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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

# PastFinder

## The grown-up genealogist

By Pamela Erickson ([www.FamilyScribe.us](http://www.FamilyScribe.us))

**I recently saw a sign that got me thinking** about the behavior of our toddler grandsons and the adult students in my genealogy classes. They can't be more different. Here are the anonymous Toddlers' Rules of Possessions from the sign:

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must NEVER appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks just like mine, it is mine.
8. If I saw it first, it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours.

While I appreciate the humor of the ten rules above, I know that with maturity, the acceptance of these rules is unreasonable for adults.

How many times have I looked for supporting information for a particular ancestor with no success and set it aside for another day? When I pick up the search again and look online, I often find someone else has already found what I was looking for and put it in their supporting data for all to see. Or, in another example, after a period of time I don't always remember

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### Outside and Inside

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## The grown-up genealogist

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whether I created the original or copied someone else. Do I have the right to exclusivity? In the following, I am not referencing any specific internet site and its “rules” for trees posted—just referring to our personal work. With this experience repeated by many in the genealogy community, I have come up with my own set:

### **Genealogist’s Rules of Possession**

1. If I find it, I share it with others.
2. If it’s in my hand, I scan it and post it with my family tree.
3. If I can borrow from your research, it’s ours to share. However, I must respect your intellectual property. It’s important that I credit you for your part and accurately record the sources. To quote a friend of mine:

Anyone who quotes something I’ve written should cite me as the source of the interpretation and the narrative, but should cite the material as the source of the information itself. I have a pride of accomplishment. And in genealogy, that’s sometimes all we have. Sometimes our families don’t care, the objects of our research are dead, and all we have is the satisfaction of doing the best we can. We should follow the law of the land—international law, for that matter—in claiming owner-

ship of how the material is conveyed, particularly if it’s narrative.

4. If I had it a little while ago and it’s lost in one of my piles, it’s no one’s until I find it and post it.
5. If it’s mine, it pertains only to my life. Any discoveries about my ancestors are theirs, and my responsibility is to present them so that others may learn about those who have gone before. My presentation about them remains mine, and I should receive credit for it.
6. If I’m building my family tree, my ancestors are mine, but they also belong to others.
7. If someone else has a tree with sources exactly like mine, I will acknowledge their efforts.
8. Even if I saw it first, it’s still not mine. Someone else created the record, and I’m just the first one to reveal the information.
9. If someone creates a family tree, posts it so others can see it, and then sets it aside, I do not have the right to claim it as mine. If I copy any of that tree and/or its sources, I will acknowledge the person’s effort.
10. If I face a brick wall, I appreciate collaboration to help me discover new documents or supporting data. 

# Finding marriage records

By Allin Kingsbury

The genealogical value of a marriage record is obvious—it gives us the basis for building a family tree. Yet historically, keeping a record of marriages was not intended to benefit future genealogists.

Such records were necessary largely to keep track of who would be responsible for the welfare of children in a society. The burden of dealing with the care of children left by parents who could no longer support their family was a major social concern, and keeping a record of a couple's union was a way to hold them responsible. In earlier European and British record keeping, a church was charged with caring for forsaken members of a society, so it was a church that maintained marriage records.

Often the process for recording a marriage began with a public declaration of intent to marry before a couple would be allowed to marry. The announcement, or banns, was a means for the church to solicit warnings from others in the community that the couple was not eligible to marry or handle the care of offspring. In some cases, however, higher church authorities were authorized to grant marriage licenses


to couples at their discretion. A system of godparents, or witnesses, usually was included in the process to add more confidence in the success of the family. At first only the established church of a country was allowed to perform marriage rites; nonconformists needed a clergyman from the established church to perform the ceremony.

When the time came to administer the estate or the debts of a couple at death, the marriage and birth records specified to whom the burden would fall. Marriage records became vital to help a government determine whether a widow or her dependents were entitled to a late husband's military pension or other benefits.

