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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

# PastFinder

The Homestead Act turns 150 years old

## A comfortable land at all seasons

By Janet Brigham

Before the Palouse of the Northwest was rolling farmland, it was rolling hills. Then my ancestors moved from California, Nebraska, and Wisconsin to join hundreds of other farmers in harnessing the fertile Palouse silt dune soil — a treasure left by the Ice Ages.

One by one, they applied for their 160 acres of land under the Homestead Act of 1862, legislation launched 150 years ago that changed the American landscape.

Our ancestors were defined by their migrations and settlements. My dad once told me that he'd asked his dad why the family had left California to homestead in Idaho. "He said that the Palouse was green and pretty, and they could grow nearly anything there." In Northern California, dry winds blew away whatever the family planted on their farm above Fremont.

The extended family's homestead records, which I copied during several days of research at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., are studies in fortitude.

Obtaining a homestead involved filing an application, improving the land, and filing for a title after living on the land for five years.

The title applications are rich with genealogical detail. We learn that homesteaders raised large families in small houses in harsh climates. They cleared, fenced, and farmed. They built schools and churches.

When they died, surviving family could apply for the land. A great-grandmother of mine made the final payment in May 1885 for her husband's homestead soon after he died.


Less than two years later, she gave "Homestead, Pre-Emption, and Commutation" testimony to obtain her

son-in-law's homestead after he was convicted of killing her daughter. It was uncommon enough for women to apply that the application asked where she had last voted. "I have never had the pleasure of voting," she replied. Drily.



The Palouse by Lijuan Guo. Used by permission.

She was living in the 12-by-14-foot two-story house where her daughter had died; she was caring for her daughter's children. A neighbor testifying in her behalf described the house in standard witness language: "It is a comfortable building to live in at all seasons of the year."

It's often been said that the Homestead Act changed the face of the land. It also changed the face of the people. 

### PastFinder wins top award

The National Genealogical Society has awarded the *PastFinder* newsletter the top honor for a regional or society newsletter. Details, page 8.

#### Outside and Inside

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# How I found it: Estella's famous fragment

By Russell Long

Growing up, I wasn't particularly interested in my roots, and my parents shared little information. My grandparents died before I was five years old, so I never had a chance to get to know them. A few years ago, because my wife was exploring her family history, I gradually became interested in mine. Yes, I blame her.

Luckily, when I started my family research my mother was still living. I wanted to find out as much as possible about her parents. She was able to tell me a lot about her mother. However, her father, Edward Russell, was a mystery. My mother remembered "English/Scotch-Irish and from Bell County, Texas, 1882." Censuses and vital records suggested that Edward's parents were John F. Russell and Mary C. Green. Then came the dreaded brick wall.

I turned to the Internet and after a long search found a researcher listing John F. Russell and Mary C. Green in her genealogy. What a break! Edward Russell (Eddie) was listed as a child in her Russell/Green family.

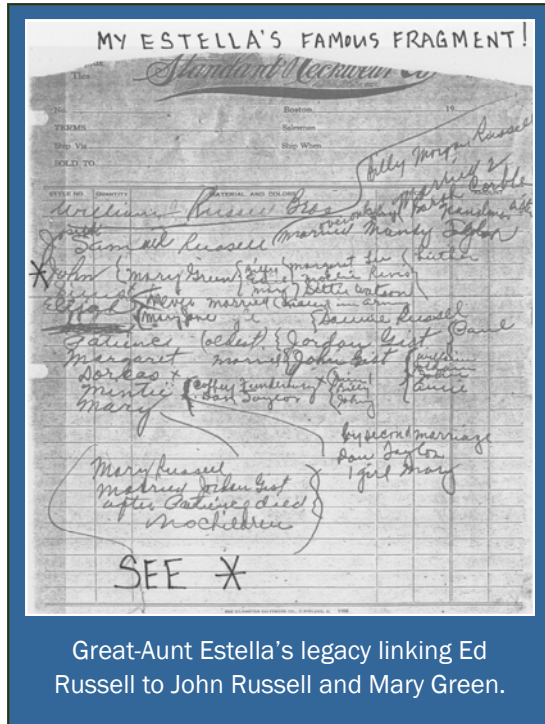
My newly found contact, Barbara Ware, wrote, "Hello Russell. Thank you for bringing me back to this family. I haven't worked on it since September when I was using it to show different online database programs at a genealogy meeting. I have worked on the family a little and would appreciate your looking at it at once. If this is the correct family for you, I would definitely like to fill in."

