SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder

'This crewel war'

The sesquicentennial of the start of the Civil War

By Janet Brigham

'O I do wish this crewel war was over,' wrote Union soldier Mack Ewing to his wife, when he feared his brother-in-law had been captured or killed by Confederates in 1864 at Petersburg, Virginia.

Historians suggest that few people in the United States—not yet a century old—anticipated that the nation's deep divide would lead to war. Yet on 12 April 1861, the Confederacy fired on Union-held Fort Sumter, launching four years of fighting that affected nearly every family in the North and the South. Even those who lived thousands of

The Fort Sumter storm flag was taken down after the battle at Fort Sumter, South Carolina.

miles from the battles were affected as they lost relatives and friends, and as places they had once lived or traveled became battlefields or cemeteries.

This 150th commemoration of the beginning of the Civil War provides an opportunity for family historians to access records from the Civil War that are being made available as part of the remembrance of lives lost and a country forever changed.

The extensive collection of Civil War letters by and to Mack Ewing, quoted above, have been donated by Ewing's great-grandson to the Archives of Michigan. This represents a revived interest in the Civil War that could be helpful to genealogists seeking information about Civil War ancestors.

Some records have been available online, but increased interest over the next several years is likely to raise awareness of them. Additionally, many groups, states, and the U.S. gov-ernment are enhancing record collections, websites, and experiences.

County and state sites, such as GenWeb, sometimes list Civil War soldiers and their regimental actions. A Web search may lead you quickly to these sites. However, be sure to check the authoritative National Park Service site to verify information: **www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/**. There you can look up regiments as well as individuals.

At first, the site appears to have no browse capacity, but by drilling down to the regiment level, you can navigate (awkwardly) through an alphabetical list of each individual in the regiment.

Also, it isn't necessary to enter something in each search field; even a simple search by given name will bring up a list of everyone in that database with that given name. You may need to try both searching and browsing to find names with inconsistent spellings, or to find names you know only in part.

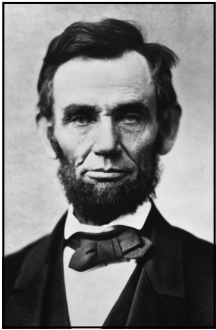The National Park Service site **www.nps.gov/civilwar** lists upcoming Civil War anniversary events, with links

Outside and inside

'This crewel war' *(continued)*

Abraham Lincoln,
President of the
United States
of America,
1860— 1865.

(Continued from page 1)

to the 70 national parks and heritage areas relating to the Civil War.

Visiting these sites—particularly on days when visitors are sparse and you can linger—can be moving and sobering. Not all family history involves names, dates, and stories; sometimes experiencing an ancestral site is as powerful as reading words in your ancestor's own hand.

Civil War Trust encouraged the formation of state commissions to commemorate the Civil War. These commissions are providing the public with enhanced access to records, historical information, and links to historic sites. To reach the Trust's many resources and state commission sites, see **www.civilwar.org/150th-anniversary/** (with the hyphen). Among the state sites offering new information and activities about the Civil War are these:

Arkansas offers an informative website that includes links to repositories containing Civil War records and materials.

Connecticut is hosting a conference in April, with lectures and a new book, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice & Survival* .

Delaware is planning commemorative activities and selling the book *Delaware During the Civil War*.

Georgia may lead all states with its visually appealing, information-rich website, **www.gacivilwar.org**.

One compelling feature of the site is its presentation of diaries written during the Civil War. For example, Carrie Barry was 10 years old when General Sherman's Northern army occupied Atlanta, Georgia. Across the months of occupation and repercussions, her diary chronicles her evolution from innocence to fear and sadness.

Indiana provides links to numerous repositories and databases and has a selection of children's books about the Civil War.
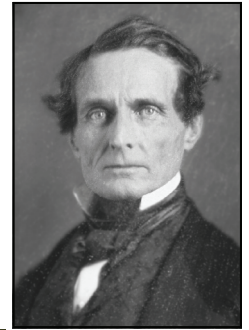
Kentucky's historical society site, commissioned for the sesquicentennial events, is a work in progress, with considerable outreach planned. The site quotes the state's governor: "This will be a four-year commemoration and not a celebration. We don't want to glorify war."