As family historians, we benefit from this record-keeping process that helps us build trees and understand family dynamics. We are delighted when we find church or civil marriage records, but we also may uncover similar records in family papers such as a family Bible, old letters, naturalization records, land records, or even divorce proceedings.

Many families were launched without a formal

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**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE**  **GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE**

Application Number 1676056/6

1840. Marriage solemnized at <i>St. Philip's Church</i> in the Parish of <i>Liverpool</i> in the County of <i>Lancaster</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Religion or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rite or Profession of Father.
184	September 6th	John Partington	full age	Bachelor	Triner	Tithebarn St.	Wm. Partington	Triner dead
		Elizabeth Hughes	full age	Spinster	-	St. Mary Street	Robert Hughes	Catholic dead


Married in the Church of *St. Philip*, according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by *Edward P. L. Thompson* by me, *R. L. Thompson*

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *John Partington* and *Elizabeth Hughes* in the Presence of us, *Joseph Partington* and *Thos. Madocks*

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of Liverpool  
 Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 2nd day of October 2009

**MXE 578390**

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. © CROWN COPYRIGHT  
 WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.



An 1840 civil marriage record for John Partington and Elizabeth Hughes in Liverpool, England. Civil registration became law in England in 1837.

# Marriage records (continued)

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marriage but were nonetheless families. Even so, it is important to try to find any existing marriage records.

Information about a marriage can be difficult to locate, particularly for a female whose maiden name was replaced by a married name. Marriages can be documented indirectly using birth records, obituaries, census records, death records, city directories, voter registrations, and other sources. They also can be documented by interviews with older family members who attended or knew of the marriage. In some cases, a marriage is assumed because the individuals lived together as husband and wife and raised their children as a family. When no records were available, family, friends, or neighbors were allowed to provide affidavits as substitute documents.

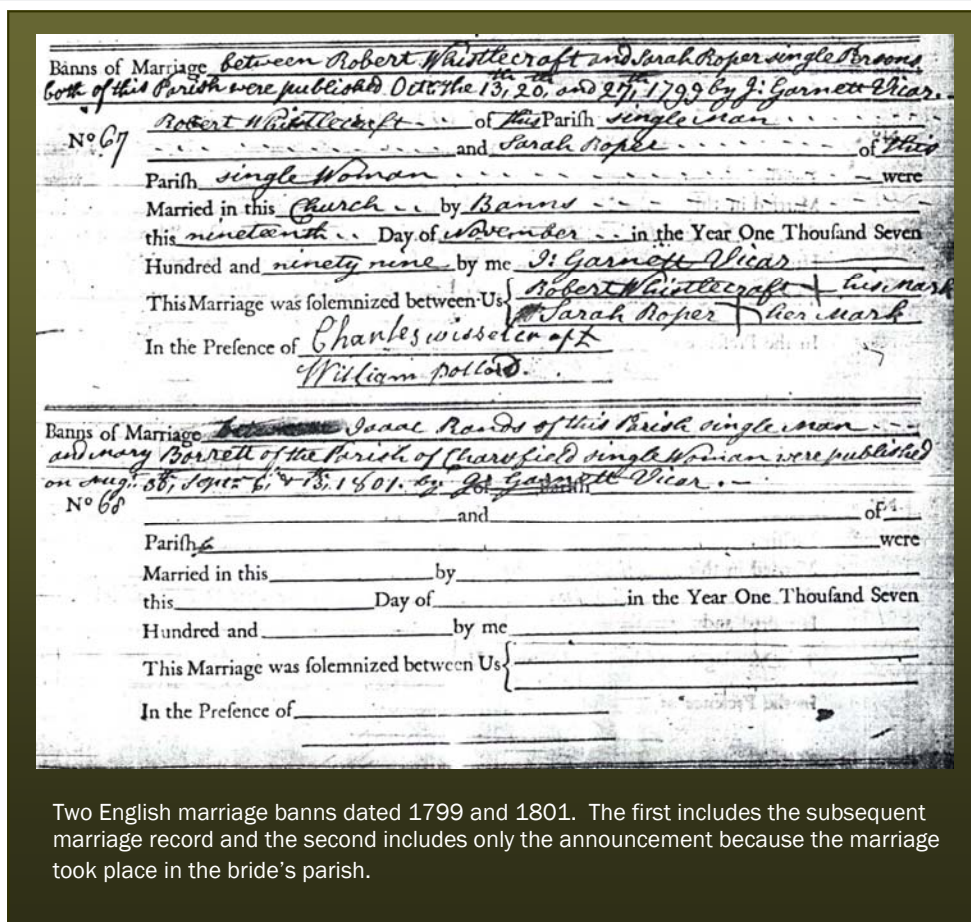
Many public records recently have been closed to the public to protect privacy. Some marriage records are accessible on the Internet, but a researcher often will need to know where the marriage took place, which could be outside the United States.