Just pray you find someone like this to help you.

## My aha moment

We corresponded for a while. Then I wrote, "We need a source to connect us." She wrote back, "Oh, I think I have this little piece of paper with relatives written on it by my great-aunt." This is not something you will ever, ever, find on the Internet. As it turns out, Barbara and I are third cousins once removed. She had kept a copy of a paper written by her great-aunt Estella in about 1960; this is 2009. (Estella was

my second cousin once removed.) Figure the probability that she still had that piece of paper. Perhaps it's happened to you once, twice. But, never to me, and I don't expect it to happen again.



Barbara explained, "No date on the paper, unfortunately. Estella died before 1963. She ran a children's clothing store out of her home in Farmersville [Texas]. The page on which the information is written appears to be an order form. It includes her mother, for whom she has written: 'Mrs. E. D. Russell 89 lacking 3 weeks being 90 years.' Her mother died in 1957. So I would guess that some or part of these pages were written between 1958-1963."

Barbara added, "It looks like Ed is written over something that ends 'tie.'" So his name was Ed, not Eddie. Since Aunt Stella wasn't a genealogical researcher, she probably

wrote this from her personal knowledge. Of course, we don't always remember everything correctly.

Barbara also wrote, "My great-aunt Estella Russell (1893-1963), at some point, hand wrote a list of the Russell family. I do not know the occasion that caused her to make this list. This must have been among the papers my uncle collected because he was responsible for closing up the house in Farmersville after her death. His daughter, Martha Hight Price, who is also a genealogist, gave me a copy."

The source for her information was a piece of paper I now call My Estella's Famous Fragment. This document contains a list of relatives scratched out on a blank shipping form by Estella Russell, the great-aunt of Barbara Ware. This was the source I needed. I could not have imagined that my connection to my grandfather would be found on such a fragment of paper.

Only Barbara Ware's high standards for thorough research and an unselfish desire to share allowed me to receive this crucial information. I'm forever grateful to you, Barbara Ware.

# Researching families from Denmark

By Lesly Klippel

My great-grandfather Peter Johnson was born in Majbolle, Maribo County, at the southern edge of Denmark. He joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon or LDS) in the 1850s and emigrated to Utah with a company of converts, walking across the American plains to start a new life in Eden Valley in what is now the state of Utah.

He met and married Ane Marie Madsen in 1861, six weeks after she arrived in Utah. She was also a convert from Denmark who had walked across the plain alongside a covered wagon. She was born in Raabjaerg, Hjorring County, at the northern tip of the country. Together they raised nine children and today thousands of descendants honor them for their sacrifices and their devotion to church and family.

In the 1960s, I conducted research on this Danish lineage in the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. This is a wonderful place to do Danish research, since all of the Danish parish registers and censuses are on microfilm, and help from the Danish-speaking workers at the information counter is invaluable.

When conducting Danish research, as with any European nation, it is necessary to learn the name of the village where your immigrant ancestor was born. That village name often can be located in records found in the United States, such as naturalization records, church records, family Bibles, letters from relatives in Denmark, or family stories and histories. Sometimes a county history where the immigrant or his children lived will give you that elusive village name.

## Danish emigration database

An online Danish emigration database ([www.ddd.dda.dk](http://www.ddd.dda.dk)) includes the lists of emigrants as recorded by the Copenhagen police beginning in 1869. Due to fraud committed against Danish emigrants, a law passed in 1868 ordered the Copenhagen chief of police to approve and authorize

all overseas tickets. Although the records extend from 1869 to 1940, the Danish Emigration Archives has digitized the records from 1869 to 1908, which you can use free of charge at [www.emiarch.dk](http://www.emiarch.dk). Click on the Information tab to read about the database and then on the Databases tab to search the database.

The information for each emigrant includes the age, place of birth, last known residence, name of ship, and destination. Once you know where in Denmark your ancestor was born, the Internet can provide some help in researching the family further.

