

Volume 22 Issue 5

May 2011

SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder



This National Weather Service photo shows tornado damage in Oklahoma in 1999. Damage would have been rated as worse if all the debris had been swept away. Few genealogy treasures could survive this destruction. (Photo by Mike Branick.)

Prepare for the worst, plan for the best

Lately the images have been sobering: towns and cities destroyed by tsunamis, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, and wars. Thousands of people displaced and homeless.

Our first concern is for the lives and wellbeing of the victims of disasters. We imagine how we would cope, and wonder how it would feel to lose everything. We remember that *everything* would include irreplaceable genealogical treasures and years of research.

Adequate backup and storage are necessary to avoid even everyday disasters such as a crashed hard drive. Even if your current computer is backed up, storage devices containing files from older computers can fail, and most online backup services charge an extra monthly fee for extra drives.

A multi-level approach to backing up, storing, and distributing your genealogy information can save you from the personal disaster of losing data. Implementing a comprehensive approach need not cost a great deal of money, but will require that you invest time in digitizing and copying.

1. Donate valuable photos and documents. Many family historians become the repository for irreplaceable documents, items, and photographs with historical value. Often, these can be

donated to local or regional archives and libraries.

Describe or show the materials to archivists of special collections to determine if your materials will be appropriate for donation. You usually can and should index the originals before donating materials. If you donate items to a nonprofit organization such as a university or historical society, the donation may be tax deductible. Archivists can connect you with a specialist who can assess the value of the donation, for tax purposes.

You may be tempted to split up a collection of old letters, photos, or artifacts and sell them to collectors through an online auction site such as eBay. Archivists shudder at this idea, because the intrinsic historical value of the entire collection will be lost. Also, the value of the entire collection is greater than the

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Prepare for the worst *(continued)*

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value of its parts. If possible, choose the tax deduction option rather than breaking up a collection for sale, or selling the collection.

Even if your collection has limited dollar value, remember that a climate-controlled archive will be a better permanent home than a private residence. You will have the assurance that the materials are handled by experts and are kept safe rather than thrown away by clueless relatives. In the meantime, you can use digital versions of documents for your research. In many instances, the digital versions are easier to manipulate and work with than the originals.

2. Back up your hard drive with an online storage service.

Web companies—like any institution—can come and go. Even services that seem profitable and stable can disappear overnight. That said, using an online backup service for your primary computer is a relatively inexpensive way to avoid losing important files. Several online services such as Mozy.com and Carbonite.com charge several dollars a month to perform continual backup and store it where it can be retrieved readily.

To avoid having to pay extra for backing up multiple drives, keep files from a laptop or netbook backed up on a computer that is already being backed up. Also, check your file directories to make sure that you've correctly chosen which folders and files to back up.

3. Digitize. Imagine yourself coming home to the destruction pictured on the first page of this article. What materials would you be frantic to find, if you had no

backup? Even if your genealogy database is backed up offsite, what about your research notes? The pages of notes you've written in libraries and research sessions? The printouts, books, and jottings?

If you would feel lost without any of these things, digitize them. Scan them at an adequate level of resolution and store the images. Things that are replaceable and retracable, such as pages of a reference book from a library, already might be cited (with actual text) in your database, so digitizing these might be a lower priority.

If you scan nothing else, scan your collection of photos, and include any identification. Link to them in your genealogy database, and include the digital versions with the images that accompany your database.

4. Back up at home. Digital storage devices have become affordable. Use them. The Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group offers classes in backing up your files. Various storage devices are available, including external drives, CDs, and DVDs. Decide what works best for you and back up regularly and frequently. Be sure to back up all those digital images mentioned in item 3.

Consider storing your backup drive(s) in a small fireproof, water-proof safe. Maybe a tornado would whisk it away, but maybe not. If nothing else, you'll know where your backup is, disaster or not.

Remember, though, that even high-end, brand-name external drives can fail. It helps to not leave them turned on all the time and to plug them in only when you need them. Even with that, they can die. In an instant, your entire backup


can disappear without being retrievable. Back up your backup.

5. Co-locate your data. Make duplicate copies of your important genealogy materials, using whatever format is workable for you, and send the copies to someone you trust who lives in another city, another state, or at least a different flood plain. That way, if your materials (digital or otherwise) are destroyed or lost, a copy will exist with someone who is unlikely to be experiencing the same disaster.

