

## **302. Online Family Trees**

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The proliferation of web sites that enable you to upload your family history makes keeping your family tree on the Internet very popular, safe and convenient. The sites also allow others to make connections with you in order to share data. The decision of whether to keep a database on your computer as well as online is a personal one and depends upon your individual situation.

If you are new to genealogy, you may want to start a tree online to get help with entering data and organizing documentation. After you get the hang of it, you may want to download a genealogy computer program in order to have your data always available on your own computer. It is not advisable to try to keep up two databases, one online and one on your computer. That just gets too confusing and makes both databases prone to error.

If you are an experienced researcher and already have a database on your computer, it is a good idea to upload at least parts of it to the various online family tree websites in order to attract others who are researching the same lines. Collaboration and cooperation are key factors in extending your tree and making sure that your data is complete and accurate. In preparing for this class, I uploaded part of my tree to Ancestry and immediately found another tree that contains data missing from my tree. As a result, I am now collaborating with a cousin I didn't know existed.

If you don't want to upload your data to an online tree website, you can still utilize uploaded trees to find more data for your tree. Remember that data you find in a tree online is someone else's research and could contain errors. If original documents are attached to the tree, they help confirm its accuracy. There also may be notes that contain information from original sources. I have seen census transcriptions, extracts of land records and probate records included in the notes attached to trees.

Remember that any biographical material and writeups about events in any person's life, is automatically copyrighted when it is uploaded to the Internet and cannot be published without the author's permission. If you download such material into your database, give credit to the author and don't publish it as part of your family history as if you wrote it.

Every online tree should include the name and e-mail address of the submitter as well as the date of the last update so you can contact the submitter in order to collaborate in your research. Some online tree websites enable you to make comments about the data in the tree. Others allow you to add a "Post-em" which amounts to the same thing. Post-ems are bright yellow and very obvious so you will easily notice them while browsing a tree. To see comments, you may need to click on the Comments button.

When I extend my database with families located in an online tree, I always verify the information through census, cemetery, military and the other records that are available on the Internet to make sure that the data is correct. If I have any question about the source of the data, I try to contact the submitter so that we can work together to complete the family groups accurately.

The following URL links to a review of the top 10 websites to publish your family tree online: [genealogy.about.com/od/publishing/tp/web\\_sites.htm](http://genealogy.about.com/od/publishing/tp/web_sites.htm). Following is my evaluation of some of the sites listed in that article.

## **Ancestry**

Access to Ancestry.com databases requires a subscription, but you can start a tree or upload a tree free of charge. Family members can be invited to have free access to your tree, but you will need to subscribe to Ancestry.com in order to search other trees, search most of the databases on the site and attach records to your tree from the website. While most of the databases at Ancestry require a subscription, some great ones are free. You can get a list of the free databases at <http://www.searchforancestors.com/ancestryfreebies.html>.

A very useful free database is Ancestry World Tree. You access it by clicking on *Search*, *Search All Records*, *Family Trees* and then scroll down the left side of the screen to Ancestry World Tree. These are mainly older trees but many are currently being updated. You can view ancestral and descendancy charts and any attached source documents and photos.

You can elect to keep your uploaded tree private with only the names showing along with your contact information. I'm finding that more and more people are choosing this option. If you find someone whose private tree connects with yours, you will need to contact them through the Ancestry web site. If someone tries to contact you, you will get an e-mail notifying you and when you log in to Ancestry, your home page will show

people trying to contact you and any responses to posts you may have made on Ancestry's message boards.

On the Ancestry home page, click on *Learning Center, Build a Tree* to watch a short video that will show you how to start a tree and what features and options are available. After you upload a GEDCOM file, with the Home Person on the screen, click on *View Family Tree* and you will see five generations on the screen. Clicking on any person brings up their profile and you can attach photos, videos, audio files and documents from databases on Ancestry. There may be a green leaf by the person's name which means Ancestry has found something about that person that may interest you. Clicking on the leaf allows you to see the sources that Ancestry thinks are about that person. If the source is in another country, you will need a World subscription to view it.