Maine has made many valuable historic books and documents available for free download, including detailed books about specific Maine regiments.

Michigan has digitized hundreds of handwritten letters and other documents.

Missouri's sesquicentennial website includes descriptions of attractions and events, history articles, and a lengthy list of links to historical societies. The site encourages viewers to "Get Involved."

Ohio's commission honors the 300,000 Ohioans who fought for the Union. The website lists historic sites, lectures, exhibits, online collections, and tours.

Jefferson Davis,
President of the
Confederate States
of America,
1861— 1865.

South Carolina features commemorative events, media, materials, and a new collection of Civil War stories collected for the sesquicentennial.

Other state historical groups, not part of the Civil War Trust, have similar themes whether or not the state was directly involved in the war. An online search for the phrase *civil war sesquicentennial* and a state name will direct you to sites with information about enlistment, veterans, and cemeteries in other states.

For example, **Idaho**—which was not engaged in the war—is home to the graves of many Civil War veterans. The Idaho Historical Society lists birth and death dates and locations for veterans with an Idaho connection.

Don't overlook **Hawaii**—you can watch a brief YouTube video (search for phrase *hawaii civil war* at YouTube.com) about Hawaii's soldiers in the Civil War. A Hawaii Civil War Round Table meets monthly.

Maryland's site addresses the fact that Maryland was divided between North and South.

Start looking, then watch *PastFinder* in coming months: the sesquicentennial lasts four years.

48 titles, OCR, and fuzzy logic

19th Century British Newspapers at Family History Centers

By Richard Rands

Recall the old Xerox Superbowl commercial depicting medieval monks slaving at their work stations copying books, and Friar Dominic brings a completed copy to his supervisor, only to be told that he needs 500 more copies? That commercial won countless awards, largely because it struck a nerve familiar to many of us.

Beginning with the invention of moveable type, the means of disseminating knowledge and information has exploded like a super nova, and genealogy researchers want to take it all in, sifting through it in search of the fleeting facts that add up to a family history. Searching for a needle in the proverbial haystack is a metaphor that falls woefully short — sometimes I feel like I am looking for an atom in a galaxy.

Getting our minds around the universe of just those newspapers that might have useful information for our individual research is crazy-making. But little by little, sanity is coming within our grasp. Archives teeming with copies of old newspapers are gradually turning them over to digitizing projects whose goal is to bring their rich content to our fingertips. One such project is the British Library's program to digitize 2.2 million pages of national and regional newspapers and to put them online in a searchable format.

The British Library's full newspaper archive at Colindale, northwest of London, is estimated to hold more than 450 million pages of newspapers and journals that are spread across 28 miles of shelf space. The entire Colindale collection is slated for eventual digitization, but the first phase has been completed: full runs of 48 selected newspapers, selected from more than 52,000 separate titles, digitized and scanned for online search access. The selected titles cover the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, with the 19th century going online first. The titles were selected by a panel of u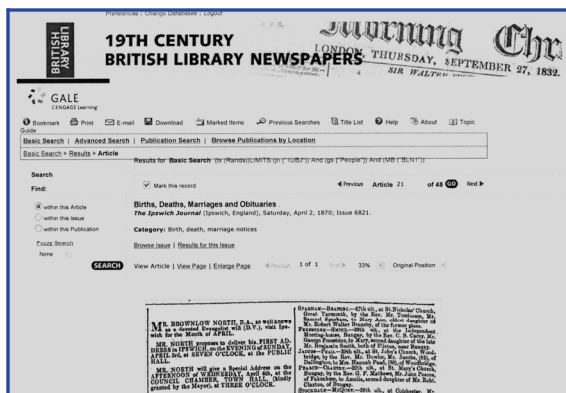sers with extensive knowledge of the newspapers during that period. They chose national and regional newspapers from a broad geographic area of the country, and avoided some major metropolitan titles, such as *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Guardian*, which are still publishing, in hopes that those newspapers will digitize their own archives.

An overall criterion in selecting titles was to provide an abundance of material for academic research as well as historical and genealogical research. The resulting database is licensed to institutional libraries around the world; hence, most of us will need to obtain free access through a local Family History Center.