Be sure that digital duplicates are not in proprietary or customized programs or formats that might not be readable in a few years. Photos in basic formats such as TIF or PNG—or even JPG, though it presents other problems—have a greater chance of being accessible.

Saving your genealogy database, along with the linked files such as images, sound files, and documents, can be done several ways. Creating and sharing a GEDCOM, including linked files, will preserve your information. You also can save a copy of the database file in its native format (.paf, .rmg, etc.), since it may well be readable.

SVC GG gets frequent requests for help in accessing old genealogy files from outdated programs on ancient computers using outmoded disks. When the files are GEDCOM, the retrieval often works. When the files are not, success is rare. Accessing some files can require a file-retrieval service, and may not work.

Remember that the goal is to prepare for the worst but plan for the best—hope that none of us will face disasters, and plan so that if we do, we will be able to focus more on helping our neighbors than on finding our data. 

Going mobile: Calculating relationships

By Janet Brigham Rands

OK, we get it. You want to be one of the cool kids.

Maybe you got a cell phone initially so that you wouldn't have to get out of the car to call AAA when a tire went flat. Then when your family gave you a Kindle for Christmas, you made sure to charge it and put a free book or two on it before the next Christmas.

Now you've upgraded to a smartphone because it came with a built-in GPS system, and you thought it might help you avoid getting lost.

We've been there. We like to think of ourselves as early adopters, but when we first got an iPod, we had to ask one of the grandkids how to use it. He was about seven at the time. He squinted and gave us a look that said he hoped whatever was wrong with us didn't run in the family.

Now the world is taking quantum leaps into what's called *mobile*. Take-along devices like smartphones, iPods, iPads, Droids, Tablets, book readers, and personal monitors rapidly are becoming viable sources of information as well as communication. People use mobile devices for nearly everything from monitoring their medications to buying shoes to booking a table at a nearby restaurant (without knowing ahead of time what restaurants actually are nearby — and perhaps you can reserve a table simply by talking to your device).

The mobile landscape is changing fast. Whether you plan to or not, you're likely to end up hiking through mobile space and wondering what to do next. Before you give up, consider how going mobile can help with your family history research.

A comfortable enough place to start is with what are called *apps* (i.e., applications) for mobile devices by Apple (iPhone/iPod Touch/iPad) or for Droid devices, which are made by a variety of companies.

Many apps are available for the different platforms. To find programs for an Apple product, download iTunes from apple.com and start at the iTunes store's

App Store. Droid apps are available through the Anroid Market online at market.android.com. You can enter a search term such as *genealogy* to bring up apps for your device. A caution: Before you buy an app, read the ratings and reviews.

Soon, the *PastFinder* will publish its own reviews of apps for using and uploading genealogy information. For now, we'll start with two simpler apps:


Relationship Finder (Apple and Droid; 99 cents). In its single-page view, Relationship Finder helps you determine what relationship you are to someone with whom you share a common ancestor. This could be handy at a family gathering, or useful for establishing a sense of distance from an unsavory relative.

Relationship Finder's two entry boxes allow you to select two individuals. The target individual (labeled *YOU*, but it could be someone else) is identified by the person's relationship to a "common ancestor, A." Once you've calculated that mentally and selected the relationship by touching a plus or minus sign, you move to the second person. This person is labeled *D*.

We are embarrassed that it took us a full day to figure out that *D* stands for *descendant*. (Did we mention that apps rarely come with a user guide?)

You then select *D*'s relationship to *A* and see (for example) that "You are the 2nd Great Grand niece/nephew of *D*." The app does require you to calculate *YOUR* and *D*'s relationships to *A*, but if you can handle that, this app will work for you.

Cousin Calc (Apple; 99 cents). This app accomplishes the same thing, but does not require that you perform mental calculations to determine the relationship of "first relative" to another relative. It does require that you do some typing on the tiny keyboard built into your

device. As you identify a "first relative" by name and relationship, you then can walk through a series of relationships to figure out the final relationship. Once you walk your fingers through it a first time, it becomes simple. 



A screen shot from Cousin Calc.

Free online classes at FamilySearch.org

By Lesly Klippel

Attending a national genealogical conference is exciting, inspiring, stimulating, educational, and expensive. Between entrance fees, hotels, rental cars, meals and airfare, you are lucky if you spend less than \$1,000.

