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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder

Research and discover

American colonial records

By Lesly Klippel

Research in the colonial United States benefits from the fact that most surviving records of the period have been either published or microfilmed. Very few original records are available to the public because of their fragility.

Many early records were kept on a colony level rather than on a county level, so be sure to check the state's general section in a library catalog as well as the records for the county of interest. As time went on and the paperwork mounted, counties were gradually created, and record-keeping was transferred to the county level.

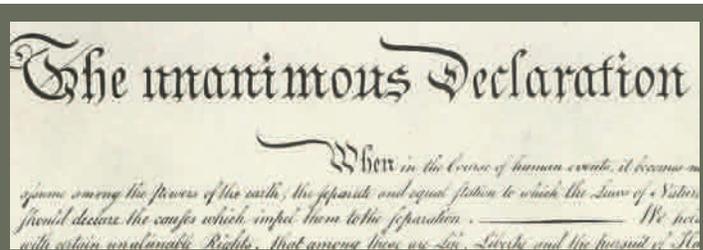
It is important to understand the terms used in colonial records. I recommend *Colonial American English: A Glossary* (Richard Lederer, 1985). Also, I love the book *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Colonial America: From 1607-1783* (Dale Taylor, 1997/2002) for learning about how our ancestors lived. The book was written to help authors of historical fiction to be authentic in their writing and portrays a very accurate picture of the times.

In researching all colonial records, be especially conscious of variations in spelling of names, since a mark of intelligence and education was the ability to spell names and other words in different ways, even on the same page.

For each colonial state, see the FamilySearch Research Outlines for particulars about available records and where they are housed. Many outlines are at FamilySearch.org; click *Go to previous site*, then on the home page, click *Research Helps*, then *Articles*, and then click on the first letter of the colony. Another good

place to learn about each colony is again at FamilySearch.org, where you click on *Learn*, and then on *Wiki*. Type in a place or question about a place to bring up hundreds of informative articles.

While the colonial period technically ended in 1783 when the Treaty of Paris recognized the United States of America as a country, the research techniques needed in the colonial period also pertain to the period up to the 1850 census, so the research suggestions in this article are pertinent even after the colonial time period.



The Declaration of Independence, dated 4 July 1776, helped launch the American Revolution. The full engraved version is downloadable from the U.S. National Archives.

Immigration

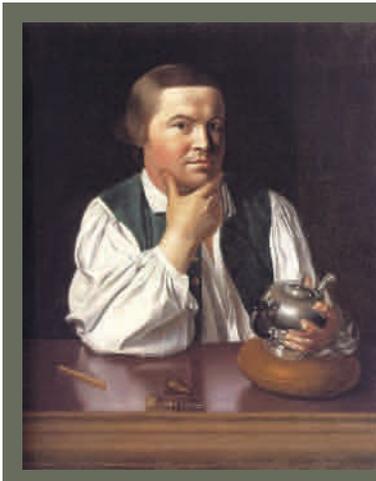
Before the Revolutionary War, immigration was controlled by each of the original colonies, and there was no need to record the names of immigrants, since nearly all of the White immigrants were British. However, original settlers were recorded in other records, and for many years, researchers have been compiling lists of immigrants from these ancillary documents, including lists of departure from Great Britain. It is estimated that at least one member of the

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Colonial records *(continued)*



Many of our ancestors were positioned along the intricate network of Minutemen and militia who responded to the call from Boston silversmith Paul Revere (left) and William Dawes.

For a full, historically documented account, see David Hackett Fischer's *Paul Revere's Ride*.

(Portrait by John Singleton Copley, 1768-1770.)

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majority of colonial white immigrant families has been identified. A good resource is Filby's *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index* and supplements, a compilation of previously published passenger lists. The set is available in hard copy on library shelves, on CD, and as a database at Ancestry.com.

Another excellent resource is the set of books by Peter Wilson Coldham about emigrants from England to the Colonies. He used records found in England as well as in the United States. Some of his titles include *The Complete Book of Emigrants: 1607-1776*; *Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775*; and *Bonded Passengers to America*. His books are found on the shelves of many genealogy libraries and in many Family History Centers, as well as on CD.

An excellent discussion of colonial immigration is found at www.familysearch.org, click on the *Learn* tab, *Research Courses, United States of America Research, Colonial Immigration*. Beth Foulk of the Midwest Genealogy Center gives a good background of why and how people came to the New World.