The opening search screen for the 19th Century British Library Newspaper collection showing a partial image of a newspaper record

Once the page images are scanned, computers apply a process known as OCR (optical character recognition) to each letter of every word, to build a catalog of words that can be searched by users through a sophisticated search engine. OCR technology has been around for decades, but it is only recently that advances in computer technology have made it fast and useful enough for the massive projects currently underway. It is an amazingly powerful technique that can render millions of words and phrases accessible to discovery, but is less than perfect if images are out of focus, faded, or overexposed, or if the original type is worn or small.

For example, when I search for my surname, *Rands*, the results often pick up occurrences of *hands* or *brands*. Even so, the ability to search millions of pages of newspapers in seconds far outweighs the inconvenience of a few misinterpreted words here and there. Today, OCR programs even can be "taught" to recognize handwritten material if the writing style is sufficiently consistent.

To overcome errors generated by OCR scanning, or by variations in spelling and usage, most search engines have a built-in feature called *fuzzy logic*. Fuzzy logic is nothing more than a feature in the search software that adds near misses to your search results. Genealogists are familiar with using Soundex for bringing up variations in names. Fuzzy logic is a similar concept applied to words in general; it can be
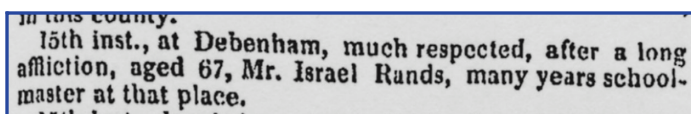
19th Century British Newspapers *(Continued)*

useful when our searches don't give us enough possibilities.

In the 19th Century British Newspaper Collection, you can choose to turn off the fuzzy logic feature, or set it to low, medium, or high. A low level will bring in the closest matches, whereas a high level will expand your results to include the broadest or loosest criteria of matching. If fuzzy logic is turned off, the standard wildcard characters (asterisk, question mark and ex-clamation point) can be used in your search criteria.

> 15th inst., at Debenham, much respected, after a long affliction, aged 67, Mr. Israel Rands, many years school-master at that place.

The 1839 death record for my fourth-great-grand-uncle, who lived in a village 30 miles from where the newspaper was published. I had not known that he was a school master.

Computers at Family History Centers have been set to boot up to a FamilySearch.org site called the Family History Center Portal. The link on the left side of the screen, titled Premium Family History websites, will open your browser to a screen giving you a choice of those subscription-based sites that are free to FHC patrons. At the top of the list is 19th Century British Library Newspapers. The search interface is reasona-bly intuitive, but an understanding of some terminol-ogy and a few details will save frustration.
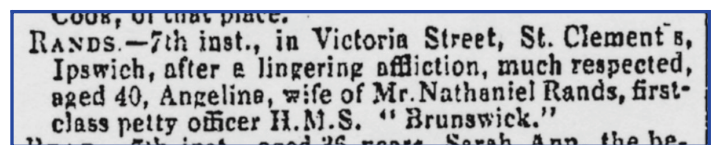
Across the top of the screen, immediately under the title banner, are menu items, such as Bookmark, Print, E-mail, Download, Marked Items, and so on. Use the Print button when you are ready to print, the Download button to copy the image to a flash drive, and the Marked Items button if you have marked more than one image to print or download.

Don't bother to E-mail an image or images to your-self or someone else, because the message comes with a link to the image that requires the recipient to have an institutional password—something that is not available to most individuals. The Help button will be useful if you have questions about the service.

The interface offers a Basic Search, an Advanced Search, and a Browse search by title or location. The Basic Search allows you to enter a simple search term and apply it to the entire document or limit it to only the keywords that academic indexers have stored with each article. For genealogical searches, select the op-tion to search the entire document.

In addition, you can limit the search by a date range, but keep in mind that the collection covers only from 1800 to 1900. You can include a limit to a set of one or more publication titles. Avoid using the date and title limitations unless an initial search provides too many meaningless hits. Many times the notice of a birth, marriage, death, or a newsworthy event for someone far away from home will show up in a newspaper where you would never expect it. Nineteenth-century Britons were considerably more mobile than earlier Britons.