Now you can enjoy some of the same nationally known speakers and learn about a wide array of research subjects, free of charge, in your own home. Sure, it's not as exciting and stimulating as rubbing shoulders with other genealogy aficionados, but the "free of charge" wins the day for me!

The website is www.familysearch.org, the official genealogy site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On the recently redesigned home page, click on the Learn tab and then on Research Courses. The list of more than 130 available courses appears.

My eye immediately goes to the name of one of my favorite instructors, Christine Rose, who gives her class on U.S. Courthouse Research at national conventions. Clicking on the course title brings up her picture and a course description. For the next 25 minutes, I see and hear this nationally acclaimed teacher instructing me about this important part of family history research.



Christine Rose teaches an engaging, interactive online course about courthouse research in the United States.

In addition to hearing her lecture, I see a series of images, Powerpoint charts, outlines, lists of tasks, and suggestions for a successful search. Interactive screens help me learn what I need to take with me on a courthouse visit. I can take my time, interrupt the course and come back to it later, or do whatever I need to do to really digest this important material.

One fun feature of her class is a virtual trip to a U.S. courthouse, complete with security at the door and a metal detector. Clever images of exactly what you will find in the various departments in a typical courthouse help you complete your tasks. It's a class well worth spending 25 minutes with, and you will probably want to take the class one or two more times to be prepared for your real trip to that all-important courthouse of interest.

Long list of available courses

Scrolling down the list of courses reveals the wide variety that is available. Since the classes are listed in alphabetical order, I first see three new classes on Australian research, including civil registration and early church records. Next are nine classes on beginning British research, including census, civil registration, church records and how to get the most from a trip to the National Archives website. Five classes on Ireland round out the British Isles section.

Crossing the English Channel, we come to Germany, Poland, Russia, and Italy, with basic research courses offered as well as courses in reading the language of these and other countries. The list of Reading Handwritten Records Series of classes is impressive, with classes in learning Dutch, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish languages as well as classes in learning to read Scandinavian script and Latin used in church records.

The list of United States research classes varies from beginning genealogy to Colonial, Revolutionary War, Civil War, homestead, Westward move-

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Online classes (Continued)

(Continued from page 4)

ment, African American, and Native American research. Too many to list here, the classes include researching in newspapers, military records, census records, county histories, land records, periodicals and, of course, Christine Rose's class on courthouse research.

Currently, seven classes are offered on African American research, with more classes being added all the time.

The list of classes in the Research Principles and Tools section covers subjects such as descendency research, using maps in research, avoiding beginners' mistakes, thinking creatively, and tips and tactics from experienced researchers.

One particularly lovely presentation is Ellen Miller's class Cemetery Art, showing examples of tombstones, headstones, and icons, and explanations of the meaning of various symbols used on cemetery markers.

While you may not want to become a professional genealogist, you might like to have the skills and knowledge of a professional. To help reach this goal, you can freely watch and learn from any of a long list of mentoring classes, but there is a charge for the syllabus for each class.

If you want to become a professional, there are classes to help you advertise and market your services. And except for the charge for the syllabus, these are all FREE!

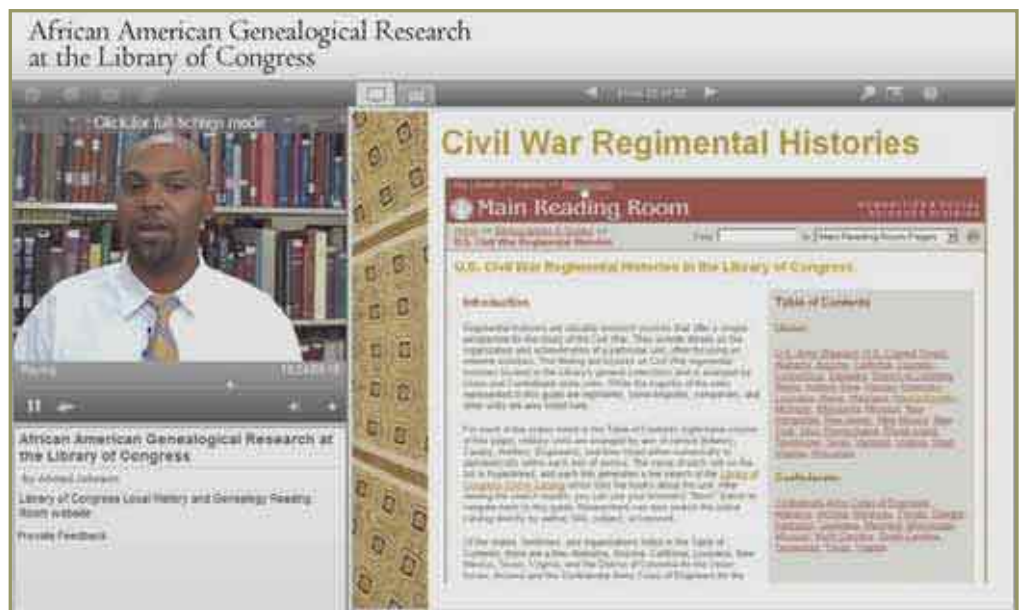
Each class is 25 to 60 minutes in length, and many of the courses have class outlines in PDF format that you can easily download and print. One