Some marriage record sources can be unreliable. Occasionally we find a trail of falsified marriage records designed to hide the fact that a couple never married. It is a good practice to verify marriages using other records, such as a census or city directory. Marriage information passed down in family records may have errors of a different type, including incorrect spelling; confusion about given names and surnames; and forgotten names, dates, or places.

## When a marriage record cannot be found

If a marriage record cannot be found, many alternate sources can help.

For reasons explained above, church records, if they can be found, are a reliable source of marriage



Two English marriage banns dated 1799 and 1801. The first includes the subsequent marriage record and the second includes only the announcement because the marriage took place in the bride's parish.

information. You may need to know the church denomination and perhaps the specific church to find the marriage record. Family Bibles are difficult to find, but the information might be reliable.

Census records list the husband and sometimes the wife by name. Some census records also list the number of years married or the age when first married. Sometimes enumerators marked the marriage status to indicate if it was a first, second, or third marriage. In the United States, census records included marital status from 1880 through 1940. Census records in other countries may state marital status at earlier dates.

Birth and death records sometimes list the names of parents and sometimes provide the mother's maiden name. Similar sources are obituaries, cemetery records, and gravestone inscriptions. Records made near the time of death may list the spouse at

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the time of death but might fail to mention other marriages. Websites such as FindaGrave.com sometimes provide the maiden name and quote the obituary of the deceased.

A divorce record may have details of a marriage for which no record can be found. The divorce record lists the names of the husband and wife and may list the number of years married or the year of the marriage.

Directories usually list the name of the husband and the first name of the wife, along with their address. Since ages or birth dates are not given, a directory entry should be verified with other records.

The U.S. Public Records Index at Ancestry.com lists the name of the individual, the address, and usually the year the residence was in effect. In many instances it includes the date of birth. By correlating the data for both the husband and wife, a researcher can establish times when the husband and wife were living at the same address.

### **Additional marriages**

During periods of high mortality rates such as plagues, wars, famines, or economic hardship, it was often the case that a spouse died or left, and the remaining spouse remarried. In more recent times divorce was commonplace. Researchers should watch for signs in the sequence of names or ages over time in census records. When you see gaps in the ages of children, or children born when the father is older, it is good practice to look for an additional marriage.

You also can check divorce records; look at the age of the husband at the time of the marriage, or check situations where a wife dies. The same situations apply for an additional marriage of the wife, but if the woman was widowed or divorced earlier, the wife may be listed by her married name, maiden name, or both. The surname of an earlier husband might not be evident, necessitating that you search for the wife using both her maiden and married names.

When the wife was previously married and the marriage record used only her married name, it can be difficult to identify her parents until the earlier marriage is found. One may find the answer in her obituary, in her children's birth records, in her death certificate, or in a published family tree.