An Advanced search allows you to search using more complex logic with multiple search terms as well as the AND and OR operators. The Browse searches can be useful if you want to search page by page through a specific newspaper for a given period of time, or by location, somewhat like scanning a role of microfilm or a microfiche. I would use this feature if I had reason to believe someone's birth, marriage, or death occurred within a short date range, and if I sus-pected that the OCR process had mangled the sur-name, or the fuzzy logic had missed it altogether.

> RANDS.—7th inst., in Victoria Street, St. Clement's, Ipswich, after a lingering affliction, much respected, aged 40, Angelina, wife of Mr. Nathaniel Rands, first-class petty officer H.M.S. "Brunswick."

The death record for the wife of a likely ancestor. Nathaniel served on the famous *H.M.S Brunswick*.

Once your search has returned some hits, the first hit will be displayed, and a line will appear where you can mark the record, skip to a specific record, or jump forward or backward record by record. Below the line that specifies the source of the record by category, newspaper title, and date, is a line giving you the op-tion to switch from viewing just the specific article containing your search term to viewing the entire page.

Also, you can enlarge the image in increments or by percentages. Enlarging the image too much will over-tax the limits of the browser and prevent the entire view from being displayed. Explore the various enlargement options on the computer you are using to find an optimal enlargement size.

When the image of an article appears, you might have to drag or scroll it up and down, and back and forth to look for your search term, which usually will

19th Century British Newspapers *(Continued)*

be highlighted in bright green. Not finding a highlighted search term may mean that the article spans more than one page, so look on the next page. Also, you might have searched for a keyword that is not in the article text.

At the left edge of the screen when your first hit is displayed, you will find a box displaying a method for filtering your results. The five filter categories are Advertising, Arts and Sports, Business News, News, and People. For each category with hits, you will see a number that tells you how many of the records fall within each category. If you select one of the filter categories, only those hits will remain in your results list. Use this feature when you get so many hits that you want to focus on a smaller subset. For example, choosing People typically gives you just the births, deaths, marriages, and obituaries. You certainly should explore each of the filter options to get a feeling for what kinds of records are in each one.

Once you are ready to use the Print feature, you can print either one record at a time or, if you have marked multiple records, you can print them all at once. To print one record at a time, click the Print button at the top of the page. If you have marked multiple records, first click the Market Items button and then click the Print button.

Follow the same sequence to use the Download option to load records on a flash drive. Next, you are given the option to print or download in HTML format, PDF format, or to handle up to 50 records when the article is more than one page. Choosing the PDF format will give you the image of the article. If I am printing, I choose the PDF option and handwrite the reference on a printed output (on a Stuck-on-Sources pad, ideally).

If you prefer to download the image in JPG format, right-click on the image and use the Save as Picture feature.

The next step is not intuitive, so take careful note. For each record that you wish to print or download, the record's image will appear in a new window, without a hint of what to do next. You will need to drag your mouse pointer over the bottom of the image in the new window until a faint image of a command bar appears near the bottom of the window. Then, with-

out moving the pointer outside the new window, carefully click the Print icon or the Download icon. At that point, you will see the appropriate screens to send the image to a printer or to specify a flash drive path. If you move your pointer outside the new window, the command bar disappears.

Searching this newspaper collection is a must for virtually any family history researcher, whether or not you have English ancestors. Keep in mind that many national newspapers are among the titles, and the news often focused on international events. You also might encounter the announcement of the birth, marriage, or death of an ancestor who lived in America, Australia, Canada, or some other current or former British colony.

I found the death notice for my fourth-great-grand-uncle, who lived some distance from where the regional newspaper was published, but was in the same county. It was exciting to discover that he had been the schoolmaster for many years. Furthermore, I found new references to potential ancestors whom I am anxious to trace. You too can have the same experience. ▰

A million-name milestone

A million names indexed or arbitrated. Incredible!

In December 2010 and January 2011, the FamilySearch Indexing team affiliated with the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group indexed and arbitrated more than 34,000 names, giving us an overall total of 1,018,865 names. We give a heartfelt CONGRATULATIONS to everyone on the team.

According to the latest statistics from Indexing headquarters, as of 25 March 2011, the worldwide team had completed 586,796,300 records, with more than 47 million completed this year alone. The worldwide team of 73,700 contributors works on 105 different projects.