Some important colonial lists include the Pennsylvania oaths of allegiance, which started in 1727 and contain mainly the names of Germans landing in Philadelphia. There are also lists of indentured servants sent to Virginia and other colonies, and lists of headrights (acreage) granted for transporting persons to Virginia and Maryland. During certain years, the person paying the passage expenses for one or more persons (including family members) was able to obtain 50 acres for each person (a headright) in Virginia or Maryland. Ship owners and captains acquired huge

estates through this system of headrights. Land owners often paid the passage for indentured servants and thus obtained both more acreage and workers.

While researchers hope to trace their colonial ancestors to the country of origin, it is a most difficult task. Of the 107 original Jamestown settlers, only 5 have been successfully traced to their homes in England. In 65 years of personal research, I have been successful in finding the home of only a few of my several dozen colonial ancestors, and I personally have many ancestors figuratively standing on the Atlantic coast looking longingly toward England for whom I would love to find their ancestral home.

Naturalization records

During the colonial period, anyone not of British extraction was considered an alien and had to become naturalized in order to vote, own a ship, run for public office, own land, or transfer property or real estate to heirs. Citizenship was granted by letters of denization or through an act of Parliament. In the Family History Library (FHL) catalog, see the emigration and immigration section for any state listing.



Abigail Smith Adams, wife of John Adams, left a rich account of colonial life in her numerous letters to her husband. Many of her beliefs and assertions influenced her husband, who became the second President of the United States. (Portrait by Benjamin Blythe, 1766.)

Vital and Church Records

In New England, vital records were kept by the town clerks beginning in the 1600s. These have been preserved, and many have been published in books and in *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. They have been microfilmed and are available from the FHL through local Family History Centers. Except in New England, vital records were not kept in the colonies, and the colonial government depended on churches to record christenings, marriages, and burials. In some colonies, churches were required to report these events to the civil authorities.

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Colonial records *(continued)*

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There are several ways to determine the church denomination your family preferred, such as family tradition, family Bibles, baptismal certificates and other papers passed down in the family. The ethnic origin of the family may be a clue, since most European countries had a state church, usually either Anglican, Catholic, or Lutheran. The name of the clergyman who officiated at family weddings is usually listed in the county marriage records. Look him up in a county history or city directory to determine his denomination.

If your ancestor was married by a justice of the peace instead of a minister, check the marriage records of siblings who may have been married by a minister. Follow the same procedure to locate the names of clergymen who officiated at family funerals as found in obituaries and death certificates.

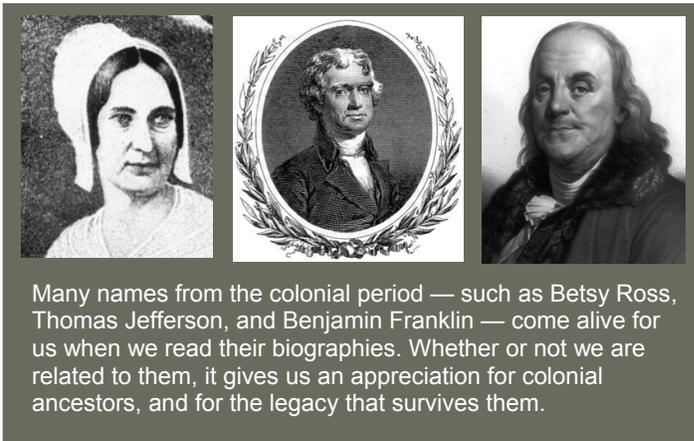
A local historical society might have information about which church was associated with a particular minister. Study the history of the time and place to determine which religions were predominant in the area. Remember that immigrants tended to attend churches where their native languages were spoken. Also, religion was so important to our colonial ancestors that they would attend whatever church was located in their community rather than not attend church at all.

Once you determine which churches were in the local area, check the FHL catalog church records for a state. Be sure to check all the records in the area, as people tended to cross over to another religion if their favored church was not available. Baptism of children was such an important ordinance in certain religions that parents sought out a minister of another faith to have the ordinance performed.

Be especially sure to check the records of the predominant church for each colony: Congregational Church in New England, Protestant Episcopal Church in the South, and Presbyterian in some frontier communities. Quakers, Lutherans, and Presbyterians shared Pennsylvania, and the Methodists and Baptists prospered west of the Appalachians.