This article will explore the websites that are useful in researching the Danish parish registers.

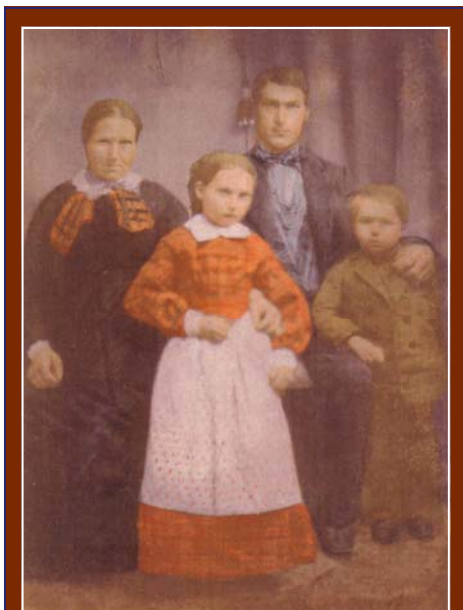
## History of Danish church records

Because the Lutheran Church was a state church, virtually every person belonged to it and was recorded in the parish registers. The church registers were the vital records for the country. After about 1850, when other denominations were given the right to worship, their members were required to report all births and deaths to the local Lutheran parish priest, who recorded them in the parish registers.

In 1686, the Lutheran church was ordered by the king to keep registers. However, few of the early ones have survived, due to rodents, insects, fires, and floods. Most of the early surviving registers began in the 1750s, although I have found some that date from the late 1600s. Beginning in 1814, pastors were told to keep two copies of the registers and to store them in different locations; consequently, most parish records are complete from that date.

Starting in 1814, the books provided for recording the information have columns with printed headings for the various ceremonies, such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages and burials. Before 1814, the pastor wrote in a notebook that he had purchased. He usually wrote the information chronologically, listing all the work he had done on a particular

*(Continued on page 4)*



Danish emigrants Karen, Christina, Niels, and Jens Jensen of Praesto, Sjælland, c. 1862.

# Researching families from Denmark *(continued)*

*(Continued from page 3)*

day. The record of the baptisms, marriages, absolutions, introductions and burials all run together in one paragraph. Very often the ordinances were performed on a feast day such as Trinity or Advent, so a feast day calendar helps you determine the actual calendar date ([www.FamilySearch.org/Learn/Wiki](http://www.FamilySearch.org/Learn/Wiki), navigate to *denmark*, and search for *feast day calendar*).

Baptisms were conducted within a few days of the birth of the child; the baptismal record will include the name of the child, the father's name, sometimes the mother's name, the residence, the father's occupation, the name of the person who held the child during the baptism, the names of the witnesses (godparents), the date of the mother's introduction (she was reintroduced back into society after a period of "cleansing"), and the name of the said father of an illegitimate child. After 1814, the records also included the mother's name and the child's smallpox vaccination date.

## Scandinavian Vital Records Index

For many years, volunteers extracted records from Scandinavian parish register microfilms, including the Danish records. These extractions were collected as a database on the FamilySearch.org website. On the revised FamilySearch.org website, they have been separated by country and included in the Historical Record Collections. On the home page, click on *Europe* and scroll down to *Denmark*. You will find more than 3 million baptisms, more than 1.5 million

marriages, and burials from parishes throughout Denmark. You may get lucky and find your relative in this important database as I did for Ane Marie Madsen (see screen shot, below).

## Searching the Church Records

The best information about Danish parish registers is the wiki at [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org). Click on the Learn tab, choose Wiki and enter *denmark* into the search field. The first item in the list of results will be the Getting Started with Danish Research page. This step-by-step guide to researching Danish records is a work in progress and will continue to grow as experts in Danish research add more information.

The home page contains a link to the Danish Genealogical Word List as a PDF file that you can save on your computer — handy to have while you are learning to read the Danish parish registers and censuses online. The map of Denmark contains links to each county, with a list of all the little places in each county. This is a helpful guide for reading the place names found in the records.

Another big help is the tutorial *Reading Scandinavian Gothic Handwritten Records*. You need to be able to read the information you see on the screen. Luckily, the number of names used in Denmark is limited, so you can generally pick out the names in the records even if you can't read all the other words.