We hope that more of you will join in to spread this wonderful service even faster. If you would like to participate in this fun, instructive opportunity, send an e-mail to: siliconvalleygroup@earthlink.net. ▰

How I found it: Using the census systematically

By Richard Rands

A few evenings ago I heard a plaintive cry ("Riiiich-ard...") from the next room, where my wife, Janet, was working on her family history. She asked if I would help her disentangle a family she had struggled with for years.

A second-great-grandmother in her father's line had been misidentified countless times by others; Janet had discovered that the existing online-tree entries were wrong, and she was working to identify the correct parents.

After systematically working backward with census records, she had a working hypothesis, but she needed information going forward. Inaccurate indexing was making census tracking difficult.

Essentially, my task involved sorting through a multitude of disparate details and filling in the gaps in the family history of Moses Metcalf and Sally Overacker and their six children.

Janet gave me a census analysis worksheet (see box below) she had been filling in. It contained the names, ages, and birthplaces she had extracted from the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Censuses. As I worked through each of the children, the oldest son, Alfred, proved elusive, so I moved on to the second son, Henry. Henry proved to be the thread that broke the stalemate, but only through some fascinating discoveries.

Born in Ohio and listed as a farmer in the 1850 census, Henry apparently had made his way to California. His brother-in-law Curtis Brigham (Janet's great-grandfather) and other relatives had left Michigan to be miners in California in the 1850s.

The 1860 Census showed a miner named Henry Metcalf living in the mountain town of Volcano in northern California. Could it have been possible that he was the same person?

Follow a standard rule for genealogy research: look for family members living nearby.

A thorough search of the 1870 Census for Henry and Hannah was unsuccessful, but I found a Hannah Metcalf in the 1880, 1900, and 1910 Censuses in the Los Angeles area of California; it appeared that she could have been Henry's wife.

If I could make the connection to Henry, having this sequence of records normally would be a slam dunk to fill in important gaps. However, Hannah's listing in the 1880 Census raised questions.

One hypothesis was that Henry and his family had lived in California continuously from as early as 1860. But the 1880 Census entry for Hannah listed two daughters, Winnie, age 14, born in Michigan about 1866, and Jessie, age 10, born in California about 1870. Perhaps Henry left the gold fields, returned to Michigan, and then moved back to California. Or per-

---

The blank census analysis worksheet for tracking across decades is available for free download at **www.svcgg.org/downloads** under Recent Handouts.

To contribute your own challenges and findings to this feature series, describe them in an email to: rrands@earthlink.net.

---

haps he never left Michigan in the 1860s, moving there only in 1870 when Jessie was born.

Furthermore, Hannah had been born in Massachusetts. The Metcalfs had few connections to Massachusetts. But I persisted!

Following a standard rule for genealogy research to look for family members living nearby, I found that the picture was further complicated by the fact that a search for Metcalfs in the vicinity of where Hannah and her two daughters lived in 1880 turned up a Metcalf family, Alfred, Jennie, and four children.

Janet confirmed that Moses' oldest son, Alfred, had been widowed before 1870 and remarried a woman named Jennie. So here was Henry's older brother living in the same neighborhood where Henry's Hannah was living. Several houses down the street from Alfred, I found a Carrie Metcalf, living in the home of a Harriet Cummins and her two sons, with no husband. Carrie was a 15-year-old girl, born in Michigan, and listed as Harriet's niece. That meant that Harriet's maiden name likely was Metcalf.

Janet's census worksheet for Moses Metcalf listed Harriet as the fourth child. This was getting interesting! It looked like one of Henry's younger sisters was living practically next door to the older brother, and one of their daughters, Carrie, was in the household.

On a side note, Harriet's two sons had surnames of Pratt and Cummins, giving solid clues for how to find Harriet in other records—she first married a Pratt and then a Cummins. Janet has other records

Ask the doctor PAF on a netbook?

Q **Sometime ago I noticed someone using a netbook at the SVCGG meeting. I wonder if PAF would/could work on one and could double-task with Word or other programs. I would use it mainly for research while I travel, checking the Web and calling home with Skype.**

I do indeed have a PC netbook that is now a couple of years old. I use it for everything I ever used a laptop computer for -- and it does it faster. I multitask all the time, usually with three or four programs open at once. PAF runs fine on it, as do other genealogy programs.