Some church records can be found only in the archives of the particular denomination, but many colonial church records have been published or microfilmed. The FHL catalog lists the extensive holdings of the FHL. In the multivolume *Survey of American*

Church Records, E. Kay Kirkham describes the origins of the denominations and lists the church records available in each state, the years covered, and their location at the time of publication. The second volume covers minor denominations. The Internet can give you the current location of the particular church archives.



Many names from the colonial period — such as Betsy Ross, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin — come alive for us when we read their biographies. Whether or not we are related to them, it gives us an appreciation for colonial ancestors, and for the legacy that survives them.

The earliest marriage records were kept by the office of the governor. Surviving records are in the state archives, and some have been published. Sometimes the colony required a declaration of intent to marry, the reading of banns in churches on three successive Sundays, or a license issued by the colonial governor. In the FHL catalog, see *vital records* for a given state, and look for marriage records in the colonial time period.

Tax records

One of the ways the colonies raised revenue was by assessing a poll tax on White males of certain ages (generally either 18 or 21 years to either 50 or 60 years), also called a tithable. The annual poll tax lists can reveal the names of males in the family and the year each son reached the taxable age. The son would be listed next to his father but often had few taxable assets, usually only a horse. Poll tax ages varied both by colony and year, so the tax laws of each colony must be studied.

Married women were not subject to a poll tax, but a single woman could be taxed for land and personal property that she owned. Poll taxes continued into the 1800s. Combined with property tax lists, poll tax lists create a census substitute and are especially useful to differentiate men with the same name in an area,

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Colonial records *(continued)*

(Continued from page 3)

since the clerk usually added some identifier, such as residence or physical characteristic. *Junior* and *Senior* did not necessarily indicate relationship to each other, but might only mean one was older than the other.

Excluded from the poll tax were ministers, children, slaves and indentured servants, paupers, militia officers, tax assessors, and those exempted by a colonial or state law for some reason such as reward for military service.

Real property tax lists contain the names of the property owner, acreage, assessed valuation, and the amount of tax. Personal property tax lists contain the names of heads of households; males older than 16, 18, or whatever was the legal taxable age; number of slaves by sex; cattle, horses, pigs, sheep and other livestock; and sometimes other types of personal property such as carriages and farm equipment. Sometimes real property and personal property lists are combined.

Land records

Land was controlled by the English monarch through a governor; through a private citizen such as the proprietors in North Carolina; by a group of citizens; or by a corporation. Land was acquired from the government by first filing a petition stating a satisfactory reason for being granted land, such as for military service or for paying the passage of an immigrant, by paying the purchase price or by being granted land as a favor.

The second step was issuing a warrant that certified the right to a certain amount of acreage, and authorized an official survey. After the survey or plat was filed, the patent or grant was issued. The petitions usually have not survived, but the warrants and patents exist, as well as do many surveys. They are housed in state archives or land office.

Land was granted to many New Englanders as a reward for immigrating to those colonies. Virginia and Maryland granted acreage as headrights for paying

Revolutionary War veterans Daniel Shays and Job Shattuck led a rebellion against oppressive taxes and monetary conditions in 1786 — rebelling against the fledgling federal government. Both were charged with sedition, and both were eventually pardoned; Shattuck was crippled for life when captured.

The rebellion helped trigger formation of a stronger federal government, leading to a constitutional convention, and prompted George Washington to comment, “Let us have a government by which our lives, liberties, and properties will be secured.”



the passage of immigrants to the colony. Many headrights were sold, so the person claiming the acreage was not necessarily the person who paid the passage. North Carolina was governed by a representative of the Crown, but the land was sold by the proprietors, who did not issue headrights. For a short period of time, indentured servants were given land at the conclusion of their service, if they had survived. More than 60% of indentured servants died before their time of service was completed.

The boundaries of land parcels were delineated by a system called *metes and bounds*, listing landmarks and the distances between them. Neighboring landowners often were mentioned; drawing a plat map of an ancestor’s property and the adjoining properties can reveal much about possible relatives and associates. Books show how to draw a plat map, which is a time-consuming but rewarding project. Platting software is available for computer (see a list of them in *The Source: A Guidebook Of American Genealogy*, published by Ancestry).