Clicking on *Tree Settings* allows you to export your tree as a GEDCOM file. Remember that if you have the same database on your computer and on Ancestry and you have made changes or additions to either of them, you don't want to mix the two. It's very tricky to keep up the same database in more than one location. On the same tab, you can delete your tree and all the attachments. This action cannot be undone.

In general, I would say that Ancestry is the most popular website that contains family trees and will give your tree the most exposure. Since you do not have to have a subscription to have your tree on Ancestry, it's a lot of buck for no dollar.

## **MyHeritage**

Myheritage.com is a totally free website to which you can upload your family tree or start a new tree using their genealogy tree software. The website is particularly helpful in keeping family members in contact with each other. It is part of a new group of 'family networking' websites which work like the social networking sites, but enable families to share photos and information in a secure and private environment.

You can join MyHeritage simply by entering a valid e-mail address and some personal information. You can then add photographs and information that other family members can view. If you share your login and password with family members, they can also add photos. For instance, photos of children and grandchildren can be added by family members to be viewed by grandparents who live far away.

When you upload your genealogy database, others can view it, but cannot add to it or change it. Other members of MyHeritage can view your family

tree after searching for a particular person found in your tree, but cannot get your name or contact information in order to collaborate. To my mind, that is a drawback of the site for use by a researcher. For instance, in searching for my stepfather, Darrell Albert Lambert, I found him and my mother in a tree with my exact notes and biographical writeup attached. So obviously, someone to whom I had sent a GEDCOM file, uploaded it to the site. But there is no contact information provided so I cannot find out who uploaded my copyrighted information to the site. (Anything that you write is automatically copyrighted; facts such as names, dates and places cannot be copyrighted.)

I would therefore recommend that if you upload a GEDCOM file, you do not include your notes if they contain biographical information that you have written and I recommend that you never include confidential notes since they will be made public.

The tree is not viewed like researchers are used to with a pedigree chart and family group sheets. It is laid out with information about the featured individual at the top of the screen and his or her immediate family members grouped around the person. So you see Darrell Albert Lambert with his wife underneath, his father to the right and his mother to the right of his father. Each name can be clicked on to bring up the information about that individual. It's not complicated, but it is not the usual layout. The site is visually attractive and appealing.

### **Family Tree Builder**

This is genealogy software that can be downloaded free of charge at MyHeritage.com. It supports GEDCOM format and allows you to attach photos and documents as sources. Good for beginners, it is probably not adequate for serious researchers or those who already have a large database. It does have a great advantage. With a single click you can change the language of the program to one of 35 languages. In the free version, you are limited to 1,000 individuals in your tree. The premium edition with no limitation on the number of individuals, is \$75.00, but the Premium Plan also offers publishing up to 2,500 names on a website, a one-year subscription to a Premium family website, some charts, publishing of videos online and other fun features outlined on the web site.

### **Celebrity Clones**

One particularly unusual feature of the MyHeritage.com web site is the face recognition software. When you upload a photo, MyHeritage.com will compare the face to its bank of 3,200 celebrities to determine who the

person resembles. Besides movie stars, the database contains pictures of famous men and women in various fields, such as science, sports, space, politics, music and literature during the last two centuries. You can create a collage with your celebrity matches and post the collage on your blog or e-mail it to your family and friends (or to yourself to have the link to the saved collage on the MyHeritage website). This feature was a big hit at my recent family reunion, especially with the young adults. I found out that I most resemble a famous singer in Greece and my husband looks like Stephen Spielberg!

## **RootsWeb**

Rootsweb.com was one of the first free genealogy websites. Its owners sold the site to Ancestry which agreed to always keep it free. The owners have now started another genealogy website called Linkpendium which contains links to genealogy-related websites similar to Cyndislist.com.