Click on *Church Records*, and after you read the highly useful information there, scroll down to

*(Continued on page 5)*

The screenshot shows a search result for "Denmark, Baptisms, 1618-1923," Ane Marie Madsen, 1832. The record details are as follows:

name:	Ane Marie Madsen
gender:	Female
baptism / christening date:	05 Aug 1832
baptism / christening place:	RAABJERG, HJØRRING, DENMARK
birth date:	
birthplace:	
death date:	
name note:	
race:	
father's name:	Mads Christensen
father's birthplace:	
father's age:	
mother's name:	Ane Marie Jensdr
mother's birthplace:	
mother's age:	
indexing project (batch) number:	C20162-2
system origin:	Denmark-ODM
source film number:	49107
reference number:	

Source Citation  
"Denmark, Baptisms, 1618-1923," Index, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/XYV5-HWY>; accessed 1 May 2012), Ane Marie Madsen, 1832.

Not all search results from FamilySearch.org have images (yet), but the information can be invaluable.

*Accessing Danish Church Records*, which has a link to the online parish registers at Arkivalieronline. If you have difficulty accessing the site ([www.sa.dk/ao](http://www.sa.dk/ao)) you might try another browser, or update your browsers.

First, click the *In English* button then scroll down to the link Search in Parish Registers. Aside from the home page, the rest of the site is in Danish. You may want to use automated browser translation. Note that the word for the home page is *Forside*.

First choose a county (*Amt*) by clicking on the down arrow and choosing your county from the list. Then choose a *Herred* (district), if you know it, and then a *Sogn* (parish). If you don't know the name of the *Herrod*, look it up in the Parish List in the Research Tools on the FamilySearch.org Denmark page. A chart shows both the years and the types of records that exist for that parish. The letters stand for the various types of records: F = births, K = confirmations, V = marriages, D = deaths, J = engagements, A = moving-out records, and T = moving-in records.

When you click on the parish name in red on the chart, you should see a notice that Java is opening and then a blank screen with red dots and *Opslag* numbers down the left side. Each number is a frame of the microfilm that was digitized (unfortunately, the images are unenhanced and have low resolution).

The site has no index of the records or indication of where each year begins and ends, other than the original chart for the parish. If you are going to do a lot of research in a parish, you might want to make your




Churches are central in Danish research (Photo of Helsingør copyright Antony McAuley. Used by permission.)

own chart listing the *Opslag* number where each year begins and ends and where the various types of records begin and end. Scale the image by clicking on the down arrow next to the 100% in the toolbar at the top of the screen. The Help button gives you help in English — yay! You can download the large TIF images to your computer by clicking on *Save as*. I advise changing the image name to something more meaningful than the default.

Begin with the records after 1814, which are easier to read. A chart shows the translation of the column headings; navigate to [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org), Learn, Wiki, Denmark, the parish. You will see two links to Parish Register Headings. The charts are downloadable images. Select the image and save it. You could create a folder on your computer to keep these images and other handy aids such as the Danish Genealogical Word List.

The parish register images were digitized from microfilm and vary widely in quality. I found some that were quite readable and others that were so light and spotty that finding the correct entry was difficult even though I knew the exact name and date of the christening. Not surprisingly, the later records are better quality and more readable.

Even with its limitations, this is a wonderful database that allows you to work at home, at your convenience, and free of charge. Hurray for the Danes! 

*Next month's article will cover researching Danish census records and military levying rolls.*

# Lessons from the 1940 U.S. Census

By Richard Rands

Has the 1940 U.S. Census lived up to its expectations? Can we see the impact of years of Depression on families and communities? Are unexpected consequences buried among the pages of enumeration sheets?

Have you made a startling discovery that answered an anomaly in your family history? Did you manage to track down a lost family member? We want to hear from you about your experiences looking through the enumeration districts or indexing batches of names. Send them (to [rrands@earthlink.net](mailto:rrands@earthlink.net)) and we'll publish them.

