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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder

'The future ain't what it used to be'

By Richard D. Rands

Yogi Berra is said to have exclaimed, "The future ain't what it used to be." When Gordon Clarke, director of the FamilySearch Affiliates program for the LDS Church's FamilySearch organization, visited Silicon Valley in May to present the latest plans for the future of FamilySearch.org, it was quite clear that a serious overhaul of the overall system is underway. It will affect how everyone, LDS members and the general public alike, will interact with the vast holdings of genealogical records, and with the FamilySearch Web sites. I can assure you that "the future ain't what it used to be"!

The April 2010 National Genealogical Society Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, provided a first-hand glimpse of how the FamilySearch organization has shifted into high gear to accomplish the tasks that have been promised for the past few years. At the opening session of the conference, FamilySearch announced that 300 million new records were being added to the FamilySearch data collection that very week.

New Web site rollout

Also, a new Web site was revealed: beta.familysearch.org—more about that later. Under the leadership of FamilySearch, the exhibit hall at the NGS Conference was nearly doubled in size with the addition of a GenTech exhibit hall, about half of which contained demonstrations of the technology used to digitize and index the multimillions of microfilm, books, and documents currently in various LDS repositories. Additionally, equipment processes the thousands of newly digitized images flowing into the system daily.

For example, on display was the equipment for digitally scanning and processing each roll of microfilm. An

operator was on hand to demonstrate the process, showing how every image is displayed on a single large monitor, making it possible for the operator to select random frames for quality checks, to properly orient whole blocks of images, to enhance the clarity of images, and to perform many other functions to make the microfilm useful to researchers.

The new FamilySearch.org Web site will be open incrementally to the public by the end of 2010.

How long does it typically take to prepare a roll of microfilm for the next step in going online? The operator said that unless the images require lots of enhancements, a roll of film could pass to the next step in under three minutes. With dozens of these devices working fulltime, the entire collection in the LDS storage vault could be online within ten years.

The exhibit also included equipment for rapidly digitizing books, maps, and large documents. It was inspiring to watch the various systems at work and to see how so many technological bottlenecks have been solved to make digitization a reality. Once an item in the collection passes completely through the preparation process and is placed online, a link to it is added to the Family History Library Catalog. Researchers can view the item through the

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Outside and inside

- What's FamilySearch up to? We know it's undergone substantial growth, but where is it headed? See above, and pages 2 and 3.
- Got questions? We've got answers, page 4.
- Get in the last word...on obituaries, pages 5 through 7.

‘The future ain’t what it used to be’ *(continued)*

(Continued from page 1)

Internet rather than having to order the item through a Family History Center.

Recently a patron walked into our local Family History Center, planning to order a microfilmed copy of a lengthy book about his ancestors. When we looked up the film number to submit the order, we discovered that it had already been digitized and put online. A single click took us to the BYU Library collection where he was able to identify the pages relevant to his ancestral lines and download the specific pages he needed. He became a very excited patron.

Clarke’s presentation last month here in Silicon Valley drew interested researchers and Family History Center directors and staff from all over northern California. He came prepared to answer many questions about the future of newFamilySearch, the Family History Centers, and Personal Ancestral File geneal-

ogy database software.

He spent a considerable amount of time explaining the roll of the new site. Many readers have experienced the multiplicity of LDS genealogy Web sites. The most useful features of these sites are now being combined into one Web site so that the full power of search function will be accessible from one place in the future—the new Web site beta.familysearch.org. The site is already available to the public.

Clarke announced that by the end of 2010, it will be fully functional. Of course, he made it well understood that they will continue to work hard on integrating new technology as it develops. When the system has passed the beta testing phase,



Equipment for digitizing microfilm features dual-screen display and mechanisms for orienting and enhancing digital images for online use.

the beta nomenclature will be dropped, and the site will become just familysearch.org, replacing the old site with that name.

