

WorldVitalRecords



DIANE L. RICHARD TAKES THE PULSE OF WORLDVITALRECORDS AFTER ITS FIRST YEAR

A YEAR AGO, WorldVitalRecords, www.worldvitalrecords.com, was a fairly new player in the world of online subscription database services. WorldVitalRecords (WVR) is the brainchild of Paul Allen, a co-founder of MyFamily.com, who left the company in 2002. Allen aims for his new company to become the number two player in the genealogy industry, behind MyFamily.com. Let's see how WVR is coming along!

The website contains a mix of free and subscription content. If you have been following the press releases from and about WVR, you know that there has been a continuous stream of new content added; some via new partnerships formed.

To quickly get a snapshot of what WVR contains for free and paid content (an annual subscription is \$49.95 US), check out these two pages: <http://www.worldvitalrecords.com/contentlisting.aspx> and <http://www.worldvitalrecords.com/genealogy-databases.aspx>. The first is an alphabetical list of databases and the latter is a list organized by type (there is also an option to see what is available for a particular location). The "types" include: Census, Birth, Marriage and Death, Military, Immigration, Family Trees, Directories, Court, Land and

Probate, Reference and Finding Aids, Quintin Database, NewspaperARCHIVE, SmallTownPapers Collection, International Parish Register Collection, International Marriages and World Gazetteer Collection.

Not all of the content on WVR is unique, but the amount of unique content seems to be increasing. Its goal is to provide a type of "one-stop shopping" platform for genealogists, where its portal allows you access to a

ing the past year include:

EVERTON PUBLISHERS

<http://www.everton.com/b/index.html>
200 issues of the *Genealogical Helper Magazine* (1946-2006) and an index of more than 3.6 million names from Everton's pedigree files and family group sheets and access to the historic Everton Library. This information is not available online anywhere else.

SMALLTOWNPAPERS COLLECTION

<http://www.smalltownpapers.com/>
Access to a completely searchable digital archive that features

WVR has come a long way since its debut. It contains a much richer and expanded collection of databases both through its strategic partnerships and digitizing/indexing initiatives.

multitude of databases without the inconvenience of visiting a myriad of different websites. It contains an eclectic mix of data and resources, which means that the "nothing ventured, nothing gained" tact is the approach to take. You cannot count on there being a unique resource for a certain locale and there are some pretty obscure resources that are gold mines of information!

NEW ADDITIONS

Some of the new additions dur-

smalltown newspapers back to 1846. Currently offers nearly one million pages and adding more than 100,000 pages each month! This information is not available online anywhere else.

QUINTIN PUBLICATIONS CDROM LIBRARY

<http://www.quintinpublications.com>
Access to more than 10,000 exclusive books and articles, which will go through an OCR (optical character reading) and indexing process, and be made available to members. These are valuable and

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hard-to-find materials from many different sources.

NEWSPAPERARCHIVE COLLECTION

<http://www.newspaperarchive.com/>

Includes select newspapers from 1759 to 1923. These newspapers were specially selected because they are rich in records, such as birth announcements, marriage announcements, death certificate listings and obituaries. WVR is continually adding to this valuable collection.

STATUE OF LIBERTY-ELLIS ISLAND FOUNDATION

<http://www.ellisland.org/>

This is a partnership whereby the historic passenger arrival records for the Port of New York and Ellis Island will be freely available through WVR and its new FamilyLink feature.

ALLCENSUS

www.allcensus.com

Allcensus has partnered to bring the Federal US censuses from 1790-1930

online at WVR and contains more than 800,000 browsable images and 32 million names from select counties in every state, except Alaska.

FIND A GRAVE

<http://www.findagrave.com/>

A search engine connected to Find A Grave gives you access to at least 16 million entries!

Additionally, patrons at more than 4,500 Family History Centers throughout the world will have access to WVR.

