

# Who we are, 2014 version

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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

# PastFinder

By Janet Brigham

Every few years, SVCGG steps back and asks itself a few questions. Who are we? What interests us? What would help us as family historians? Each time we do this, we learn that we are evolving and changing.

The 2014 member survey tells us that those who attend the monthly meetings come because they learn new things (87%), improve their genealogy skills (85%), and try new approaches (76%).

The online database search site most commonly used by members is FamilySearch.org (89%), followed closely by Ancestry.com (88%).

Most of the questions in the survey allowed respondents to provide more than one answer (“select all that apply”), with the result that response percentages do not add to 100%. Some questions did allow only one response, such as age range or zip code.

Research in the United States (80%), Canada (74%), and the British Isles (74%) remains a top priority for members, followed by continental Europe (60%). Among United States and Canadian research areas, New England (70%), Midwest (62%), and Atlantic coast states (46%) garner the most research interest.

American history maintains high interest among members responding to the survey. The top topics endorsed are United States/Canada immigration waves (66%), Colonial (62%), American Revolution (55%), and English (47%) and Irish (43%) history.

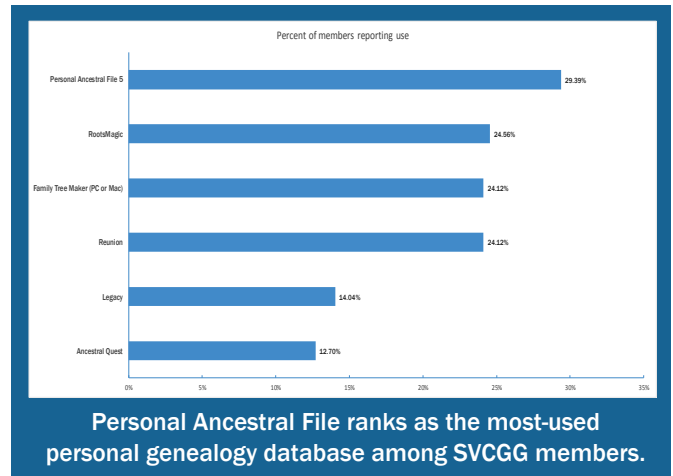
## Who does the work?

The majority (61%) of those taking the survey indicate that they are the only person in their family conducting family history or genealogy research.

Those reporting that others also actively do research are 26%.

## Computer equipment

The tools that members use to conduct genealogy research include basics (printer, 94%; scanner, 83%) and mobile devices (smartphone, 47%; iPad, 36%; other tablet, 11%). More than half of respondents report having a PC desktop computer (56%) or PC laptop (53%); results for Mac computers are lower (Mac desktop, 21%; Mac laptop, 22%). Some 37% have a dedicated ebook reader (Kindle, Nook, or other brand).



More than 93% of respondents report that they use personal genealogy software, such as RootsMagic (25%), Family Tree Maker (24%), Reunion (24%), Legacy (14%), and Ancestral Quest (13%). As in past years, the most frequently

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# Who we are (continued)

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endorsed personal genealogy software is Personal Ancestral File, v. 5.2.18 (PAF, 30%). PAF no longer is supported but still is available for free download (parowansoftware.com).

The class topics that most interest respondents are Internet research skills (73%), online databases (69%), source documentation (54%), advanced features in personal database software (42%), creating and editing digital images (40%), transferring information between databases (35%), and publishing a family history (34%).

The survey asks about current religious preference and religious background, partly to deflect a misconception that SVC GG is populated largely by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the organization that sponsors FamilySearch; also the church that has provided SVC GG with free meeting facilities for monthly meetings and seminars for 25 years).