In some colonies, such as Virginia, the law of primogeniture prevailed, wherein all the entailed (marked for inheritance) real property was inherited by the eldest son. Property that was not entailed or marked as dower could be inherited by other children and heirs. Entailed or dower property was not taxed by the state. Dower is the widow’s portion of her husband’s estate off the top, before taxes or other bequests are paid. Her portion usually included use of the house during her lifetime or until she remarried, as well as a portion of the crops and income from the estate.

Early land records contain other items, such as

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Colonial records *(continued)*

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earmarks, animal brands, slave manumissions, apprentice papers, petitions, depositions, tax lists, and occasionally even vital records such as marriages. You may also find a widow's release of dower in favor of her son in return for his pledge to provide for her.

Beth Foulk's lesson on colonial land records can be found at www.familysearch.org—click on the *Learn* tab, then *Online Courses*, then *United States Research*. Both of Beth's lessons provide a bibliography.

Apprentice, school, and business records

The Old World system of binding young people to learn a trade was carried to the colonies. Most apprentices were boys in the pre- or early teens, indentured until age twenty-one. The length of the indenture in the document will give an indication of the age when the agreement was signed. Girls were sometimes indentured to learn "housewifely" skills.

Apprentice records and other business records, such as account books, licenses, and other professional records, usually are housed in town, county, or state historical societies or archives. A few have been published, but most exist in manuscript form. Many of these societies list their holdings on their websites.

Schools in the colonial period were private, and any records that can be located would give valuable information about families. Business records are being discovered in odd places and constitute a major new source for the colonial time period.

Colonial legislatures and courts

In every colony, the proceedings of the governing body were recorded either as the Archives or the Acts of the Legislature, or by a similar name. Court proceedings were likewise recorded. These records have been published and are housed in state libraries as well as many other libraries. These records contain acts passed by the legislature and the dealings of the courts, which mention colonists by name and describe actions such as disputes, fines, marriages, divorces, guardianships, and grants of privileges.

Most colonists are listed at least once in the legislative acts of their colony. Although it is tedious to go through the volumes one by one, the rewards can be worth the trouble. The documents have no general index, but each volume is indexed. They are all on the shelves at the FHL in Salt Lake City, with some also at

the New England Historic Genealogical Society library in Boston, Massachusetts.

Internet lists

You can join some message boards to learn more about a particular colony by joining with other researchers to pool information and ask questions. Check Cyndislist.com under your particular state for links, to other sites that might include colonial records.

Successful colonial research depends a great deal upon learning the history of the time and place, exploring every possible record for the time and place, and making friends with county and state archivists and local librarians. Since most of the published and microfilmed material is located in the FHL, visits to local Family History Centers, and perhaps a trip to Salt Lake City, could be beneficial in helping you track your colonial families.

Finally, what you should do first!

Many colonial families have been traced by other researchers, especially in New England. Look at Ancestry.com (available free at Family History Centers), FamilySearch.org, and Rootsweb.org to see if a pedigree for your family already exists.

Use a search engine to look in the Internet wilderness for a website about your colonial family. No use starting from scratch if you don't have to. If you do find some previous research, you will want to do some verifying to make sure that it is accurate. Double-checking someone else's research is usually easier than locating all the information yourself.

The FHL catalog contains listings for thousands of books written about colonial families and their descendants. Brigham Young University has an ongoing project to digitize family histories, and you may find that the entry for your family book in the FHL catalog contains the wonderful statement *To see a copy of this book, click here*. The entire book then comes up on your screen as a PDF for you to search and read, but not to download.

Many, many people have spent their lifetimes doing colonial research, and it would be wise to climb on their shoulders rather than to begin your research at the bottom of the ladder. Learning about your colonial ancestors can be time-consuming, expensive, and frustrating, but the reward is knowledge about the courageous people who made possible both you and this miraculous United States. 

How I found it: The curious course of true love

By Richard Rands

It happens often enough that I shouldn't be surprised when a valuable clue shows up in an unlikely place, but I am still stunned when it happens.

It happened recently when I was struggling to validate a substantial amount of family lore recorded in a family history, explaining why a young fellow from Salt Lake City had married a woman from North Carolina. I am familiar with the fact that it was not uncommon, historically, for Mormon missionaries to marry young women from the places where they served. In this case, discrepancies in the stories made me want formal evidence to prove that this was indeed a case of a missionary serving in North Carolina who arranged to bring a young woman home to Utah.

