

FamilySearch Labs: One-Stop Genealogy!

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a year and a half makes! In July 2007, we reported that FamilySearch was actively seeking testers and indexers for its new FamilySearch Labs, <http://labs.familysearch.org>. We now report on the project's success and what's in the future for this quickly growing website. Whether you have been using this website all along, or are new to it, there's plenty of new information and features.

FAMILYSEARCH RECORD SEARCH PILOT SITE

<http://pilot.familysearch.org>

Every week, hundreds of new images and indexes go online. That means each week you can check for new primary source documents that you can access for free!

A number of exciting new features have been implemented. One of these is a search engine with some remarkable capabilities: You can use a world map to focus on a particular geographic region; easily fine tune your results — narrow by place, date, first names, role, event type and other parameters; and remain in the same screen, even when you click on an entry or image.

The site's search engine also has a "fly-over feature". How many times have you searched in an index, had to click to learn more, then go back to the results, click another entry, go back to the results list and so on? This new features eliminates those extra steps. When you hold your mouse over an entry, an information overview is revealed which allows you, without any clicking, to quickly check a series of research results.

A user-friendly image viewer allows you to rotate, zoom in on and convert a positive image into a negative one. You can navigate

around the picture and focus on specific parts by dragging it with your mouse, or you can use the thumbnail view. You can also temporarily expand the screen size, and return to the original size by clicking the arrows.

Infrastructure improvements have been made so that FamilySearch can post new records at any time, without having to

over the computer — except from the convenience of your home.

FAMILYSEARCH RESEARCH WIKI

https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Main_Page

According to Jim Greene, Product Manager for the Research Wiki, "The most important thing [to know] is that we are smarter than me.... In other words, the value



The new and improved FamilySearch Record Search page.

temporarily disable the site. All results are presented within the same format, so that regardless of where the images are stored, you will be able to access them from one search page. This allows the project to incorporate 3rd party information, where the indexes are part of the FamilySearch records and the images might be stored on a partner's website.

Some digital images are available for browsing almost as soon as they are available. According to Paul Nauta, Manager of Public Affairs, FamilySearch, think of it as being able to use a "digital microfilm reader". Instead of sitting down at a microfilm machine, you are having the same experience

and the beauty of the FamilySearch Research Wiki is that it provides a means for anyone to access the collective knowledge and experience of a potentially large genealogical community. The content is only as good and as current as the community makes it. It is our job to make it easy for contributors to enlighten us, and for anyone to quickly find what they are looking for."

If you have ever found yourself on Wikipedia, you have already experienced something similar! Even before wiki's emerged, The Family History Research Guides, Letter Writing Guides, Word Lists, etc., have been a mainstay of the serious

researcher's arsenal. The new Research Wiki takes previously published pieces, and puts them together in one convenient location, encouraging experts and interested researchers to expand the knowledge-base!

Traditionally, Family History information pieces were written by an expert, and the process usually took two to three years before the document was ready for distribution. Recently, Jim shared that "We just had the expert on Wales, who has been working eight years to get...his [piece] published, [and] put [it] online instead. It took him two days to get it the way he liked, and now... other Welsh experts can come in and add their knowledge." This creates a community of experts telling everyone how best to do Welsh research, and doing it in a fraction of the time.

With this new project in its infancy — we jokingly referred to it as an alpha instead of a beta version — this means you really have an opportunity to work with the developers to make it what you need and want. As Jim says, "The only real difference between an alpha site, a beta site and a production site is how often things change."

Future plans include a full-blown pilot by the end of 2008. As Jim stated, "The content is king and we need everyone to start sharing their content now." All the research content from the current FamilySearch site will be mitigated by the end of 2008. The site will involve the community to speed the acquisition of content. You are encouraged to author or share your expertise; check out "Get Started with this site — FamilySearch Wiki" at https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Portal:Get_started_with_this_site, which includes several demo videos to help you better understand the wiki and effectively contribute to it. Once it's in full production, they will determine just how much hardware is needed to support the user base. According to Jim, "Of course, one of the ways of doing that is to just keep letting more

and more people on until we start to see a slowdown in performance. So far, we can handle 10,000 users with no problems."

FAMILY TREE

<http://labs.familysearch.org/familytree/Main.html#start>

Another exciting new project is FamilySearch Family Tree. Tim Cross, product manager, took me on a "virtual tour" — I was impressed! This is not "just" a

dency for a couple, linearly list out any person's descendents, etc.