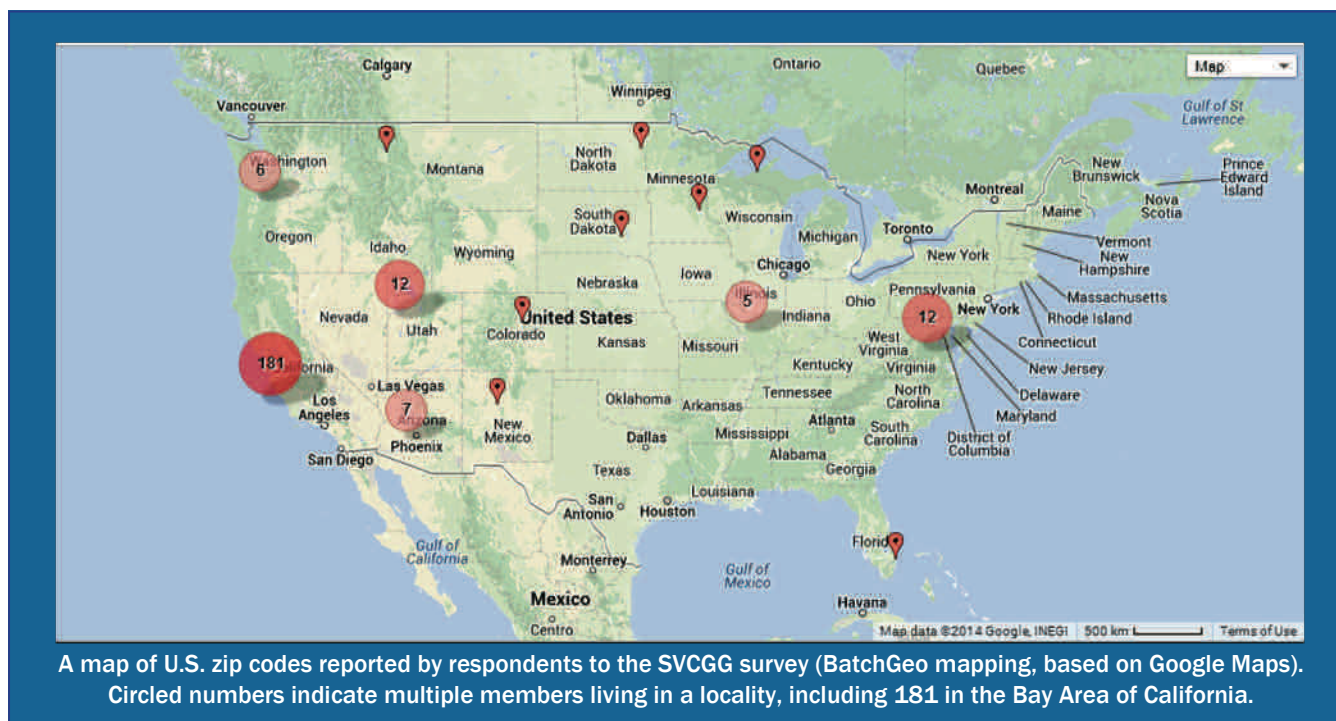
According to the survey, members with LDS affiliation comprise less than one-fourth of the membership (current, 23%; background, 16%). Protestants (current, 44%; background, 59%) and Catholics

(current, 15%; background, 19%) constitute the majority of responding members, with 13% of respondents indicating no current religious preference.

The age range of SVC GG members remains in the 70s, with 48% of respondents indicating that they are between 70 and 79 years old. Those older than age 80 are more than 21% of the membership. Some 25% are in their 60s, and only 0.42% are 49 or younger.

Verbatim (or open-ended) questions were available for most questions, designed as the “Other (specify)” option. Among responses was the comment that some members do not know how to use their personal genealogy software. This type of information is particularly useful to SVC GG, since it helps the group determine what software to include in future classes and newsletter articles.

The survey was designed, as were previous surveys, by SVC GG president Richard Rands (retired CEO of a survey-software company) and vice president Janet Brigham (professional research psychologist). The survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey.com, with a high response rate of 48%. A PDF of the full report of the survey results, including open-ended comments, is available by request; send email to: [siliconvalleygroup@earthlink.net](mailto:siliconvalleygroup@earthlink.net).





# Ask the Doctor *New database software*

**Q I want to use a personal genealogy database but can't figure out how to use the one I've installed. What should I do?**

First, breathe deeply and pull yourself out of panic mode. Not everyone finds personal database software easy to use, but using it effectively will greatly enhance your experience. It's worth taking time to learn. Also, continual hand-wringing doesn't help you learn and makes it difficult for others to help you.

Second, identify (1) those things you already can do and (2) how best to obtain help with the rest.

For example, look on the software company's website for tutorials and a user guide. Access or download these and follow them. They probably will tell you what you need. Even if you don't understand every word, just keep plugging away at it, and the process will begin to make sense. Perhaps you can ask a relative or friend to help you understand the user guide or the tutorials.

Look online (you can use a basic search engine for this, such as Bing or Google) and see if a user support group exists for your software. Again, don't approach this in a state of panic or desperation — approach it calmly, with an open mind and a willingness to learn new skills.