We also learned the development team is engaged in significant effort to resolve the difficulties inherent in the newFamilySearch system. This part of FamilySearch has been available only to LDS members. It is beyond the scope of this article to review all the improvements that have been implemented. Suffice it to say that FamilySearch is removing the Dispute function from the main system and creating a separate discussion area for resolving differences in genealogy records.

Clarke also pointed out that a large group of well-trained genealogists is working to process the immense number of change requests regarding data in the newFamilySearch database. Many in the audience agreed that their requests were being handled quickly.

The future of the local Family History Centers is not in doubt. Although the LDS Church will



FamilySearch hosted several large of booths at the 2010 National Genealogical Conference, bringing a fresh emphasis on technology to the meeting’s exhibits.

not be adding new centers, they do not have plans to eliminate them, with some exceptions. For example, a new regional Family History Center is about to be opened in the southwest region of the Salt Lake Valley. This was made possible when the church acquired a large building in the area once used by Intel for a data center. The building was a prime site for consolidating a number of small Family History Centers in such a densely populated LDS community.

Hence, many of the surrounding small centers will be combined into the new regional center. A few new centers for non-English speaking communities are being opened in areas that are not well served.

The future of PAF was stated loudly and clearly. PAF is not dead! The millions of satisfied PAF users can rest assured that PAF will continue to be distributed free by the FamilySearch organization, and that support staff will continue to help users. Family History Center directors

are expected to provide consultants who can help PAF users. Since LDS users of PAF can use additional software to reconcile their PAF databases with the church's ordinance data, users do not need to abandon PAF.

FamilySearch does have plans to add one new feature to PAF and to the GEDCOM standard. Currently, when users wish to link multimedia files to their PAF database, including photos, videos and documents, only the path to the media file on a local hard drive or external drive is inserted in the database. When a GEDCOM file is exported or imported, the GEDCOM processor can handle only a path name. Since many sources, photos, documents, trees, and other aspects of our family history are stored on Web sites and Web-based repositories, PAF will include Web addresses (URLs) as well as paths. The GEDCOM standard will be enhanced correspondingly to accept Web addresses. No doubt commercial genealogy programs, such as Ancestral Quest, Legacy, Roots-Magic, Reunion, and others will need to include this change.

One final significant point was announced at the meeting where Clarke spoke. Representatives of the information technology industry were meeting in Silicon Valley that week to begin establishing standards for ensuring the longevity of digital data. Banks, insurance companies, medical facilities, gov-



FamilySearch displayed equipment for scanning books for digitization, and eventual access online.

ernment agencies, and others are aware that their repositories and the commercial repositories they use are vulnerable to financial collapse as well as physical destruction.

The LDS Church has become an active participant in these discussions. The FamilySearch organization is pushing for an industry-wide stipulation in every repository's contracts to have clearly defined, mandatory beneficiaries to prevent the loss of data when an owner dies, or is no longer planning to maintaining it. Furthermore, through its certification process, FamilySearch requires that data repository affiliates specify a beneficiary, which could be FamilySearch, so that data collections that have genealogical value will not be abandoned. This process would add a considerable degree of insurance for the longevity of our family histories. 



This equipment is for scanning large-format books, documents, and maps.

Ask the doctor

Q I am aware of the LDS Church's Family History Library way off in Salt Lake City. I have heard that they also have thousands of branch libraries around the world. How do I find the one nearest my home in Nome, Alaska?

You have heard correctly. More than 4,000 such libraries are located around the world, called Family History Centers. Some are large regional centers, and others are small facilities in corners of an LDS Church building. All are open to the public and are free of charge, except for the cost of ordering copies on loan of microfilm or microfiche from the Salt Lake Distribution Center, making copies or printouts, or other supplies.