Meanwhile, let me share some first impressions. One of the first things that struck me as I looked through sequential pages was the high incidence of divorce. Prior censuses might have one divorce in perhaps a dozen pages. Now I have encountered two or three on page after page. On the first five pages of the enumeration district that included my divorced grandmother, I noted eleven divorces. I have no way to determine how many couples were separated but not yet divorced, but it is not difficult to detect the impact of the Depression era on families. When my grandfather was unable to find work after many fruitless trips to other parts of the country, my grandmother gave up on him and told him if he left again not to bother coming back. I'll just have to wait until more states have been indexed and put online to find where he ended up in 1940.

A couple of weeks ago I attended the funeral of my dad's younger brother, whose middle name was Monroe. I had never known why he had been given that name, because it was not in our family history. After the service, I chatted with my aunt about the neighbors around the family listed on their page of the 1940 census. At the very top of the page was the entry for a Judge Albert Monroe, who had given my grandmother a rare job as a court clerk during the Depression years. My aunt explained that Grandma had named one of her sons after Judge Monroe, but later regretted it because of some political disagreement. She had then told everyone that her son was named after President James Monroe.

Another aspect of the census that has become apparent is the paucity of given names that I thought were common from my younger years. I thought names that were often used in my extended family, such as *Richard, Gary, David, Paul, Janice, Connie, Jeff, Donald, Nancy, or Penny* would be more frequent by 1940. Surprisingly, it appears that the widespread departure from traditional names such as *William, Ann, Robert, Elizabeth, Dorothy, or Edwin* happened after 1940.


Our group's secretary remarked to me that after many pages of indexing, she had still not found another Wanda. It

wasn't until several days and many pages later that I encountered a Wanda.

Both my wife, Janet, and I have been astonished at the diversity of nationalities in remote locations. We see many marriages between individuals from vastly different parts of the world. In a remote area in Montana, a Vladimir born in Ukraine might be married to a Shirley from Kansas. In grade school history classes we often were told how the United States had become the melting pot of the world. The evidence of that claim can be seen in the pages of the census.

One of my clients had told me that his Italian family with an unusual surname first settled in Colorado but soon moved to California. Now that Colorado has been made available for name searches, I checked and found a dozen people with the family name living in Colorado in 1940 — very much to his surprise, and a source of research for a whole new group of cousins.

One more early impression: I have been surprised by the large number of families who were living in the same place, or even the same house, in April 1935. I had expected to find far more movement in the population between 1935 and 1940. On the surface, it seems as though the movement caused by the disruption of the Depression era had already taken its toll prior to 1935, and many families apparently had settled and put down roots by 1935.

Progress on the indexing project has been encouraging. At this writing, nearly 30% of the records have been indexed. At this amazing rate, we may find my prediction of a four-month project to be right on the button. 





# Ask the doctor Is EarthPoint still free?

**Q** Some time ago during a presentation on U.S. Land Records, we were told that the website EarthPoint.us offers free access to genealogists who wish to plot a land patent's Township/Range/Section on Google Earth. When I go to EarthPoint.us now, it says I need a subscription to use the site. Has there been a change?

The only change is that more features have been added to EarthPoint.us, and the author is still anxious to generate revenue from businesses that use all the great features. But plotting your ancestor's land patent on Google Earth is still free.

When you open the EarthPoint.us Web site, look at the left-hand column that lists the various features, and select the option, Search By Description, in the group labeled *USA Utilities*. There you will see the boxes where you can select the State, Principal Meridian, Township, Range, and Section for the patent you want to plot. Then click on Fly To On Google Earth. Don't forget that you need to have Google Earth loaded on your computer to make it work.

Our user group website has complete instructions

for using EarthPoint to identify exact locations from land records (svcgg.org/earthpoint.pdf). The instructions explain:

The process of locating the exact location of your ancestor's land patent is now just a few clicks away, or, conversely, if you know where the family's farm was, you can determine the township and range specifications. The direct link to the site is [www.earthpoint.us/Townships.aspx](http://www.earthpoint.us/Townships.aspx).

Every researcher working on U.S. land records should become familiar with its features. In fact, with the ability to track down land patents so easily, everyone with ancestors who settled in the western states should make use of the site. The only prerequisite is to have Google Earth loaded on your computer, preferably version 5 or later. [The current version is 6.1.0.5001. To determine your version of Google Earth, use the Help pull-down menu within Google Earth to select About Google Earth.]

