PastFinder

'I remember...'or do I?

By Janet Brigham

We might think of ourselves as biological computers. We experience something and store the memory in our brain, from which we can retrieve it. We might think it's just like opening a computer file and closing it without changing it. True or False?

False, glaringly false, according to neuroscientists. Recently, Johns Hopkins University neuroscientist David Linden, who is promoting the latest of his books opening neuro science to a lay audience, explained just how false this notion of memory can be:

"The most important realization" in recent years about memory, Linden recently explained in a radio interview, "is that it is not like a computer's hard drive or a card catalog full of cards with information...that you...come back to again and again.
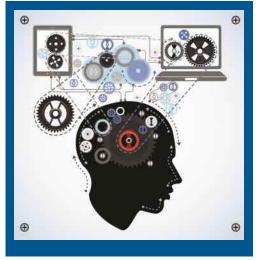
"What we now know is that every act of recollecting a memory makes it a little bit labile [changeable], so that every time we recall a memory, we can alter it a little bit."

Why would the human brain work this way? The ability to rewrite memories allows us to connect them to other experiences also stored in memory, to make sense of the world. This allows us to reference related memories and to link our experiences together, so that we understand our world better and can be safer in it. Linden added:

"Now, the dark side of that is that it also means that our memories for facts and events are often not very accurate, and eyewitnesses are not very accurate. And what's worse than that, it's not just that our memories aren't that good, it's that we don't even *know* when they're not that good.

"So if you ask people, in situations where you can check up on them, how confident they are that their memory is accurate about an event, their indication of their confidence is no prediction at all about how accurate they really are."

What does this portend for genealogists, who conduct oral histories with living relatives? And what about the verity of first-hand information provided in diaries, letters, autobiographical accounts, affidavits, statements in pension files, and other accounts?

The closer to an event, the more accurate a memory might be. If it hasn't been altered through repeated recall, this could indicate that it wasn't a particularly salient (noticeable, important) event. This is why we might recall even mundane things we were doing when a major event occurred, such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks or the Novem-

I remember... *(continued)*

ber 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Our personal background events might not have been memorable or salient, but the national events were highly salient. Hence the events and our personal situations linked as memories.

Are our memories of such events more reliable than our memories of other events?

Dr. Linden indicated that it can be easy to create "false memories," particularly in young persons. He explains:

> Not only can we continually reinterpret [memories], but we are subject to bias from people around us, and we are the most subject to this bias when we're small. It turns out, if you want to implant a false memory in a five-year-old, it's an extraordinarily easy thing to do.

For example, you could ask a child if she remembers the clown who visited her kindergarten. If no clown visited, she might say no. But if you ask her repeatedly over time, she might start telling you about the clown's red nose and green hair.

"Not only can you implant false memories, but you can cause someone to start elaborating very reasonable-sounding details based on those utterly false memories," Dr. Linden says.

This does not mean that all memories are corrupted or false. It does not mean that you should not trust family documents, autobiographical accounts, diaries or letters. It does mean that you will be on more sound footing genealogically if you verify what you can verify.

One approach is to transcribe documents and watch for details that can be verified through newspaper accounts, advertisements, church or civic records, city directories, histories, and other accounts.

When my husband transcribed his grandmother's diary, which she kept in 1918 at the age of 20, he used local historical sources to verify everything possible. When she wrote that she went to a movie to see a specific actor or actress, my husband looked up listings for movies playing in that city during that time in 1918.

Memory is not like a computer's hard drive or a card catalog.

—Neuroscientist David Linden

Looking for details about events his grandmother mentioned in passing, he was able to reconstruct many details about her life. He was able to trace her movements across town to work, to a nearby military base, to a train depot to greet troops passing through, and to relatives' houses. Although she never mentioned her mode of transit, it soon was evident that she must have been using a local trolley system. If she had not used public transportation, she could not readily have gone all the places she mentioned.

Why didn't she mention riding the trolley? Perhaps she rode it so often that it was not an unusual (or salient) event. It was clear from her occasional critical or yearning comments that she was not thinking that others might someday read her diary.

Because she was keeping a daily diary that was updated with new entries frequently, she recorded current accounts that perhaps had not yet been altered by repeated recall. An autobiographical account written years later might be accurate, but also might not.

One of my great-grandfathers wrote at least seven versions of his life story, all of them as an adult, including an account within months of his death at age 83. He always started with the same event — the death of his mother when he was five years old, following a difficult childbirth. Although he repeated the account many times in person and in writing, his details match most details in contemporary accounts rendered by adults at the scene.