Individuals who purchase a subscription to the Godfrey Memorial Library, <http://www.godfrey.org>, (or who are current members) can upgrade their membership to include a WVR subscription for an additional \$45 US. A subscription to Godfrey Memorial Library includes a variety of genealogical material, reference books and indexes, including the 19th Century Newspaper Collection,

London Times Archives 1795-1995, American National Biography Online, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, and the Columbia World Gazetteer.

Additionally, WVR subscribers benefit from this partnership by having the option to upgrade to

in more diverse publications than I expected, since I was searching on 18th- and 19th-century families. Here is a sampling of a few of the identified resources:

- An Abstract of North Carolina Wills, 1760-1800
- Spring Hope Enterprise (Spring Hope, North Carolina)
- Marriage Notices from the *Charlotte Journal*, Charlotte, North Carolina, 3 July 1835 to 7 December 1851
- North and South Carolina Marriage Records, From the Earliest Colonial Days to the Civil War
- Marriage and Death Notices in *Raleigh Register* and *North Carolina State Gazette*, 1846 to 1855

As you can see, these are some pretty valuable resources and ones that I had utilized previously in print form!

For any search, besides getting "hits" on the WVR website, you will also get "book

results" powered by Google. This will identify for you books listed on the Google book site, <http://books.google.com/> that have the chosen search terms. I found this a wonderful way to quickly get a sense of what other relevant resources may apply to those I was researching.

From the search results, when you find an item that you would like to "see", you just click on "more details" and you will be taken to the relevant digital image. At the top of the viewing window, you will find some basic controls to modify the image size and generate a printer-friendly version. If you desire more options on how to manipulate the image, you can choose "enhanced viewer". I found both viewers straightforward to use and that the image quality was just fine for everything that I looked at.

There are actually three types of searches that you can perform:



The WorldVitalRecords website.

the Godfrey Library Scholar Online Portal for only \$30 US (a \$35 value). Another part of the agreement allows WVR to scan and index books, articles and church records from the Godfrey Memorial Library. The indexes will be housed on both sites.



When viewing a document, this is the viewer controls area.

USING WORLDVITALRECORDS

Now that you know what WVR is about, let's now take it through its paces!

My first test was to put in various names from North Carolina research. I was pleasantly surprised to find that there were actually more entries found

- Exact searches will return results that match the exact spellings that you entered into the Family Name box.
- Soundex searches will return search results that match the Soundex variations for the name that you entered into the Family Name box. Soundex is a "phonetic algorithm" that identifies words that sound alike but are spelled differently such as "Smyth" and "Smith" or "Brown" and "Braun".
- Double Metaphone searches will return search results that match the Double Metaphone spellings for the name that you entered into the Family Name box. It is superior to Soundex because it understands the basic rules of spelling for English, Slavic, Germanic, Celtic, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish and Chinese. "Double Metaphone" tends to return more accurate and slightly fewer name variation search results.

To give you a sense of how these perform, my second test was to enter in the name John Rench and a location of North Carolina. For the Exact Search, I received one match and when I entered in the Soundex and Double Metaphone searches, I received more than 5,000 hits for the former and probably about 1,000 hits for the latter — definitely fewer matches found using the Double Metaphone method. The biggest thing I noticed is that once I moved off "Exact Search", the results were not limited to North Carolina — most of the entries came from across the US and the world. This means that you definitely need to play around with the search engines as you look for your ancestors. Though an Exact Search is more limiting, it might be less overwhelming for a novice genealogist!

For my third test, I did a lot of searches on a variety of surnames that I have researched — everything from Grasmick and Herrle to Bevan to Acey to Glenn, and I even did Jones! For any name I tried, except Niittula,

matches were found. Many of these were the obvious ones in the SSDI, Find A Grave, select military records, etc. and some were unfamiliar finds in more obscure documents. I can't say that I found anything that directly impacts the research I have done and these were all families that have been well researched already.