Since I bought my netbook, several other companies have come out with excellent netbooks. Mine was the top of the line when I bought it, and I made a point to buy that specific computer with an extended battery because it had the longest battery life (more than 9 hours). For a netbook, that's a key thing—make sure it will last a long time on battery, because you may find yourself in a place where you can't plug anything in.

Another way to keep it running well is to not overload it with every program you might put on a laptop or desktop. Just install programs that you actually need. Don't have them in the Start menu unless you need them to be there.

Be *sure* to install good virus and malware protection on it, and keep it updated. I now use a commercial virus protection program *and* an anti-malware program called Malwarebytes, and I update them frequently. Since a netbook may sit for a week or two unused in between outings, be sure you turn it on frequently to update the virus and malware software.

Experts often recommend not using public hotel, restaurant, or library wifi when you travel, if you can avoid it. Some recommend using a broadband modem to avoid contaminating your computer.

The last time an IT specialist worked on my netbook, it took him two days to clean off all the little bugs I'd picked up in hotels and libraries before I installed an anti-malware program.

How I found it: Using the census systematically

(Continued from page 6)

documenting Harriet's unusual marital history—but that's another story, perhaps another article.

Back to Hannah. The census page prior to that listing Alfred and Harriet had a Nora Metcalf, born in Michigan, listed as a domestic servant for a Smith family. Henry may have been a gold miner at some point, but the family left behind a veritable gold mine of details for me to work with.

I still had the issue of the Henry Metcalf living in Volcano, California, in 1860. On a hunch, I went back and searched for a Henry and Hannah in Washtenaw County, Michigan, where Moses and Sally raised their children. Sure enough, I found Henry Metcalf and a Hannah, from Massachusetts, who fit

the age of Hannah in Los Angeles, with a one-year-old daughter, Eva, born in California! The record had been incorrectly indexed.

The picture was now beginning to get clear. Henry did, in fact, go to California, but evidently not alone, and not for good. Eva was born there about 1859, and then before 1860, the family moved to Michigan. Somehow they were missed in the 1870 census, and Hannah was without him in California in 1880, living in the vicinity of her brothers and sisters-in-law.

By now the trail of the Metcalfs was teeming with clues. The 1900 Census of an area in Los Angeles listed married women with the names Carrie, Winnie, Nettie, and Elnora who fit the ages and birthplaces for Henry's children.

Using the familysearch.org

California County Marriages 1850-1951, I found Metcalf marriages for them to the men who appeared with them in the 1900 Census. The women also used nicknames as well as names listed in earlier censuses. Jessie, another sister, had not married by the 1930 Census.

To cap it off, we followed a hunch and discovered that Hannah, Henry's wife, was the sister of Curtis Brigham, Henry's brother-in-law. A brother and sister from the Metcalf family had married a sister and brother from the Brigham family.

Using the census to follow the notion that families, particularly this one, often moved together across the country and remained close added new families to Janet's family history—and new facts to verify with other records.

Upcoming SVCGG meetings, events

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).
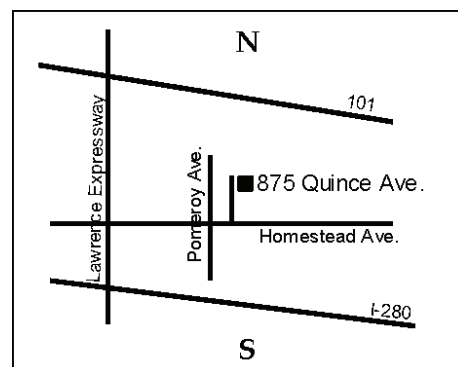
See the Meetings section of our website (www.svcgg.org) for any last-minute changes in the class lineup each month.

Classes for 9 April 2011

- Getting past dead ends by being systematic
- Data storage & backup, part 1
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting Started with Reunion
- RootsMagic webinar and discussion: Citing sources
- Beginning genealogy – Q & A for getting started

Classes for 14 May 2011

- New Web search options
- How to do stuff in Windows
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting started with Reunion
- RootsMagic
- 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, *Past-Finder* 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.