There is a handy Find a Family History Center function on the www.familysearch.org Web site. When you pull up the Web site, look for the tabs across the top just under the FamilySearch logo. Place your mouse pointer on the tab labeled *Library*. It is next to the *Help* tab. A pull-down menu will reveal four options, the second of which is labeled *Family History Centers*. Click on it to see a screen labeled *Find a Family History Center Near You*. In your case, click on the *Country/Region* space and type the letter *U*. You can scroll

all the way down to *United States of America*, but it is faster to enter *U*, which takes you to the first country beginning with *U* – *Uganda*. Now you only need to scroll down two countries to reach *United States*.

Click on *United States of America*. Then enter *Alaska* in the State/Province box (or the two character abbreviation), and *Nome* in the City box. A click on Search will reveal the address and telephone number of the Family History Center in Nome, nearest to you. Some centers will display a Web site address, and hours of operation.

Q My new iPad just arrived, and I am very excited to be able to use it with my genealogy research. But much to my disappointment, I have not been able to find any applications for the iPad. Do you know of any?

I'm jealous of your new toy! At the National Genealogical Society Conference in April, it was announced that the applications available for the iPhone and the Touch are being upgraded to run on the iPad. MobileTree, a popular service, announced plans for an iPad version; as of this writing, it is not yet available.

The best way to locate genealogy applications that run on your iPad is to navigate to the App Store in iTunes. In the search box in the upper right corner, enter a term such as *genealogy ipad* for a list of currently available genealogy applications for your iPad. Right now

you can download MobileFamilyTree, which is the iPad version of MacFamilyTree, GedView, which is a GEDCOM viewer and recording tool for any genealogy database while working away from your regular computer database, and Name Maps for iPad, a program that plots the worldwide distribution of any surname on maps. You should do this frequently to keep abreast of any new applications that become available.

Reunion will have a new iPad app created specifically for the new device (date not yet announced). It will have even more features than the current iPhone/iPod Touch app. In the meantime, as with other existing iPhone apps, you can run Reunion for the iPhone/iPod Touch on the iPad in "double-pixel" mode using the 2X button to enhance the size for viewing.

Q It was awesome to hear that 300 million new records were recently added to the FamilySearch data collections. Is there an easy way to identify what and when new collections are in the system?

At the moment, the only way to identify the new or recently updated collections is to navigate to the Record Search site (pilot.familysearch.org or beta.familysearch.org) and use the Browse Collections function. A red asterisk will be in front of the collection names that have been recently added or updated.

It is possible that FamilySearch will set up a notification system that uses a blog or an RSS feed. 



Obituaries: Genealogical treasure chests

By Allin Kingsbury

The obituary has the most genealogical information of any of the documents generated at the death of an individual. Obituaries often name the spouse, children, the spouses of the children, the brothers and sisters, and the parents of the deceased individual.

A few obituaries name the grandchildren, and occasionally, obituaries include aunts, uncles, grandchildren, and other members of the family of the deceased. The obituary will mention the individuals who died before the deceased and those who survived the deceased. Almost all obituaries state the death date and death place of the deceased. Most give the age at death or the birth date.

Obituaries are written to be placed in newspapers. A few are written by someone on the newspaper staff, but now these obituaries are of the wealthy, the famous, and prominent individuals who are nationally known. The remaining obituaries, which include almost all obituaries, are actually classified ads, paid for and written by a member of the family or mortuary staff.

The obituary serves to notify friends and relatives of the death and to announce the time and place of the funeral. Recent obituaries often are posted on the mortuary Web site along with pages for condolences from friends and relatives.

Finding an obituary

Many Web sites have obituaries. Several categories of sites include those listed here.

Obituary collections. The commercial site Ancestry.com and other sites collect obituaries for genealogical research. The collections include both free and subscription sites. The collections have large numbers of documents that can be searched for a name.

JAMES KILGOOR, M.D. Edin. 1838; M.R.C.S. Eng. : L.S.A. 1838, one of the early settlers of Victoria, died in Auckland, N.Z., last month. Dr. Kilgoor arrived in Melbourne in 1838, when that city contained only 20 habitations. He had formerly held the positions of Hon. Physician to the Thames Hospital, N.Z.; Physician, Geelong Hospital, Vic.; and Assistant Pathologist, Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh.