A state marriage index, such as the one for Califor-

nia, typically lists a marriage twice. One entry lists the maiden name of the wife; the other is indexed by the husband's surname. By searching both names in earlier census records, the married and maiden names may be found, and it will be obvious which is the married name. She might appear as a child living with her parents.

The best rule for success is to be thorough. It is especially important to look at all appropriate census records carefully to see if both husband and wife are the same people in each of the records. A change in year or place of birth could be an anomaly or could indicate change in partners.

### **Children from an earlier marriage**


When a family breaks up, non-adult children often stay with the mother. However, a divorce or death of a husband followed by a remarriage can make children and their mother difficult to find. The surname of the mother might change if she remarried. If adopted by a stepfather, children might take his surname. Even without a legal adoption, they may have assumed a stepfather's surname for the sake of convenience or privacy.

Should a husband die or divorce or if the wife and children seem to disappear, a subsequent marriage may explain the mystery.

Most genealogy database programs have a feature that finds potential errors, such as children born before the marriage, or after the death of a parent. All such circumstances need to be carefully reviewed. Many of them may require additional research, especially where an undiscovered second marriage is involved. The labeling of a child as a stepson or stepdaughter clarifies the situation, of course.

### **Worth the trouble of searching?**

Marriage is a key event in the history of a family. If a marriage record is missing, the story is incomplete. Children and stepchildren might provide important information about the family, or, if they are no longer living, may have passed it on to their descendants. If you are able to contact any of them, you may be surprised and delighted by the information you find.

Once you contact a living descendant, sharing information can be easier. You can gather and share photographs, documents, old letters, and some enlightening stories about your family. 

# How I found it *Bombshell from Down Under; Finding DAR evidence*

## Be careful what you ask for

By Sandy Hart

As the saying goes, be careful of what you wish for, because you might get it! I have learned that lesson in a personal way in recent months.

I've always felt that I knew quite a bit about my great-grandmother, Letitia Pfeil. Her youngest daughter, my great-aunt, lived to the age of 98 and told many stories about her mother, her mother's extended family, and their lives in Australia. In 1923, she spent nearly a year forming lifelong relationships with our Australian kin; she sailed there to honor her mother's wish that that her ashes would be returned to her home in Melbourne, Australia. I have been able to verify these stories through research and a recent visit Down Under.

However, I knew very little about my great-grandfather. I didn't realize what a mystery he was until I became interested in genealogy and had nobody left to ask about him. I knew that he was born Henry Curran but changed his surname to Smith when arrived in San Francisco in 1885. I knew that he was born in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, but knew nothing about his birth, childhood, parents, or siblings. I knew that he emigrated from Ireland to Australia as a young man, but not why, when, or where he landed. He referred to himself as a marine engineer, but his only American occupation was that of hotel and saloon owner.

Most puzzling was that I knew no family stories about the 20 or so years he spent in Australia nor any stories about how he met and married Letitia.

I looked for him in American records first. He apparently became an American citizen, but his natu-

ralization records appear to have been lost in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. I found his name in the 1900 and 1910 U.S. censuses and found his obituary, but they told me little that I didn't already know. I found his grave, but he didn't even have a headstone! I also tried unsuccessfully to find any trace of him in Australia. Finally, I began to research his Irish origins. I didn't get very far, because his family's birth, death, and marriage records were not readily accessible. Also, he left Ireland before the first complete list of households was completed in Ireland (Griffith's Valuation).

As a last resort, I posted what I knew about Henry on Fermanagh-Gold.com, a wonderful online information-sharing resource for genealogists interested in that part of Ireland. The next day I received an email from a man in Melbourne who politely inquired as to whether my Henry might also be his Henry.

He said that his third-great-grandfather, Henry Curran, emigrated from Enniskillen to Queensland, Australia, in the early 1860s. Henry married Ann Weldon in St. Mary's Catholic Church in Queensland in 1864; they had eight children before he disappeared with a woman named Letty about 1887.