The township feature on EarthPoint will automatically open Google Earth for you, so you can start by going to the EarthPoint site first.

The screenshot shows the EarthPoint website interface. At the top left is the logo "Earth Point" with the tagline "Tools for Google Earth". To the right are links for "Sign In / Buy Subscription" and "Contact". A left-hand navigation menu lists various features, with "Search By Description" highlighted under the "USA Utilities" section. The main content area is titled "Township and Range - Search By Description." and includes a message: "A user account is **not** needed for the features on this web page." Below this is a form with the following fields: State (dropdown menu with "(any)" selected), Principal Meridian (dropdown menu with "First" selected), Township (dropdown menu with "001 N" selected), Range (dropdown menu with "001 E" selected), and Section (empty dropdown menu). There are two buttons: "View" and "Fly To On Google Earth". A note at the bottom right states: "Free. User account is not needed. If you want to see the surrounding townships, then once you have clicked the 'Fly To' button, come back and click the BLM or National Atlas 'View on Google Earth' button. Free. User account is not needed."

# PastFinder wins top NGS honor

The National Genealogical Society has awarded *PastFinder* newsletter its top honor in an annual NGS competition.

The award was presented at the opening session of the NGS annual conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, on May 9. Leaders of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group accepted the award in behalf of the many individuals who contribute to the newsletter's success.

Current editor-in-chief Allin Kingsbury has worked diligently for more than a decade to make computer-based research techniques accessible for the diverse membership of the group. Several years ago, SVC GG streamlined the newsletter's design and broadened the writing and editing base, while maintaining the newsletter's helping-hand approach.

## Upcoming meetings

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, California (see map at right). The group is not affiliated with a church.

**12 May 2012, 9–11 A.M.**

- Italian Research basics (Richard Rands)
- RootsMagic 5 (Janet Brigham)
- Reunion for the Mac (Pat Burrow)
- Getting started with Reunion (Deb Callan)
- Getting started in genealogy (Gloria Christine)

**9 June 2012, 9–11 A.M.**

- U.S. land records, including Earthpoint (Richard Rands)
- Digital slide shows for family gatherings (Janet Brigham)
- Reunion for the Mac (Bill George)
- Getting started with Reunion (Deb Callan)
- Getting Started in Genealogy (Gloria Christine)

This contest was among regional and society newsletters. Major (national) and family newsletters competed separately.

This was the first time *PastFinder* had been entered in the competition, although it has been published continuously for the 23-year lifespan of SVC GG and its predecessor. Originally titled *The PAFinder*, the newsletter had many articles about using Personal Ancestral File software.

As the genealogy software market matured, several other excellent genealogy database software programs evolved. *The PAFinder* became *PastFinder* when the name of the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group was changed to reflect growth in technology.

Throughout the newsletter's 23 years, it has been written, assembled, edited, and distributed by volunteers. Some who were instrumental in the newsletter's evolution have moved or died, and in their place others have stepped forward to continue the tradition.

SVC GG publishes a book of the best articles from the newsletter, *Better than slices bread: Genealogy and Technology*.

January — March 2011 issues were entered in the contest, with features by Kingsbury, Richard Rands, and Janet Brigham.

## About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

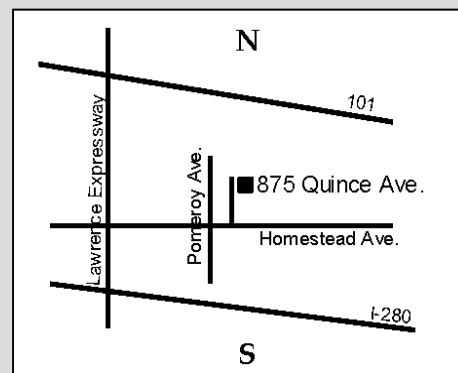
SVC GG is the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, a nonprofit group of some 600 genealogy enthusiasts. The group is based in Silicon Valley in the Bay Area of northern California, but members live all over the world.

SVC GG offers classes, seminars, and publications to help family historians improve their skills in using

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Meeting site has ample free off-street parking, with a wheelchair-accessible entrance near the front of the building.

technology for genealogy research.

*PastFinder*, the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group. Published monthly except December, *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to members and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter electronically by emailed download link.