CHARLES JAMES SHIELDS, M.B. et Ch.B. Melb. 1884; F.R.C.S. Eng. 1888, died at Hyde, N.Z., on September 6. Dr. Shields was a native of Melbourne, and was formerly Resident Medical Officer at Melbourne Hospital and the Women's Hospital. He practised for a time at Kew, near Melbourne, and for the last three years at Hyde. He was 37 years of age.

CHARLES JOSEPH TOVELL, M.R.C.S. Eng. 1851, who practised at Brighton, Melbourne, for the past 35 years, is dead.

JULIUS JOHN EARDLEY WILLMOTT, M.R.C.S. Eng. 1872; M.B., O.M. Aberd. 1874; M.D. 1880, died at 71 Collins Street east, Melbourne, on September 18. Dr. Willmott, who was formerly an Hon. Surgeon to the Alfred Hospital and the Hospital for Children, Melbourne, was 46 years of age.

Historical obituaries about physicians.

I searched several of these collections for the name *Smith* to see the distribution of names by year. All of the names I sampled were after the year 2000, although the Ancestry.com collection has obituaries dating back to 1787.

Mortuaries, cemeteries.

Many mortuaries and cemeteries post obituaries and death notices online. If you know which mortuary was involved, you may find a searchable site. If not, a general search engine may turn up the information you are look-

ing for. Mortuaries typically list obituaries for five to ten years, but cemeteries often list grave details for all those buried there.

Newspapers: Many local and some large city newspapers have online archives that include obituaries. Some newspapers require that you subscribe to see the obituaries, but most of them have free access to their archives. Like the mortuaries, most newspaper archives go back ten years or less.

Other obituary sources.

Other online sources may have information not found in the obituary placed in the local newspaper. One example is obituaries found in trade or professional journals, alumni magazines, and publications of societies, organizations, fraternities, clubs and corporations. These obituaries are usually for officers in the organization, major contributors to the organization, or otherwise noteworthy persons.

A company Web site may have an obituary for a company founder or key employee. Other obituaries may be quoted in genealogy queries and responses to queries. They may also be quoted in an online family tree or family history.

Obituaries from genealogy books and family trees are typically much older. They are usually retyped or photocopied. Most of these come from family records that were gathered through research and used as source exhibits.

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If an obituary cannot be found, it may not exist. For many deaths, friends and family were personally notified of the funeral, and no obituary was written. It is also possible that no online source is available.

If you cannot find an obituary with a Web search, that does not mean that the obituary cannot be found online. Many old newspapers have been scanned and are available online. The contents of the newspaper may be in PDF format and may or may not be picked up by a search engine. However, most online newspaper sites have a keyword search feature. The text is extracted using character recognition software and might have recognition errors. This may cause an occasional false hit or missed word, but the search capability is faster than scanning every word visually.

Web sites with scanned images of old newspapers are numerous. It may be best to look for sites with national, regional, and state collections of old newspaper images. By consulting a map to find the nearest cities, and then looking for newspapers published in those cities, you can identify a list of newspapers to search. An obituary usually appeared a few days after the death of a person. It is much more efficient to find the death date before scanning newspapers for an obituary.

The history of the obituary

The earliest obituaries date back to the introduction of the printing press in the early 1500s.

These obituaries were not very common, lacked detail, and would be considered death notices by today's standards. They were concise, usually including the deceased person's name, birth date, death date, cause of death, and names of both surviving and deceased family members.

John Thadeus Delane, editor of the London newspaper *The Times*, is credited with promoting the modern obituary. During the late 1800s, he saw the potential of obituaries and began publishing them in his newspaper. As newspapers recognized a death as a solemn, important event that needed more recognition than a brief death notice, obituaries grew in length and detail. Some contained short prayers, poems, and brief biographies.