The timing was such that it happened a year before the 1900 U.S. Census, so there would not be a record of the two of them residing near each other in the Raleigh area. The LDS Church records that might have put the two individuals in the same congregation at the same time are not online and would have required a trip to the new LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City (not to be confused with the LDS Family History Library). Mormon emigration records would not have helped because this was not a case of immigration from outside the U.S.

Finding the two individuals, Joseph and Effie Lulu, as a married couple in the 1900 U.S. Census in Salt Lake City proved elusive, but I discovered them enumerated with his mother, who had been widowed and remarried, and hence had a different surname. That did provide evidence that Effie Lulu was really from North Carolina. I had located what the family lore claimed was her parents' family in the 1900 Census in Raleigh, but, of course, Effie was not listed, presumably because she was now living in Utah.

If I could locate the same family in the 1880 U.S. Census with a daughter named Effie, it would be good evidence for the records. However, Effie could easily have been born too late to be counted in the 1880 Census, because she was only 20 years old in the 1900 Census.

Again, with persistence in using variations in surname spellings and variations of the children's given names I eventually located a seven-month-old Effie L. in the 1880 Census with her family, living in a different county.

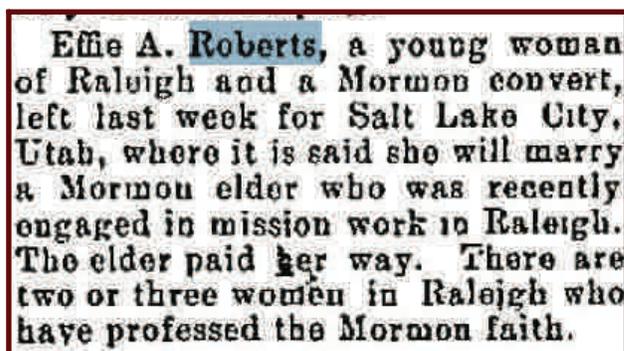
However, before finding them in the censuses, I made a startling discovery in a newspaper archive, which still has me awestruck. During a search session when nothing seemed to be working, I decided to use NewspaperArchive.com to search for any mention of the family name, Roberts, in local newspapers.

When I set the search criteria for the name *Roberts* in Raleigh, North Carolina, between 1880 and 1900, there were zero hits. Assuming that the collection did not have Raleigh newspapers for that time frame, I removed *Raleigh* from the search criteria to see what a search of all newspapers in North Carolina might turn up. Unfortunately I had nearly 400 hits.

After scanning a few pages of the articles, I discovered that Roberts was a very common family in North Carolina and that the local newspapers seemed obliged to cover every famous Roberts in the world. For example, the Boer War was raging in South Africa, and Lord Roberts was the commander of the British Forces. Virtually every major move he made was mentioned.

Next, the case of Congressman-elect B.H. Roberts, the polygamist from Utah, was a hot topic, and the U.S. Treasurer, the state auditor, and a popular officer from the Civil War were all named Roberts. There were hundreds of articles about these people.

Then the following article on page 2 in the *Statesville Landmark* newspaper for 13 February 1900, popped up:



Effie A. Roberts, a young woman of Raleigh and a Mormon convert, left last week for Salt Lake City, Utah, where it is said she will marry a Mormon elder who was recently engaged in mission work in Raleigh. The elder paid her way. There are two or three women in Raleigh who have professed the Mormon faith.

Statesville is a town nearly 160 miles west of Raleigh. Not only did this provide the formal evidence I had been looking for, but it confirmed which of the various marriage dates in the family lore was most accurate.

Incredible! 



Ask the doctor Mystery of the disappearing Earth

Q I know you're probably getting weary of answering questions about the Windows 7 PC operating system, but I ran into a problem I hope you can solve. I use Google Earth to plot land locations with Earth Point (thanks for telling us about this!), but since I moved to Windows 7, Google Earth keeps disappearing. I keep reinstalling it, but it never shows up on the desktop or in the list of programs.

We never tire of Windows 7 questions, because we know that eventually many—if not most—of our PC users will end up with Windows 7 or some future incarnation of it. Many things about Windows 7 are admirable, but it also triggers considerable frustration.

Oddly, we too have had a problem with Google Earth disappearing from the desktop and program list in Windows 7. We have looked outside our home and noted that the Earth itself is still intact; also, we can almost see the Googleplex from our front porch (if it weren't for the trees). So the disappearance problem appears to be with Windows 7, not with Earth, Google, or even Google Earth.