Search on Facebook for an online community related to the software you want to use. Try Pinterest and other social media sites as well.

Also, check with SVC GG to see if we are planning to offer a class that might help you with this software. We no longer have a formal mentoring program, but we offer a range of classes. It's inappropriate to demand help, but many of our volunteers are generous with their time and knowledge and may be able to help you get started.

Ask at a local Family History Center (FHC) to see if any of the staff can help you work with your database software. You can find a FHC using this site: [familysearch.org/locations/centerlocator](http://familysearch.org/locations/centerlocator)

If you still feel inadequate to the task, enlist the help of another family member or person close to you who can handle the database issues while you pursue other aspects of the family history research. Perhaps you can engage in tasks such as contacting living relatives for information, or searching censuses and online databases, while a niece, child, or

grandchild tidies up your personal genealogy database.

Another approach is to start simply with an online tree that is easy to populate and manipulate; make sure that each entry you make is documented and correct. This might help you get started in the process of building a family tree and might allow you to download the information later (using a GEDCOM file) to load into your personal database.

For genealogical success it's extremely important to build and maintain an accurate database. Keep that as your goal, but don't be afraid to take intermediate steps to reach that goal.

You also may find it useful to sign up for a community class in genealogy research techniques, or to join a local genealogy interest group and to attend meetings with the goal of learning all you can.

Another option is to hire a professional genealogist to help you build your database and learn to use it. You would not be the first person to do this. It does cost money, but if you have ample resources, it may be a straightforward, quick solution for you.


Someone once wrote us that because she could not figure out her database software, her entire family history process was on hold, and it was our fault. She believed that her deceased ancestors, who were dwelling in another realm, were angry because she had not done an adequate job finding them, which was because she could not understand the software. She indicated that this was our fault.

The SVC GG (unpaid) teachers and other volunteers have busy lives and go out of their way to help many people. One look at our storage rooms, garages, and yards provides a clue as to what we do (and don't do) in our spare time.

Ultimately, your research agenda is your own responsibility.

**Q What does the Doctor do for fun, genealogically speaking?**

The Doctor was tempted to answer that the Doctor never has fun, but that wouldn't be true. As we all know, the Doctor is a free spirit.

The Doctor considers family history research to be brain candy. In that spirit, the Doctor enjoys reading and watching good mysteries, since they help the Doctor practice detective skills that make research fun. Clue: Research isn't always work. 

# How I found it Honorable skepticism

By Richard Rands

Skepticism is an honorable trait for the genealogist. We are taught to verify everything, especially if no original source documentation exists for what we discover. But pessimism is not necessarily a healthy personal characteristic.

We are taught to start with research hypotheses based on common, everyday, positive assumptions about curious details, rather than assume unusual, negative circumstances.

For example, if an elderly family member disappears unexpectedly from a census enumeration, death may be a reasonable hypothesis for the reason. But if a young man disappears from a census, being sent to prison surely should not be a first hypothesis. Likewise, when a child is born less than nine months after a marriage, assuming a forced marriage might not be a good first hypothesis. The difference between skepticism and pessimism is substantial, and we should make certain we do not confuse them in our research.

While researching a case recently, I encountered several instances that exemplify this point. The case involved a family whose ancestors immigrated from Norway in the late 1880s, ending up in the state of Washington.

Many Scandinavians arrived in the Pacific Northwest during this period, so research with former pat-

ronymic names is particularly challenging. The paternal side of the family arrived with the name of Johansen; the maternal side arrived as Hansen. Among the many variations of these two names are Johannsen, Johnson, and Hannson.

Some search engines are fairly good at dealing with most of the variations, whereas some don't deal with them at all. In addition to surname variations, the immigrant ancestor for the paternal line was Christian Johansen, who also appeared in various records as *Christ* and *Chris*. As I tried to reconcile my discoveries with family lore, I realized that a pessimistic approach had led some family members to assume that the change from one name variant to another was an overt effort by the individual to disguise himself from authorities or hide from creditors. It is far more likely that Christian, or his son Chris, had a strong Norwegian accent, and when he gave his name to a clerk, registrar, or an enumerator, it was recorded differently each time.

One of the primary documents in the case file was a copy of an official death certificate for the immigrant ancestor, Christian Johansen, who died at the age of 73 on 25 December 1945 at Tacoma, Washington. It was so full of meaningful details, some subtle, and some not so subtle, that it warranted a very close analysis.