Following the Civil War, obituaries published in the United States gradually began to include more and more common individuals and also began to include more detailed information about the deceased person. During this period, the obituary sometimes was the only published source of death information.

Even though states began to require death certificates during this period, these were not always issued. The other feature that made the obituary valuable for the genealogist was that it usually gave the maiden name of the wife, and, in fact, often was the only easily available source of the maiden name.

During the 1900s, advances in printing technology made it easy

to include pictures. During the late 1990s, obituaries began to appear on the Internet, many with pictures.

Death notices

Ada Mae Dymont (son of Lloyd William Dymont and Doris Ruth Ladner) was born 13 Mar 1951 in Victoria West, Prince Edward Island, Canada, and died 06 Nov 2001 in Trail, Rossland, BC, Canada.

This death notice is informative in that it gives both date and place for birth and death, along with the full names of both parents and the maiden name of the mother. The death notice inaccurately identifies Ada Mae as a son.

The following example of a death notice is, unfortunately, typical. Fortunately, it was accompanied by an obituary with more detail. This death notice contained the minimum information necessary to document the death:

YEO - Vivian Isabel of Cornwall on July 29th at age 88

Extracting data

I like to extract the genealogical data in the obituary because I find the format in the obituary confusing to use when adding the data to my genealogy database.

I begin with the parents and anyone else mentioned from their generation, such as aunts and uncles. Next I include data about the deceased, his or her spouse, brothers and sisters, and brothers- and sisters-in-law. The next generation includes children and their spouses, and if

mentioned, stepchildren, cousins, and so forth. Usually the last generation mentioned by name is the grandchildren and their spouses. The following information, extracted from an obituary regarding a Canadian woman, illustrates information from a large family:

Name: Della Mae MacKinnon

Parents: Emerson Barlow and Isabel Key

Maiden name: Della Mae Barlow

Birth: 1934, Foxley River

Death: January 10, 2009, aged 74 years

Dwelling: Summer Street, Summerside, Prince County, Prince Edward Island, Canada

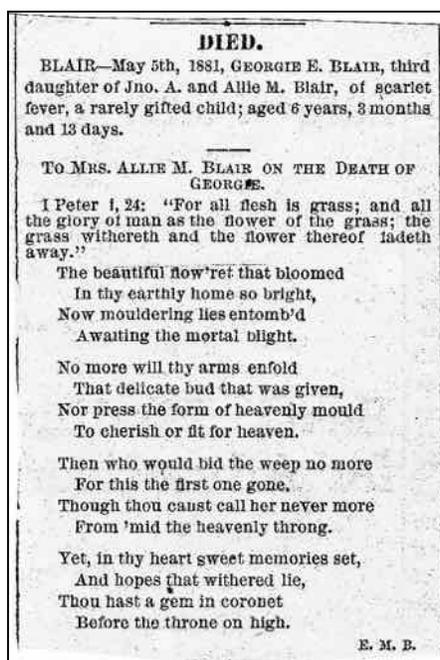
Burial: Peoples Cemetery, Summerside, Prince County, Prince Edward Island, Canada

Husband: Burleigh MacKinnon (died before 2009)

Brothers: Russell Barlow, who married to Muriel; Eric Barlow, married to Verna; Sterling Barlow; Charlie Barlow, married to Gail; Shelton Barlow, married to Mary; John Barlow, married to Audrey; Leith Barlow, married to Bonnie; Ronnie Barlow, married to Bea — no surnames were listed for the brothers' spouses.

Sisters: Reby Barlow, married to Norman MacKinnon; Barbara Barlow, married to Paul Arsenaault; Doris Barlow, married to Blaine MacDonald; Mary Lou Barlow, married to Eugene Stairs; Brenda Barlow, married to Roy MacCaull; Gretha Barlow, married to (no given name) Ford; Margaret Barlow, married to Elton MacAusland (died before 2009).