Ellen Miller of the Midwest Genealogy Center presents an online slide show about numerous styles of cemetery art.

more important part is the ability to give course feedback. Telling FamilySearch what you like, don't like, and want to see more of will help this wonderful service become even better.

Education was never easier. 



Ahmed Johnson teaches one of several courses about African American research at the Library of Congress. This segment is about Civil War records.

How I found it: A gold mine in a pension file

By Richard Rands

One of the most reliable methods for uncovering the names of children born to a couple in the United States is to look at a succession of census records beginning with the 1850 Census, when all family members began to be enumerated. But if the family lived prior to 1850, the task becomes much more difficult, and we have to turn to other records.

Since so many 18th century and early 19th century families in the United States were on the move across wild frontiers that had few formal record keepers, we have to hope to find informal records kept by the families themselves. One such source that can be a gold mine of information is a family Bible, although that source rarely survived the rigors of migration across thousands of miles.

Recently, I was faced with the need to verify the names and birth dates of a family of eight children who were born shortly after the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783. A descendant of the family pointed me to a website that contained the names and dates, but the site offered not one shred of evidence to document the information. The fact that there were full names and complete birth dates made me suspect that some type of documentation probably had been passed down, but no one seemed to know what it was.

I surmised that a family that started after the end of a war was possibly a case of a soldier who married when he returned home. From experience, I have learned that surprising details about a military veteran's post-war life can turn up in military service files and pension files. So on the hunch that the father in my target family had served in the American Revolution, I went to Footnote.com and found that, indeed, he had enlisted in the 6th Regiment of the New Jersey Line shortly after the beginning of the war and had served for nine months.

The Compiled Service Records did not show any further activity in the military for the remainder of the war, but Footnote.com had digital images of a pension file initiated by his widow, which consisted of 118 pages. That many pages is unusual, especially for someone who served only nine months. I deciphered every page in hope of finding clues to where the names and birthdates of his children had come from.

The story that unfolded as I created a timeline of events was fascinating, complicated, and well worth the time and effort to work through the old handwriting. It also explained why there were so many pages. But the reason I mention this case in this column is that buried in the pension file were several affidavits that told the story of a family Bible.


To claim the pension that Congress authorized to Revolutionary War widows, the widow had to prove her marriage, and one of the best ways to do that was to show evidence that there were children. In this particular case, the actual marriage had not been recorded, so the widow had to get affidavits from people who had witnessed the ceremony. To show evidence of her children, she declared that she had kept a detailed record in a small Bible.

She bought a new, larger Bible and copied records

However, after the children had grown and she was moving to a new town, she decided that the Bible was too worn out, with pages falling out. So she bought a new, larger Bible, and copied the birth records onto the appropriate pages. The old Bible was donated to a poor family who were in the process of moving westward, and she had no idea if it still existed.

The next affidavit in the pension file was a statement from her oldest son, who testified that he remembered the old Bible, and also remembered watching his mother copy the names and dates into the new Bible, and that as far as he remembered, the copy was identical to the original Bible. The next page in the pension file was the actual page cut from the new Bible, containing the names and birth dates of all eight children, plus one granddaughter.

Following the Bible page was an affidavit from the local justice of the peace witnessing that the page had actually been cut from said Bible; this was followed by an affidavit from the county clerk testifying that the justice of the peace was who he said he was.