The form had been typed, but some handwritten

(Continued on page 5)

3. (a) FULL NAME		Christ Johansen		Great Grandfather		(c) Social Security Number	
3. (b) Was decedent ever a member of the Army, Navy or Marine Corps of the United States?		Name of organization in which such service was rendered					
4. Sex		5. Color or race		6(a) Single, widowed, married, divorced			
male		white		widowed			
6. (b) Name of husband or wife		6 (c) Age of husband or wife if alive					
Julia		years					
7. Birth date of deceased		Jan. 7th, 1872					
8. AGE:		Years		Months		Days	
		73		11		18	
		If less than one day					
		hr. min.					
9. Birthplace		Norway					
10. Usual occupation		Retired Longshoreman					
11. Industry or business		991					
12. Name		Christ Johansen					
13. Birthplace		Norway					
14. Maiden name		Unknown					
15. Birthplace		Unknown					
16. (a) Informant's own signature		Hannson					
		Tacoma, Wash					
<b>MEDICAL CERTIFICATION</b>							
20. Date of death: Month <u>December</u> day <u>25</u> ?							
year <u>1945</u> hour <u>about</u> minute <u>midnite</u>							
21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from _____, 19____, to _____, 19____;							
that I last saw h_____ alive on _____, 19____;							
and that death occurred on the date and hour stated above. Duration							
Immediate cause of death <u>found dead</u>							
<u>Probably arteriosclerosis.</u>							
Due to _____							
Due to <u>Investigation, reveals</u>							
<u>death was not due to</u>							
<u>unlawful or unnatural</u>							
Other conditions (Include pregnancy, <u>991</u> causes of death)							
Major findings: <u>Deputy Pierce County Coroner</u>							
Of operations _____							
Of autopsy _____							
22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following:							

Death certificate for retired longshoreman Christ Johansen (from Ancestry.com)

## How I found it (*continued*)

Johnson Christ	Male	38	11	10	Flange
Johnson Henry	Male	41	10	7	Flange
Johnson Julia	Female	34	10	21	Washington
Johnson Christ Jr	Male	4	10	19	Wash. D.C.
Johnson Henry	Male	4	10	17	Washington
Johnson Julia	Female	4	10	15	Washington
Johnson Christ Jr	Male	4	10	13	Washington
Johnson Henry	Male	4	10	11	Washington

Census entry for the family in the 1910 U.S. Census for Tacoma, Washington

alterations were revealing. For example, the typed version of his name was *Christ Johonsen*. His father's surname also was typed as *Johonsen*, but someone had handwritten the letter *A* over the middle *o*, rendering the surname as *Johansen*. One possible explanation is that the *o* was a typo. Another is that the registrar thought Christ had said his name was *Johonsen*, and the same for his father's surname. Someone fixed the spelling on Christ's entry. His occupation was "retired longshoreman."

Another curious detail was that the informant was not a known family member, nor was he someone I had encountered by that point in the research. It was a signature that looked like *Henry Herman*. This detail, along with a handwritten note in the line for the cause of death that said "found dead," led me to surmise that he was living alone when he died. Elsewhere on the form he was listed as widowed. His wife was listed as *Julia*.

The county coroner who investigated the case noted on the form that he saw no evidence of an unnatural cause of death. The record contained one other subtle detail that ended up playing an important role in resolving a discrepancy late on. The home address listed at the top of the form was typed as 2004½ N. 30th St., Tacoma, Washington.

After considerable fruitless effort to find Christ or his son Chris in the 1920, 1930, and 1940 U.S. censuses in Washington, I used the Tacoma city directories at Ancestry.com to verify that the son, Chris, lived in Tacoma, at least for awhile, at 2004 N. 30th St.

Meanwhile, since I had been unable to locate Christ (including all the name variations) in the expected census records, the next step was to search using Julia's name, assuming that Christ might have been away from home when the census was taken. At this point, when I searched with a wildcard character for *Joh\**, the results for the 1910 U.S. Census turned up two entries, one with a Julia married to a Christian Johnson, and a second with a Julia married to a Chris Johnson. Both entries listed the birth place as Norway, with a birth date about 1872.

This was the first census-based evidence I had seen. But why were there two seemingly identical index entries?

To my surprise, the Johnson family had been enumerated twice in the same precinct, once in April when the normal enumeration took place, and again eight months later during a November accounting. Never having seen such a gap between enumerations, I concluded that the later accounting had to do with a state or county process to locate individuals who had been missed during the federal accounting.