- "Folders" collect data for each person.
- Data is associated via the name variant used on a record — a nice way to keep track of those (though, you can choose which names you use in your tree).
- A workspace where all your "open" folders are visible, to make it easy to work with multiple individuals and family lines at once.



These two images of Lillie Dale (Jordan) Aaron's death certificate, from the Texas Death Certificates database, shows how the navigation remains the same when you switch between the text, above, and image, below, versions of the document.



family tree program. It's an all-in-one integrated interface where you can publish your family tree, search and collect primary documentation, collaborate with others and much more.

Here's a snapshot of some features that really caught my eye!

- Nice visual context provided for each individual within the family tree, plus abilities to highlight any individual family line, to line up in a horizontal line the direct descen-

- A list of tree members — select one and see a synopsis of that person's spouse and parents, and options to "Go To Tree" or "Open Folder".

- Designed so that other companies will be able to synchronize with FamilySearch Family Tree.
- If you start a data search from a particular individual, "go to search" pre-populates the fields with the already known information.

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- Found records pertinent to your ancestor can be easily “dropped” into that person’s folder.
- When you intentionally (or not) stop working on your tree, at your return, the “folders” of information that you were working on will be just as they were.
- It’s easy to move documents found (e.g., references) between people.
- Available in English, Spanish and Japanese, and eventually five more languages.

Though this is currently only available to select members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as a test group, it will eventually be available to everyone.

FAMILY HISTORIES ARCHIVE

www.lib.byu.edu/fhc/
Currently housed at BYU, this encompasses local, county and family histories. Currently, there are about 20,000 books and about 2,000 new books are being added a month. It has expanded beyond BYU to include the Family History Library, Allen County Public Library, Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research (Houston) and the Mid-Continent Public Library - Midwest Genealogy Center.

And, anyone can donate historical books of genealogical significance to FamilySearch to be digitized. Donated material must be out of copyright and have more narrative than pedigrees to qualify as a published history. Donors can print a form online at FamilySearch.org, Family History Library, Donations.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You are important to the success of this project. Whether you provide feedback about the site’s functionality, donate a family history book or actively index records, you and others like you are necessary to this project. And, volunteering to

help is easier than you might think.

You can test out the search engine. The new search engine on the pilot site needs tens of 1,000s of users to test it out and provide valuable feedback. Visit the Research Wiki and tell them what is easy, what is hard, what works and what is confusing. As Jim Greene says, “Come early, come often and let us know what you think. Then come back again.” You can also become a volunteer indexer. If you’re fluent in a foreign language, you can be a valuable help indexing foreign records, and testing the non-English interfaces as they’re developed.

it’s too much work, too much time or it won’t help your own research, the FamilySearch team has made an effort to make indexing simple, fast and even helpful for researching your own ancestors! Paul Nauta says the developers have paid attention to user feedback, and come up with solutions for almost every problem. Here are some of the most common concerns volunteers had, and how FamilySearch solved them.

It’s too hard to do!

“Too hard” as in having to learn how to do it and “too hard” as in thinking that you will make a ton of mistakes and your help won’t

be any use at all.

For the former, the improved and expanded “Help” section includes an “interactive video tutorial”. For the latter, every image that has an index created is verified through “double-keying” and “arbitration”. Double-keying means that two volunteers are seeing the exact same image. They each independently enter the index terms needed. If

the data entered matches, the index entry is accepted. If the data disagrees, an arbitrator will review the entries and determine what the appropriate one is. That’s it! As Paul Nauta says “You are not being graded!” Don’t worry about making mistakes.

I don’t have enough time!

If you are interrupted while indexing, just click the “save to server” button and your work is saved! Then, resume when able! A typical batch takes about 30 minutes and an indexer has 7 days to complete it. If you are not able to get back to the work in 7 days, whatever you entered is used and the rest are passed to another volunteer to complete. As I wrote this article, I completed a page of indexing for the Cheshire Poor Law records!

FAMILYSEARCH FAST FACTS

- 15 high speed scanners are digitally imaging the microfilm
- By the end of 2008, all the old microfilm cameras currently in the field, roughly 200, will be replaced with digital cameras
- It will take eight to 10 years to digitize the information

KEEPING CURRENT WITH FAMILYSEARCH

- Registered indexers, FamilySearch members and Labs users receive e-mail updates about the project
- Check the FamilySearch Labs Blog, <http://labs.familysearch.org/blog/>, for more updates
- Subscribe to one of the blogs that publish media information provided by FamilySearch, like Eastman’s Online Genealogy Newsletter, <http://blog.eogn.com/>, and Dear Myrtle, <http://blog.dearmyrtle.com>.