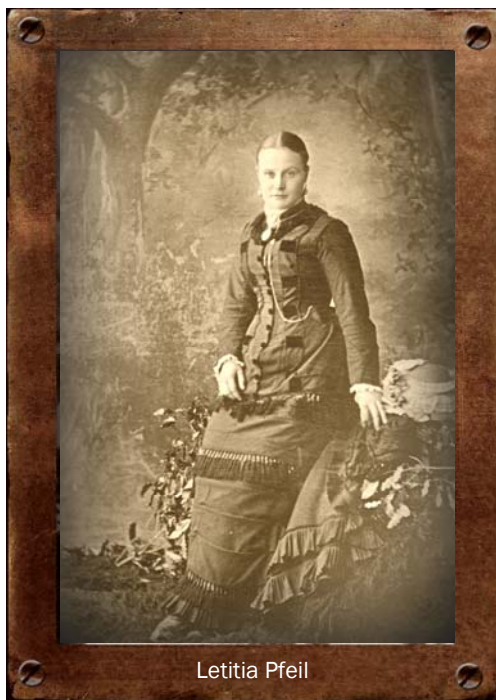
My communicant attached marriage and birth records from St. Mary's and a newspaper article about Henry's disappearance. I was shocked! Apparently, my great-grandfather was mysterious because he had a big secret to hide!

Since receiving the initial email, I've had many exchanges with my newly discovered second-cousin. We became convinced that his Henry Curran and

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Henry Curran (Smith)



Letitia Pfeil

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my Henry Curran were, indeed, the same man. He also sent me the 1878 Melbourne marriage record for my 18-year-old great-grandmother Letitia and a 27-year-old grocer, James Luong. The marriage record listed both of her parents. None of the family stories even hinted at this marriage.

Apparently Letitia and Henry left Australia together in about 1885, abandoning their spouses and Henry's eight children. They sailed to San Francisco, where they established themselves as a married couple, adopted the surname Smith, and had a second family. I am still pursuing the new avenues for research that these ancestral bombshells provided. I doubt that anyone in his second family knew about the first, and vice versa, so it will be left to his descendants to document the entirety of Henry's life, nearly 100 years after his death.

## Inferential genealogy

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By Bonnie Wagner

My research over the last two years has involved what I call *inferential genealogy research* that has allowed me to push through a brick wall to identify an ancestor Jacob Shepherd as a Revolutionary War patriot.

I traced my mother's family tree back to Calvin Lewis Sheppard, born in May 1843 in Patrick County, Virginia. Finding his death certificate online at Ancestry.com, I identified his parents as Jimmie Sheppard and Betsy Dowdy. This confirmed Calvin's parents, birth date, and birth place.

When I searched for 1850 and 1860 U.S. census records listing *Sheppard* as head of household in Patrick County, Virginia, James Shepherd appeared in the both census, along with his spouse and children. The names of five of his twelve children were unique enough to confirm that I had located the correct records.

The name *Sheppard* was spelled differently for the same family in various census records. The name *James Shepherd* appeared in at least two of 30 land deeds from Stokes County, North Carolina, where the surname was spelled three different ways in the same document. This realization gave me another tool for online searches.

Knowing that the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census records placed my ancestors in Patrick County, Vir-

ginia, I searched online for a local genealogical society of Patrick County, Virginia, and of Stokes County, North Carolina, where I knew my ancestors had settled.

With this one cold contact in Patrick County, I was introduced to a Sheppard descendant who had established an independent website for this family line. By invitation I joined this site to see gathered descendant trees and to share what I had. I am amazed that all twelve children of James Sheppard and Betsy Dowdy reached adulthood to produce yet another generation. My family tree had literally exploded, along with resources to draw on.

This Sheppard Family website included a file cabinet of descendant trees with citations. What a bonus I discovered in two-volume *The Heritage of Patrick County, Virginia 1799 to 2005* compiled by The Patrick County Heritage Book Committee and County Heritage, Inc.