Since many surnames are also occupations, landmarks or can be used in a context other than a surname, you will find many search results that are not ancestral in nature! For example, a search on the surname Paradise brings up many entries talking about a place that is a paradise versus a family named as such.

KEEP CURRENT

You will find the Press Room and weekly Newsletter as great ways to keep abreast of the new data and services as they are added. The newsletter contains a lot of interesting information about the project and its happenings, including new databases and upcoming data sets on WVR, and you can have it delivered to your e-mail mailbox or read it online. Better yet, each edition lists the newly added databases and when a new database is added, access to it is free for 10 days!

INTERNATIONAL GENEALOGY COMMUNITY PAGES

Another feature is the recently started International Genealogy Community pages. The first phase is country specific search engines which use the power of Google, <http://www.google.com>, to search the top genealogy and family history websites for each country.

In the future, these pages will include experts in genealogy, family history and specialists in historical documents for every country in the world. These international sections will also include podcasts, blogs, discussion boards and user generated content. Training and information will be available in a variety of languages. A newsletter will also be generated from each country.

Bygod Eggleston: Englishman & Colonist & Some of His Descendants

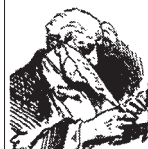
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England's West Country

Did Your Ancestors come from the ancient English counties of Somerset, Devon, Dorset or Bristol?



If so consult the specialist in Family and Local history for this area.

Bernard D. Welchman
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When I revisit this page in another year, hopefully I will find some assistance for all those emigrant ancestors I have.

FAMILYLINK

Related to WVR is www.familylink.com. This is a new family tree viewer where you can build your own trees (either one-by-one or upload a GEDCOM file), add to the trees of others, as well as having people add to your tree.

Essentially this means that once you upload your tree, you can:

- Find other genealogists who are researching the same places you are, or even individuals who live in that place.
- Find other genealogists who have interest in or are researching the same surname.
- Receive help from genealogists locally and around the world when you hit a brickwall.

There is also a partnership between FamilyLink and Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness (RAOGK), <http://www.raogk.com/>, a global volunteer organization in which volunteers perform various genealogy-related tasks for researchers who live far away. As part of the partnership, RAOGK will introduce more than 4,000 of

its volunteers to FamilyLink.com, a new free, social genealogy network that is operated by WVR.

CONCLUSION

A year ago I wrote that "WVR has a few interesting features but we get the impression that it has been rushed to the market, possibly because they are aware of so many other launches due at this time. It seems very much like a work in progress and \$49 for one year is a lot to pay for what is currently available. Their pedigree and potential resources could make them an important player down the line but they have a long way to go."

Now, a year later I can safely say that WVR has come a long way since its debut. It contains a much richer and expanded collection of databases both through its strategic partnerships and digitizing/indexing initiatives. And, although some of the databases may contain content available elsewhere, this frees one from needing to individually visit the various websites; hence, the convenience and appeal of being better able to access diverse collections through one web portal.

It is still a little fragmented and spread a bit thin across a

broad spectrum of data collections, but this is not nearly the factor it was a year ago. WVR has certainly grown up a bit this past year. For the cost of a subscription, what it now offers subscribers is comparable to other similarly priced collections. However, with the difference and at its current pace of growth, WVR just might have the makings to become an important player in the world of Internet genealogy.



Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for 20 years. She is always looking for new

resources to further her personal research and that of her clients. She currently does professional research in NC and she can be found online at

www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy.

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ILLINOIS DEATH CERTIFICATES

- 1916-1947, - **The Illinois State Genealogical Society (ISGS)** has established this project to assist members and researchers who do not have easy access to the Illinois State Archives to obtain death certificate copies. Cost per certificate is \$6.00 for ISGS members, \$10.00 for non-members. For non-certified copies of 1916-1947 death certificates go the ISGS web site at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilsgs/index.html>, click on the link for death certificates

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilsgs/projects/deathcerts.html> and follow the ordering directions.

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