This problem has happened often enough that Google Earth's Help section has several potential solutions. We were reluctant to use the solution that involved downloading a utilities repair program, because it might create new, worse problems. Instead, we uninstalled the existing Google Earth program (it

was there, but hidden, after being installed and reinstalled).

To do this, click the Windows icon in the lower left corner of the desktop, select *Control Panel, Programs*, and *Uninstall a program*. Select *Google Earth* (it probably will be there), and *Enter*, and verify that you want to uninstall it.

Then go to Google Earth's page (www.google.com/earth/download/ge/agree.html). Some comments online indicate that it's best *not* to opt to install Google's Chrome browser at this point, although it's offered. Click *Agree and Download*, and download/install Google Earth. Google Earth should then show up in your programs list. You may need to manually put it on your desktop. 

Longtime genealogy friend, 'gadget guy,' passes

By Patricia Burrow

Howard B. Bennion, an early member of the Silicon Valley PAF Users Group and a Mac instructor for many years, died 25 June 2011 of a stroke. The cheerful, helpful octogenarian assisted many Mac users over the years and taught many classes.

I met Howard Bennion on my first trip to SVC GG, somewhere around November 2005. He was entertaining a small group of Mac users on what we now call Mac Row. He brought in his desktop Mac, display, and keyboard—not quite as easy a setup as our laptops and the projectors now available. He was struggling with some vision problems and found the easy way the Mac enlarged the screen to be perfect for him.

He showed us the genealogy program Reunion, which I had not seen demonstrated. I was sold. He worked the features so easily and described what could be done so that we all understood. He told us that he had taught PAF for Mac for many years to all who would come. That, on his first family history mission in Salt Lake City, in 1993-1994, he helped test Mac PAF 2.3.1, the last version available, and that he

had it running on three of his Macs at home. This was always a help when someone wrote SVC GG and asked for assistance in porting old PAF data to a new Mac.

Howard was a gadget guy, a tech junkie. Each new device that came out, he was right on top of it. I can still see him standing in front of the Mac group and talking about Reunion for his iPhone, and then the little voice recorder comes out of his shirt pocket (good for family interviews, he says). Next he reaches down and pulls out an iPod and tells us how much music he has loaded on it.

He didn't give up his desktop computer for a new laptop, but instead added the portable device to his tech collection. He tested software programs and always assured us that Reunion was the best. Oh, and did I mention that he is on Facebook? You can see his smiling face and mischievous smile right there.

About a year and a half ago, Howard lost his beloved wife, Kim, and we all recognized the pain that must have accompanied him. The 110% mojo that we were used to was just a little softer. So, too, will be our own memories of a generous, remarkable man. Howard, thank you for all you have left us; we miss you. 



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Upcoming SVCGG seminar, classes

Be prepared to become even smarter: Our fall seminar will bring you up to speed on just what you can learn from archives.

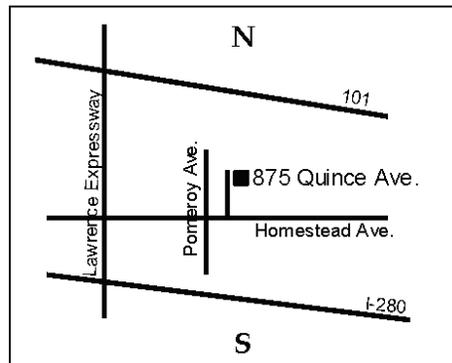
Rob Richards, director of Archival Operations for the National Archives at Atlanta, Georgia, will present an all-day seminar on 10 September 2011, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., exploring the amazing resources of the National Archives, and helping us preserve family documents and materials.

All seminars and classes are at the same location. The group meets monthly except December, on the second Saturday from 9 to 11 a.m. at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, California (see map at right).

Any late changes are posted at www.svcgg.org/meetings.html.

Classes for 9 July 2011

- Intro to Norwegian research
- Digitizing documents with photography and scanning
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting started with Reunion
- RootsMagic webinar
- PAF & PCs for beginners 



See www.svcgg.org/directions.html

About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVCGG 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 live all over the world.

PastFinder is the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group. Published monthly except December, *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to

members in attendance and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter by e-mail containing a download link.

SVCGG 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. 