To upload a tree to the WorldConnect Tree, you need to register. Then you can create a GEDCOM file in any genealogy software to submit. You can submit your entire database or a portion of it. When submitting data, you must agree to the terms and conditions of the website. Here is a portion of that agreement:

“You are licensed to use the Content only for personal or professional family history research, and may download Content only as search results relevant to that research. The download of the whole or significant portions of any work or database is prohibited. Resale of a work or database or portion thereof, except as specific results relevant to specific research for an individual, is prohibited. Online or other republication of Content is prohibited except as unique data elements that are part of a unique family history or genealogy. . .”

I hope you understand all that because there's a lot more!

It's a good idea to read through the Protecting the Privacy of the Living section so that you will not inadvertently reveal information about living persons without their permission. You can protect the living by not including them in your GEDCOM file. Most genealogy programs have the capability of not including persons in a GEDCOM file who are considered to be living by the rules of that particular program. PAF and Ancestral Quest consider a person to be living if he or she was born within the last 110 years and has no death or burial date listed. Other programs may have different criteria for determining who in the database is considered as still living.

To completely protect the living, I prefer to delete the names of the living from the GEDCOM file during the creation process. Otherwise, their names are replaced on the website with the word “LIVING” and some information

about them may be inadvertently revealed.

The next decision is whether to include notes and sources. I really appreciate having them when I view someone's tree, but you may have notes that you don't want to make public. If that is the case, either don't include notes in your GEDCOM file or edit the notes of every person in your GEDCOM file to make sure they can all be made public without unpleasant repercussions. You may want to include sources as they are usually public documents with no private information and to not include notes which are usually more biographical. That is the choice I made in uploading to the RootsWeb WorldConnect Tree.

In the uploading process, you have some choices such as whether or not to bold surnames, whether to include names of the living and the cutoff year to determine if a person is living. It's important to read through the choices. You may be unhappy with the result if you just accept the default settings.

An important option is whether to allow users to download a GEDCOM file and if you do allow it, what options the user will have. The choices are not allowing the download of a GEDCOM file at all, allowing the entire file to be downloaded or allowing either ancestors or descendants to a specified degree to be downloaded. If you do allow a GEDCOM file download, you can write a message to be included in the notes of every person downloaded. The message I wrote was "Downloaded from Ancestors of Darrell Albert Lambert at Rootsweb.com" After each choice, you click the "Update" button to activate your choice.

Once you upload your GEDCOM file, you can always go back and replace your tree with a new GEDCOM file, take your tree offline or delete your tree.

## **Freepages**

You can create one free website through Rootsweb using the website creation feature in your genealogy computer program such as PAF, RootsMagic, Ancestral Quest and others. Click on "Requests for Web Space" on the Rootsweb home page and then click on "Freepages Accounts." While creating your web page, you can add photos, source documents and other good stuff depending on the capability of your program. My website is "Ancestry of William George Klippel" and it contains family pictures and photos of the places in Germany where the Klippel family lived. A Google search for any of the names in your family website will list the website in its results list.

There are other websites on the list on which you can post your family tree. However, one that wasn't mentioned is the LDS Church site,

[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), where you can upload a GEDCOM file to Pedigree Resource File. Just click on the Share tab and register and then follow the instructions to upload a GEDCOM file. Your file will be indexed on [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), but a user would have to buy the DVD containing your file in order to see any notes and sources and to put the individuals into family groups. The Pedigree Resource File is incorporated into the [new.familysearch.org](http://new.familysearch.org) website which can currently only be viewed in a beta test condition by members of the LDS Church, but which is expected to be open to the public by the end of this year. There will be a provision to allow the uploading of a GEDCOM file so that this humongous free website will probably be one of the best places to place your family tree for others to view. Wherever you decide to upload your tree, having it in public view will undoubtedly make it possible for you to contact other researchers with whom you can collaborate in extending your pedigree. Have fun working with others in this exciting and potentially addictive hobby.