Each family history submitted by a local resident contained not only genealogy information but a glimpse into lives of the individuals. The bonus of these brief histories of resident families included contact information of a descendant. My network was expanding. I purchased both volumes and similar volumes for Stokes County, North Carolina, for my personal library.

James Sheppard (my spelling of choice) was married in 1821 in Bedford County, Virginia. My sister, who lives northwest of Richmond, Virginia, checked a nearby Family History Center for a marriage bond/license for James Sheppard. *Marriage Bonds of American Quaker Genealogy, Bedford County* had a listing for the marriage bond of James Shepherd and Betsy Dowdy, daughter of Hundley Dowdy. This confirmed the marriage bond issuance date and the marriage date. Betsy's father's name turned out to be a useful inferential fact.

Since James was married in Bedford County, Virginia, in 1821, I searched census records from that locality for his possible parents in the 1820 U.S. Census. Both a Jacob and a John Shepherd were listed as heads of household. Jacob was the only Shepherd with a son of marriage age. Since James married Betsy Dowdy, daughter of Hundley Dowdy, I also searched for and found a Hundley Dowdy nearby

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## How I found it *(continued)*

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with a daughter of marriage age.

I look for public family trees that show sources or citations for data so that I can independently verify the information. One particular family tree listed a Joel, not a James, as a son of Jacob. However, the information carried a citation for a Sons of the American Revolution application. The application listed Jacob Shepherd, born in 1760 in Pennsylvania, with a spouse and a son Joel.

Unfortunately this was not my James. Highly promising was a list of the documentation's supporting membership application including pension records, death certificates, family Bible records, and a will of Jacob Shepherd.


I directed my efforts toward finding a Jacob Shepherd in Revolutionary War records. I found a wealth of information on HeritageQuest.com, including a summary page of service for Jacob listing his surviving children by name. The list included both a James and a Joel.

## Upcoming meetings

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). The group is not affiliated with any church or other group.

### NO DECEMBER MEETING

**12 January 2013, 9–11 A.M.**

- U.S. Colonial research (Lesly Klippel)
- Managing computer files (Richard Rands)
- Reunion 10 for Mac users
- Mac Reunion basics
- Getting started in genealogy 

Furthermore, the text of the application included a note from an attorney who indicated that Jacob married a Mary Warner in Loudoun County, Virginia, in 1787 after his military service ended.

The notation also indicated that they lived in Loudoun County until moving to Bedford County, Virginia, in 1800. This confirmed James's presence in the 1810 and 1820 U.S. censuses for Bedford County, Virginia.

The bonus was that James was named as one of Jacob's surviving seven children. I followed up by locating Jacob's will, which stated that only one child, Thomas, inherited Jacob's farm-plantation. This was based on Jacob's written statement that Thomas would care for both him and his beloved Mary until their deaths.

By inferential reasoning I followed an investigative path to identify not only the parents but the siblings of James Shepherd, my ancestor. At that point, I had good documentation to support a membership application to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

I can now confirm that the DAR approved my research, and I am now an active member of the DAR. 

## 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.

SVCGG offers classes, seminars, and publications to help family historians improve their skills in using

**PastFinder**  
First place winner  
Local/society newsletter  
National Genealogical Society, 2012

Website: [www.svcgg.org](http://www.svcgg.org)

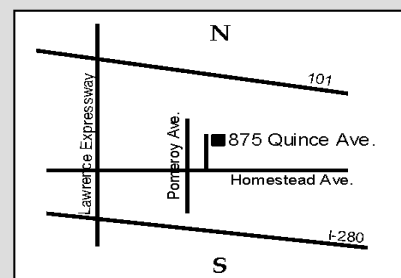
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Meeting site has ample free off-street parking, with a wheelchair-accessible entrance at the front.

technology for genealogy research.

*PastFinder*, the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group, is published monthly except December. *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to members and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter electronically by emailed download link. 