

FamilySearch Labs: You Be the Judge!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO help test the future of FamilySearch, www.familysearch.org? This is exactly what the developers would like you to do.

According to Dan Lawyer, Product Manager, lawyerdc@lds.church.org, this website is a "place to show experiments to people and get feedback. These features are not ready for prime time but they are far enough along for people to look at and experiment with. Typically, the feedback received quickly tells us that people either really like what we are doing or really don't."

At the FamilySearch Labs website, <http://labs.familysearch.org>, you have an opportunity to "test run" some prototypes that the developers are working on. And, your feedback goes directly to the engineers involved! They are looking to learn about the experience of "real users". Even though this website has not been up for long, they have already learned both from how people use the site and from the feedback received that people weren't using certain features (e.g. using "click and drag" as a way to navigate a Pedigree Chart) as anticipated. In real time, they made modifications to the introductory/help material and subsequently found that the previously invisible features were now being used.

For each of the projects, you have three ways to give "feedback".

- You can e-mail: feedback@familysearchlabs.org
- You can blog: <http://familysearchlabs.blogspot.com>
- You can use the provided "feedback links" visible on the pages.

This information is then combined with technical data collected anonymously as users interact with the prototype. They are able to technically track what people are doing, and with this informa-

tion, they can identify trends (both desired and surprisingly, as in the example above where individuals did not realize that you could

PEDIGREE VIEWER

Many have commented that trying to look at pedigree information on FamilySearch has been like trying

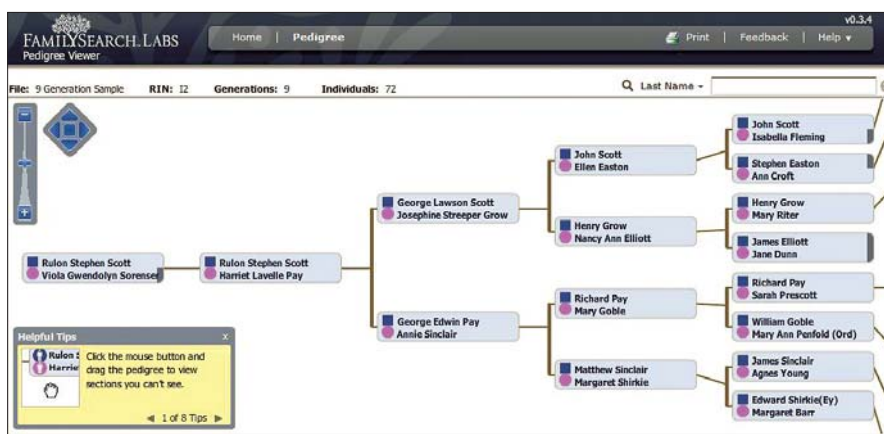


"click and drag" on the pedigree chart) and then quickly make select adjustments. Even with all this feedback, face-to-face testing will also occur, with the goal of making sure that the resulting experience for the user is optimal and matches the vision of the creators.

The ultimate goals for any new software tested is to enrich the FamilySearch system by incorporating new concepts that will ultimately be in planned updates

to look through a straw. I can attest to the frustration of finding an individual, then trying to look at that person's family and other ancestors to try to see the "big picture". That can be challenging! Lawyer said it is like "a person showing up in town and there is no map!" You may be in the right place but it is hard to tell.

To try to address this and other identified weaknesses in viewing a pedigree, they have created a Pedigree Viewer. To test



A screenshot from the Nine Generation Pedigree Viewer example.

for FamilySearch and to "up the bar" on the overall experience, usability and excitement of using FamilySearch by patrons.

Let's look at the two projects currently available for "testing". Note that as you enter the prototypes, you will be asked for your name and e-mail address.

this out, you can upload your own GEDCOM file or there are examples (nine-generation pedigree, 12-generation pedigree and descendantcy).

I checked out the nine-generation pedigree example. A few things to note:

- You can see several generations

at once, and blue squares and lavender circles are used to indicate gender, male and female, respectively.

- The color of any box will alter as you mouse over it and the relevant branches of the tree will also change color to indicate who the ancestors and descendants of the chosen individual are.
- When you click on an individual, you then have options to expand (and see more information), see additional spouses, etc. Just hold your mouse over each icon and a label will appear to tell you what will occur when you click on it.
- You can “click” on any person and “drag” your mouse to re-orient the pedigree. For example, when I first pull up the nine-gen-



The expanded detail information for Rulon Stephen Scott and his wife.

eration pedigree chart, I can only see five generations and now I want to see generations six through nine. To do this, I just “click” on the box that includes John Scott and Isabella Fleming (a fifth-generation couple) and “drag” the cursor to the left (and then down a bit to get his parents on the screen). Voila! I am now looking at parts of generations six through nine. Do recognize that in the upper left hand corner, there is a navigation tool (arrows) and a zoom control (slide from – (make smaller) to + (enlarge)) which can also accomplish the same task.

- There is a “helpful tips” area in the lower left corner. When I looked over the tips, I found that tip #2 (“use your mouse scroll wheel to zoom in and out”) was something I would have never figured out on my own.

LIFE BROWSER

The concept behind the Life Browser is to extend pedigrees beyond just a list of names, events, dates, places, etc. The idea is to give individuals an easy-to-use forum where they can “enrich” the pedigree by adding images, photos, documents, family stories, etc. A place to share what you remember most about an ancestor — what brings them to life — these include the fun stories, recollections, interesting information gathered, and images that illustrate personalities or put the individual in context with other relatives and family events.

Hopefully by having more than just the bare facts, those who do not consider themselves genealogists will be attracted to participate in such a visually rich and story-filled environment and be better able to visualize their ancestry and heritage. And, for those already actively researching their family, it’s a nice place to share the fun bits of an ancestor’s life!

Currently, there are two examples for you to visit: Deodat Brewster (1789-1881) and George Ellis Crosby (1900-91) — each includes a small family tree and images of photos and documents. When you click on each image, you will see an enlarged version of the image accompanied by details of date, place and an overview of what the image is of and the information learned from it.

As always on this site, share your thoughts! These prototypes are designed and tested to give you the best possible family research experience. Let them know the hits and the misses!

FAMILYSEARCH INDEXING

We have learned from Paul Nauta, Manager of Public Affairs, nautapg@ldschurch.org, that the FamilySearch Indexing project, www.familysearchindexing.org, is no longer in its beta (or test) phase, as previously reported. What this means is that the project is now openly enrolling new volunteers.

There is no longer a waiting period between registering and receiving your log in and password. So as soon as you register, you will be able to “immediately choose from a number of fun projects” and start indexing. You can always check out the Current Projects page to see what is available for indexing and the Upcoming Projects page to see what’s in staging.

The project currently has about 40,000 volunteers and Nauta anticipates that by year’s end, there could be at least 125,000 indexing volunteers! Both the registration process and the indexing are straightforward. There are no minimum time requirements and the software needed is free and easily downloaded.

So, if you have the time and would like to take part in a project that will make more original source material available and help advance everyone’s family history research, register today!

As you can see, FamilySearch continues to advance the ability of everyone to research their ancestry. This article just scratches the surface of the capabilities of these prototypes. Be sure to check out the FamilySearch Labs and the FamilySearch Indexing websites for new features and news. And, don’t forget that the ultimate goal is that these new features/data will all eventually be seamlessly integrated into a new expanded FamilySearch interface, with the hope that the genealogical world is being improved with everyone doing research via a website that people are excited to use.

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