Brothers- and sisters-in-law: James MacKinnon (died before 2009); Ewen MacKinnon, married to Florence; Leland MacKinnon,



Older obituaries sometimes were accompanied by scriptures and poems.

married to Velma (no spouse surnames listed); Joyce MacKinnon; Audrey Cameron (died before 2009).

Children: Donna MacKinnon, married to Michael Pocznyek; Judy MacKinnon, married to Hughie Farrow; Wayne MacKinnon, married to Kelly Bowes ; Cathy MacKinnon, married to John White.

Grandchildren: Bethany (no surname listed), married to Trevor Harding; and Sarah Harkness , Jennifer Harkness, Katie White, Emily White, Jillian White, Olivia MacKinnon, and Matthew MacKinnon.

Note that there is no clue for which child is the parent of Sarah and Jennifer Harkness. The children could belong to the son, Wayne, and their surnames could have been changed after a remarriage of the mother. They also could belong to one of the

three daughters from an earlier marriage. The granddaughter Bethany could be from the eldest child because she is the only married grandchild, but from the information in the obituary, we cannot eliminate any of Della Mae's four children as the parent. The three White grandchildren probably belong to Cathy MacKinnon White and her husband John, and the two MacKinnon grandchildren probably belong to Wayne MacKinnon and his wife Kelly Bowes MacKinnon. The deceased sister-in-law, Audrey Cameron, cannot be linked to the family with the information given in the obituary.

An obituary contains much more information than a birth, marriage, or death certificate. It is most useful in finding descendants. The accuracy of the obituary is only as good as the knowledge of the informant.

Obituaries are also a good source for identifying living family members who may have old letters, family Bibles, pictures, diaries, and family documents. Living descendants might know of a family historian, or keeper of any family records and pictures. Contact with living family members is usually a productive experience, and is well worth the effort.

As mentioned earlier, the obituary may be the only document that you can find that states the maiden name of the spouse and also the death date and place for the deceased. These are two good reasons to put forth the effort to find the obituary. 



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Upcoming SVC GG meetings and events

Monthly meeting July 10

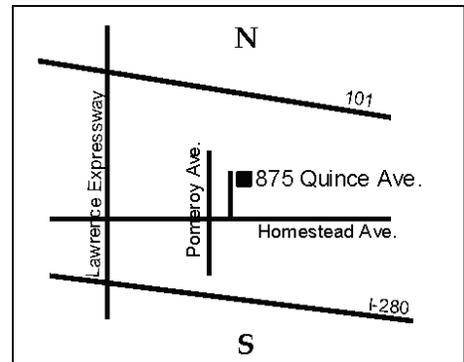
The group meets monthly except December, on the second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11 a.m. at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, CA (see map at right). Next month's classes:

- FamilySearch.org: The (near) future (Margery Bell)
- Dealing with viruses, worms, and other vermin (Kirk Larsen)
- Reunion for the Mac (Mark Moore)
- Getting started with Reunion (Deb Callan)
- Beginning Q & A (Randy Jones)

**Publishing Workshop
 September 11**

Our September 11 meeting will be a day-long workshop entirely about genealogy publishing. The workshop will have multiple

tracks with more than 25 sessions on different publishing methods, plus a show-and-tell exhibit area. Co-sponsors of the workshop are SVC GG and the Santa Clara County Historical & Genealogical Society. Preliminary information: publishourwork.com. 



See www.svcgg.org/directions.html

About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVC GG is the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, a nonprofit group of some 600 genealogy enthusiasts. The group is based in Silicon Valley in the Bay Area of northern California, but members are all over the world.

PastFinder is the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group, a nonprofit organization. Published monthly except December, *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to members in atten-

dance and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter by e-mail.

SVC GG offers research tools and materials through its website, www.svcgg.org.

Membership dues are US\$15 per household per year, US\$20 for Canada, and US\$25 for other international locations. Members receive the newsletter in print or are sent a link to an electronic version. 