items are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order... blogging has quickly emerged as a popular and important means of communication, affecting public opinion and mass media around the world.” (Wikipedia). For a more complete history and background on blogging, see the Wikipedia entry at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogging>.

*“RSS is great. No, I’ll go further than that. RSS, as a representation of an idea is perhaps the single most influential cultural shift of the post-2001 technical and business community. RSS is the embodiment of the notion of sharing and syndication.” (DeWitt Clinton’s unto.net)*

### Blog aggregation tools

NetVibes ([www.netvibes.com](http://www.netvibes.com)) example – [www.netvibes.com/familyhistory](http://www.netvibes.com/familyhistory). ProtoPage ([www.protopage.com](http://www.protopage.com)) example – [www.protopage.com/relativelycurious](http://www.protopage.com/relativelycurious).

### Carnivals

A **blog carnival** is a type of [blog](#) event. It is similar to a magazine, in that it is dedicated to a particular topic, and is published on a regular schedule, often weekly or monthly.<sup>[1]</sup> Each edition of a blog carnival is in the form of a blog article that contains [permalinks](#) to other blog articles on

the particular topic.

Carnival posts are generally collated by the author by soliciting relevant contributions from interested people. The author collects links to these submissions, edits and annotates them and publishes the resulting round-up to his or her blog. Many carnivals have a home page or principal organizer, who lines up guest bloggers to host each edition. This means that the carnival travels, appearing on a different blog each time.

Communities of blog readers, writers, and edition hosts form around specific carnivals. The carnivals provide an aggregation of recent posts by the community on a given topic, and the host provides a level of editing and annotation that helps readers find posts they are interested in. Writers who submit their articles to blog carnivals are rewarded with traffic... For example, Smile for the Camera at [www.shadesofthedeparted.com/2009/01/carnivals-in-town.html](http://www.shadesofthedeparted.com/2009/01/carnivals-in-town.html).

[www.blogcarnival.com/bc/clist.html](http://www.blogcarnival.com/bc/clist.html) – list of carnivals. Pick category history. You can browse or do a search within that category.

## Wikis

A **wiki** is a page or collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content. Wikis are used to create collaborative websites, where a community work together to provide meaningful content. Wikipedia, the world's largest and most used encyclopedia, is probably the best known example. However, wiki has been used successfully in the genealogy community. Dick Eastman started the Encyclopedia of Genealogy at [www.eogen.org](http://www.eogen.org). FamilySearch started the Research Wiki at [wiki.familysearch.org](http://wiki.familysearch.org). The idea is for everyone to work together to create something that's freely available to everyone and made possible by the combined efforts of many.

To see the efforts to have the genealogy community at large participate in the Research Wiki, see [https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Barn\\_Raising\\_on\\_FamilySearch\\_Wiki](https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Barn_Raising_on_FamilySearch_Wiki). The value of a wiki is that anyone can contribute. The combined efforts of several individuals usually create a better end result than any one individual could create alone.

## Social Bookmarking

There are a number of sites that attempt to create a community for locating and *vetting* web sites. These include digg, del.icio.us, furl, connotea, stumbleupon, and dozens of other sites. There are many ways to use the power of the community to find and recommend valuable web sites on any subject. In addition to social bookmarking services, there are custom toolbars (see [www.usefultoolbars.co.uk/index.html](http://www.usefultoolbars.co.uk/index.html) and [www.familygenietoolbar.com](http://www.familygenietoolbar.com)), shared favorites (see [http://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Family\\_History\\_Library\\_Internet\\_Favorites](http://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Family_History_Library_Internet_Favorites)), and bookmark synchronization (most notably XMarks). For more information on social bookmarking, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_bookmarking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_bookmarking).

## Social Networking

The most successful sites on the Internet over the past few years have been social networking sites, including FaceBook and MySpace. The idea is to create a community that shares things or works together to help each other.

FaceBook has become one of the largest gatherings of individuals in history. To use FaceBook, you need to sign up for an account, but it's free. You then make other people your friends, which allows for automatic links and notifications, if desired. It has become the most common way for the younger generation to socialize and is catching on with many in the older generation.

Naturally, there are some genealogical applications, including We're Related (#4 FaceBook application!), FamilyTree Family Builder, Relatively Me (OneGreatFamily), Genealogy Gifts, I Remember (Footnote), and FamilyFacts (Ancestry). Look for a lot more in the near future, including games. I also enjoy the Friend Wheel (search for Friend Wheel in FaceBook).

There are also a variety of groups for discussion on FaceBook, but the only thing new about that is the potential for friend tracking. The Photos section has some great potential, especially when combined with the CoolIris extension for FireFox ([www.cooliris.com](http://www.cooliris.com)).

How about a site to foster cooperative work among family members? One such is Family Pursuit at [www.familypursuit.com](http://www.familypursuit.com). You can share research and conclusions, pedigrees, sources, and even task assignments.

As I was at lunch at the FamilySearch Developer's conference (11 March2009), one of the individuals at my table (Daniel Horowicz) said "what we need is social networking for the dead."

As I thought about it, I became more and more excited about the idea. Why not have pages for our ancestors, containing information about them and the people they came in contact with? Why not let descendants browse not only information and records about their ancestor, but also about their ancestors' friends—those who lived in the same area at the same time, who participated in the same events, belonged to the same religious or ethnic groups, served in the same military regiment, or travelled on the same ship or wagon train? We could have a social network for our ancestors, linking them to others with things in common. I blogged about the idea at <http://mannerings.blogspot.com/2009/03/social-networking-for-dead.html>. This idea has merit, and may be well worth pursuing.

Some have implemented first steps towards such a thing, such as <http://biographicalwiki.org>, <http://chaunceywalkerwest.blogspot.com/>, and <http://benjamin-kingman-curtis.blogspot.com/>. However, these offer the advantage of being wiki-like—everyone can add items, but they don't capture interrelations between deceased individuals.

The first attempt I've recognized to create something like this in an interactive way is the FamilySearch Life Browser, which is still only a prototype—see it at <http://labs.familysearch.org/lifebrowser/>.

A major attempt to implement Facebook for the Dead is ***I Remember***, a Facebook applet by Footnote. See a sample page and read more about it at the following links:  
[http://apps.facebook.com/i\\_remember/](http://apps.facebook.com/i_remember/)  
<http://www.geneamusings.com/2009/05/footnote-pages-on-facebook-great-idea.html>  
[http://whenwordsmatter.typepad.com/passing\\_it\\_on/2009/05/facebook-launches-facebook-for-dead-people-really.html](http://whenwordsmatter.typepad.com/passing_it_on/2009/05/facebook-launches-facebook-for-dead-people-really.html)

A more recent effort to do something about this is the BYU journals project. This project links journals or other content to unique individuals as shown on FamilyTree in new FamilySearch. This has tremendous potential. See a demo video at <http://journals.byu.edu/>.



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