Beside the difference in Christ's given name, additional differences helped resolve the problems. In both cases, the family had seven children, all still alive and listed by name. The first five were too old to be Christ's children, implying that Julia had been married before. On one of the listings, the first five children had a different surname and were listed as stepchildren. The different surname looks surprisingly like *Herman*, and the oldest child was Henry.

(Continued on page 6)

# Whadya think this is?



This item was in a household drawer and was a common household item. Whadya think it is? (Answer is on page 8.)

- A. Part of a bagel machine; the rest of the machine is not pictured
- B. A hat shaper for a gentleman's wool hat
- C. A belt buckle
- D. Hair adornment for a woman with long hair

(Clue: The number  $6\frac{7}{8}$  on the object)

## How I found it (*continued*)

(Continued from page 5)

I remembered that the informant who signed the death certificate for Christ was Henry Herman—he was a family member after all, a stepson. Also, several of the children on the list were one year older on the second enumeration, meaning that they had passed a birthday during the months between the two records. The address was 2004 30th St. Furthermore, the latter of the two listings had been lined out, suggesting that someone had figured out that this family already had been counted.

When I shared this case with Martha Wallace of our group, she pointed out that lots of Ancestry Public Member Trees contained a Julia Hansen who matched what I now knew about Julia. A quick check revealed many dozens of such public trees, but they all referred back to a single tree that appeared to be the source of information for the others. This prime tree was full of useful clues that will help carry the research further.

However, one detail troubled me. Julia's second spouse, Chris Johnson, was listed with a death date of "about 1933"—contrary to the death certificate that said he died in 1945.

To make a long story short, it turns out that the "about 1933" death date on the much-copied public tree had been derived from a conclusion that since Christ had disappeared from a city directory in 1933, while his son was still living at the family residence, Christ must have died.


The disappearance can be explained less pessimistically by the fact that the son's address was 2004 N. 30th St., while the father's was 2004½ N. 30th St.,

possibly a cottage or room in the back of the property that was overlooked by the city directory's canvasser.

To further substantiate the 1933 death date, I found the death certificate for a Christ Johnson with the December 1945 death date, but the age, spouse's name, and parents' names were different from those on the death certificate I already had. Those differences were what led the creator of the public tree to conclude that the 1945 death date was incorrect. When I tracked down the 1933 death certificate and located that individual in the 1930 U.S. Census, I saw that he was born in Denmark—clearly not the same person.

Now that I had dispelled doubt that Christ Johansen had lived until 1945, I renewed my efforts to find him in the 1940 U.S. Census. But instead of repeating the potentially futile process of searching for him again by name, I took note of the address from the 1942 city directory and the death certificate, 2004½ N. 30th St. and browsed the census pages for the entry for that address.

Using Steve Morse's census search pages ([www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org)), I determined that 30th Street in Tacoma would appear in enumeration district 42-1. On the fifth page, at the top, I found house number 2004½ where Christian Johnson was listed.

Bewildered by the fact that he had not appeared in any of my previous census index searches, I noted that his birthplace was listed as Sweden. That listing had caused my searches for a person born in Norway to not show results. Even so, the preponderance of evidence from all other sources makes it possible to overlook that listing. 

# What's up with DNA and genealogy these days?

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At the same time that hundreds of genealogists were sitting in an all-day seminar to learn the latest about DNA testing for genealogy, one of the world's largest testing companies was making a major announcement, elsewhere.

An all-day seminar preceding the Southern California Genealogy Society's annual Jamboree was underway in Burbank, California, in early June while AncestryDNA announced that it was discontinuing two types of DNA testing and planning to destroy some existing samples.

At a pre-Jamboree seminar luncheon that day, a representative of Ancestry did not mention the announcement, and it was not otherwise discussed in a panel about the future of genealogy DNA testing.

Within only a few days, a Change.org petition was circulating to pressure Ancestry into saving the samples headed for destruction. At press time, it had 1,152 signatures. (It was not the first petition launched at Change.org to influence Ancestry; prior petitions had pushed Ancestry for sensitivity in advertising and in pedigree listing of nontraditional family relationships.)

The field of genetic genealogy has progressed steadily over the last decade, as the science has evolved and as the databases of tested persons have grown. Several companies have moved into leadership in the field, although testing with one company does not involve comparisons with results from other companies.