VOLUNTEERING AT FAMILYSEARCH INDEXING

www.familysearchindexing.org
Without volunteers, the volume of material that you are enjoying would not be possible. Signing up to volunteer is simple — just visit the above page, click on the “volunteer” button and you are on your way!

To give you a sense of scale — there are currently about 125,000 registered indexers who index the equivalent of about 1,000,000 records a day. After accounting for the double-keying and arbitration processes, this means that about 300,000-400,000 index entries are completed daily! The result is over half a billion records are currently available on the website.

The project still needs more volunteers. Though you might think

What's in it for me?

Many indexers report that their research abilities have improved. They are more familiar with the content and vagaries of the types of documents they have worked on. Volunteers are better at reading handwritten source documents. In the future, qualified FamilySearch volunteers, will earn free access to some of the pay-per-view images covered by affiliate agreements. You'll be able to access these materials in your jammies and slippers, while others will need to subscribe to the affiliate services, or trek to their local Family History Center to gain the same free access.

You are interested in non-English documents.

When you enter the indexing website, choose "download from". You are shown a list of projects to choose from, many of which are not in English. French, German, Italian and Spanish records were some of the recent choices.

You are not a native English speaker.

The indexing tool now comes in Spanish, and within a year it will also be available in French, German, Italian and Russian!

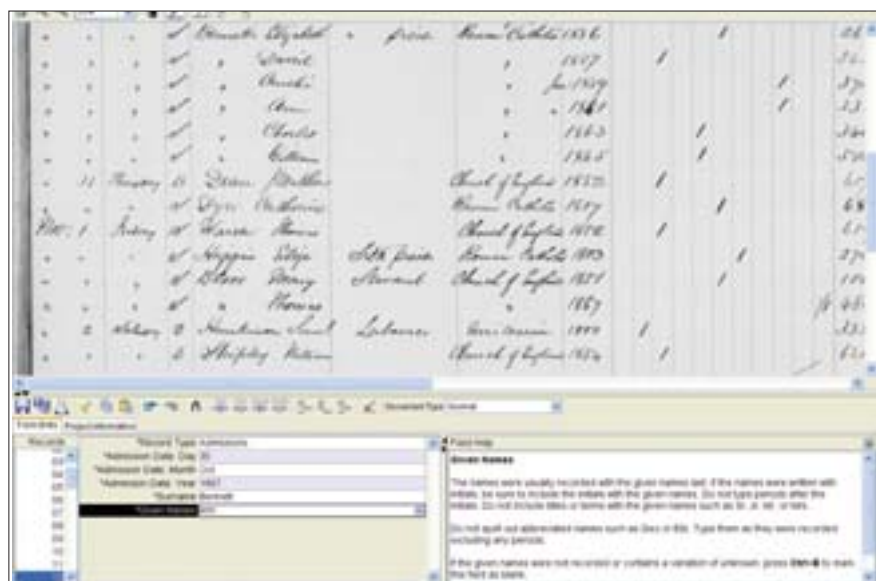
Slow Internet connection

Use the "offline" mode and save your work to your computer. Work at a pace that suits you — taking no longer than one week. When you're finished, go online and post what you have completed.

PARTNERSHIPS AND THE FUTURE

You may have heard of a series of partnerships involving FamilySearch. Each of these collaborations speeds up and improves free access to indexes for FamilySearch patrons and free access to the images for qualified members.

- With Footnote — FamilySearch will provide digital images of the 1860 US Census, and Footnote.com will provide the indexes to both the 1860 US Census and Civil War Pensions.
- With Ancestry — FamilySearch



A sample of what the indexing tool looks like. The author indexed this portion of the Cheshire Poor Law while writing!

will provide digital images for the US Census to Ancestry.com, which will provide copies of its census indexes. FamilySearch will merge the Ancestry.com indexes with the new FamilySearch indexes to create enhanced census indexes.

- With FindMyPast.com, Origins, et al — They are all partnering to share indices and digital images of the currently available English and Welsh Censuses (1841-1901).

Besides additional content, there are plans underway to make the FamilySearch Catalog compatible with Web 2.0. This means that in the future, when you use Google, or other Internet search engines, the results will include information from the FamilySearch Catalog.

CONCLUSION

As we saw in summer 2007, FamilySearch continues to strive to increase the ease with which individuals can research their ancestry via its FamilySearch website.

The life of an Internet genealogist just keeps getting better!



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