I now had the evidence behind the family information from a source that is as reliable as it can be under the circumstances. Both the little old Bible and the new bigger Bible are long gone, but preserved in the middle of 118 pages of a military pension file is a single page that is a gold mine. Incidentally, I also found the soldier's original will, which is not likely to be indexed in court records. All the more reason to examine military pension files carefully when you research your family history. 



Ask the doctor Windows 7 vs. Ancestry

Q My faithful Windows XP computer finally gave up the ghost, and I was left with no choice but to buy a new computer with Windows 7. Among the many frustrations was one that caught me totally off guard.

When I use Ancestry.com to search for source records, I always save a copy of the document on my computer to use as source documentation. But when I tried to save a document from Ancestry.com on my new Windows 7 computer, it told me I do not have permission to save the file.

I have tried fixing the permissions, I have checked the security settings, and I have searched the Web for answers, but still I am unable to save a document. Saving documents from other sites, such as Footnote.com, works fine, but not from Ancestry.com. Can you help?

Yes, I can help with a workaround, but I am not totally sure why it works.

Just so you know, prior to Windows 7, Microsoft operating systems always ran in administrative mode, so whenever you had your computer do something that required system resources, it did it with no questions asked. The problem with that technique was that


whenever a hacker broke into a Windows computer, whatever the hacker wanted to do was done with no questions asked. So Microsoft changed Windows 7 to run in standard user mode. That means that when the operating system wants to do something that needs system resources, it

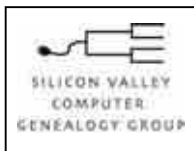


will ask you if you really want it to be done. For example, if you try to install a new software program, you will have to give your approval first. If a hacker breaks into your computer and tries to do something to change the system, you will see a question asking if you approve. That's good, but getting all those questions over and over again when you know what you are doing can be annoying.

So what does that have to do with saving images from Ancestry.com? Apparently, the process Ancestry.com uses to download images to your computer makes Windows 7 think something sneaky is going on, and it refuses to let it happen. So you will need to make Windows 7 believe that Ancestry.com is what is called a "trusted site."

Here is what you do—noting that browsers vary, so you may have to adapt the instructions for your own browser:

- Open your browser (e.g., Internet Explorer) and click on the Tools menu at the top of the screen.
- At the bottom of the menu, select Internet Options.
- When the Internet Options window opens, select the Security tab.
- Across the top of the window are icons for the four "zones" of security settings: Internet, Local intranet, Trusted sites, and Restricted sites. Click on the green checkmark for the Trusted sites zone.
- Next, click the Sites button to the right under the icons. A new window will open where you can add the address of the websites you believe can be trusted.
- In the box for adding a new website, enter the following address: **http://*.ancestry.com**
- Before you click Add, clear the checkmark in the box at the bottom that says "Require server verification (https) for all sites in this zone."
- Now click Add. The Ancestry.com address will be added to the list.
- Click Close and OK. If you were logged into Ancestry.com, logout and log back in. Now you can save images from Ancestry.com. 



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Electronic contribution of articles is welcome. The editors reserve the right to accept, reject, and edit articles.

Upcoming SVC GG 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 14 May 2011

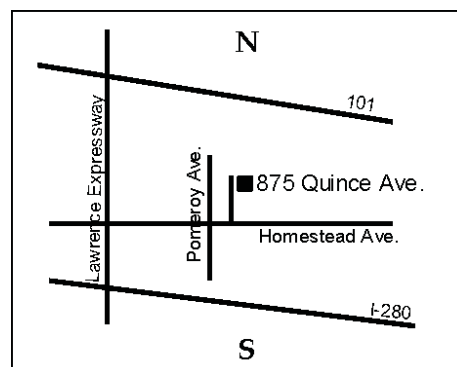
Opening segment: Your genealogy program is not your database.

Classes:

- New Web search options
- How I found it: Case studies
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting started with Reunion
- RootsMagic webinar
- PAF & PCs for beginners

Classes for 11 June 2011

- Colonial research
- Data storage & backup, part 2
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting started with Reunion
- RootsMagic webinar
- Beginning genealogy Q&A 



See www.svcgg.org/directions.html

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.

PastFinder is the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group. Published monthly except December, *PastFinder* 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.

SVC GG 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. 