AncestryDNA's announcement indicated that it would no longer be offering two types of testing, mitochondrial (mtDNA; maternal lines) and Y-chromosome (Y-DNA; father-son lines), both of which could be used for examining gender lines. Instead, Ancestry will be offering autosomal DNA testing, which (as AncestryDNA puts it), makes it "gender neutral" and provides the same amount of information to both men and women.

To learn more about different types of testing and companies providing testing, a good starting place is the website of the nonprofit, noncommercial International Society of Genetic Genealogy (ISOGG; [isogg.org](http://isogg.org)). ISOGG provides a comparison chart on its

wiki (a free genetic genealogy encyclopedia; the chart was updated less than one month ago at this writing). The chart can help you choose between companies, should you be interested in having your DNA tested for genealogical purposes.

At the June seminar, presenters repeatedly were asked what DNA testing company they recommended for genealogy. The company 23andme.com was recommended highly, but not solely. Unless some (preferably noncommercial) entity steps forward to merge DNA results from

multiple companies, consumers will continue to need testing from multiple companies to maximize the possibility of identifying distant cousins and comparing results to find ancestors they have in common.

More than one presenter suggested that this role could be filled by the nonprofit entity FamilySearch, but FamilySearch

has neither concurred nor made an announcement. (Hold that thought.)

In the meantime, several issues remain up in the air.

Last November, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration informed 23andme that it was marketing an unapproved medical device (namely, its testing kits, which at that time were used not only for ancestral research but also for providing personal genomic health information). The company must provide verification of the information provided in its personal genome reports. 23and me has since submitted its product to the FDA for regulatory approval (which can take some months) and has continued to provide genealogically relevant information and raw genetic data.

One contrast continually surfacing at the genealogy DNA seminar in Burbank was that DNA testing is, to varying degrees, part of the various parent companies' business models. It is an expensive and competitive process in a rapidly changing field.

The users/consumers who pay to avail themselves of the DNA testing are, for the most part, amateur genealogists with limited resources. They are not corporations — and investing several hundred dollars to

*(Continued on page 8)*

# What didja think it was? And were ya right?

## ANSWER to question posed on page 6: B. Hat stretcher

This item still can be purchased as a gentleman's wardrobe accessory. The item pictured had belonged to a man in an earlier generation, but the same item is still sold.

It's not for this kind of hat:



## Upcoming meetings

The Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy 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 organization.

- **12 July 2014**, 9–11 A.M.
- Important genealogy websites
- Organizing your stuff (part 2)
- Reunion 10 for the Mac
- Reunion basics
- Research with Lesly
- Getting started in genealogy

### 9 August 2014, 9–11 A.M.

- Ohio research
- Evernote for genealogy research
- Reunion 10 for the Mac
- Getting started in genealogy



Rather, it's designed for putting inside a wool hat (including a wet hat, a warm hat, or a worn hat), to stretch it out or to ensure that it dries to the right size. 

## DNA (continued)

(Continued from page 7)

test multiple family members is not a minor expenditure for them. Even if the science of genealogy DNA is at times beyond them, they want to get the most out of the technology.

In the middle of these conflicting goals is the nonprofit ISOGG and other organizations that provide information to help consumers optimize DNA testing.

The ISOGG wiki has, for example, definitions of numerous genetic genealogy terms; a timeline history of genetic genealogy; comparison charts of autosomal, mtDNA, and Y-DNA testing available from major testing companies; a list of testing companies in business; and a list of companies “no longer trading.”

A “book creator” function within the wiki allows you to build a downloadable PDF to keep selected information at your fingertips.

Anyone can join ISOGG for free, without membership dues. 

## About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVCGG is the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, a nonprofit group of some 600 genealogy enthusiasts. We are based in Silicon Valley in the Bay Area of northern California; members live all over the world.

SVCGG offers classes, seminars, and publications to help family his-

## PastFinder

First place, Major Society Newsletter, 2013-14

First place, Local Society Newsletter, 2012

National Genealogical Society

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

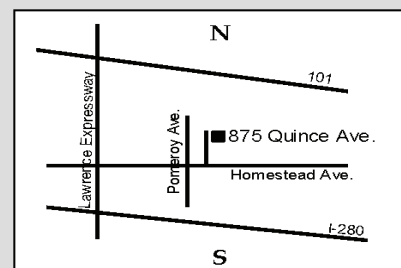
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Meeting site has ample free off-street parking, with a wheelchair-accessible entrance at the front.

torians improve their skills in using technology for genealogy research.

*PastFinder* is published monthly except December. It is distributed at meetings to members and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter digitally by emailed link. 