In his case, the salience of the events (death of a parent), as well as hearing the account told and retold throughout his childhood, may have protected the memories from substantial alteration.

Establishing the accuracy of his accounts was relatively straightforward because it was well documented in the Mormon Immigration Index, which now is available at mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/ .

The take-home messages: As always, verify any verifiable facts, document your sources, and be glad for whatever documents you have.

FamilySearch revisited Part 1

By Lesly Klippel

One of the problems with using Familysearch.org during the past couple of years is that format changes have occurred so often that using it always involves a learning curve.

I have followed the changes quite closely, and while I didn't like some of them when they were made, the site now seems to have settled down into a more user-friendly, consistently logical format.

So I am taking the leap of describing what the site contains and how to get the most efficient use of its tremendous amount of data.

Family Tree

FamilySearch is an umbrella name covering two major sections. **Family Tree** contains pedigrees that have been submitted and uploaded in the last 45 to 50 years, beginning with a request years ago for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to submit hard copies of four generation pedigrees and related family group sheets. A separate **Historical Records** section contains more than 3.6 billion images containing billions of records accumulated across decades of microfilming and, more recently, digitizing. Many digitized records have even been indexed.

Rather than go through the tedious evolution of the 21st-century technological structure of the current site, I'll just say that a lot of names were collected, and they are all contained in the current Family Tree, creating a huge number of duplicate records.

Merging

The system has been programmed to sort out the duplications, but users are still asked to merge duplicate records. It is a complicated procedure, so please do it carefully, and don't complete a merge unless you are sure of your information. When you make a merge, the record on the right side of the screen will go away completely, so try to use the Reject feature

The Latest Changes section for each individual could include new sources,

on the right side of the screen as much as you can. Don't use the Replace feature to change Male to Male, for instance. It is best to Add any record in the Merge, even if that creates another duplicate record that you need to merge later. That new record may contain valuable additional data that would be lost if you were to reject the record.

Family Tree logs every change made to a record, providing the log in the Latest Changes section for each individual. You can see, for example, which records were merged and who made the change, and you can undo any change that your research indicates was incorrect. You can also click the Watch button on a person's record and receive an email any time a change is made to that record.

Everything a user does in Family Tree leaves a footprint; while users are asked to include either an email or a cell phone number, not all users have done this, and I have been told that the site cannot legally require that information. So you sometimes see the name of a person who has submitted information but has provided no contact information.

FamilySearch revisited *(continued)*

Pedigree chart

The Pedigree chart can be viewed in four useful formats: (1) the traditional view, with an interesting quirk—each block contains the names of a couple, so the block that looks like it should be the father of the primary person in the pedigree actually contains the names of the parents of the husband. Where we would expect to find the mother's name, we find the parents of the wife. Keep calm—you'll get used to it quickly.

The other three pedigree views are (2) the fan chart (visually pleasing and prints nicely with a color printer), (3) the portrait view (an hourglass showing both descendants and ancestors with any pictures already uploaded), and (4) the descendancy view that can show as many as four generations of descendants.

When you first log in to FamilySearch.org and click on *Family Tree*, you may see only yourself with no ancestors displayed. You will need to enter the information for any living ancestors; that information is kept so private that you are the only person who can see it. Even your siblings will have to enter their living family members' information into their trees.

Clicking on any name brings up the Summary Card, with some information about the person and the options to view the Memories section (photos, documents, stories, and audio files), to place the person into the primary position in the Tree, or to look at the person's Details page, which shows both the person's spouse and children, as well as parents and siblings, all on one crowded screen. Again, you'll get used to it soon enough.

Family Tree is a Wiki, which means that any logged-in user can make additions, changes, and deletions. To change a person's record, merely click on the item and click *Edit*. Make the change or addition and add a reason or a source to help make the pedigree accurate.

Historical records

Familysearch.org's versions of Ancestry.com's shaky leaves are the Record Hints and Research Help sections for each person, both of which take you to the other part of the FamilySearch.org site,

Record Hints and Research Help will take you from Family Tree to the historical records part of the FamilySearch.org website.

the Historical Records. FamilySearch and its predecessor organizations have been collecting genealogical records for more than 100 years. Microfilming began in 1939, and the 2.5 million rolls of microfilm in the collection are now being digitized and indexed. In addition, more than 200 camera teams are working throughout the world to preserve even more genealogical records for posterity.

Nearly everything that Familysearch provides is available for public use. Since all the records are owned by the original providers and are subject to usage agreements, some items can be viewed only in the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, and other items can be accessed only in a Family History Center.

Clicking on the *Search* link brings up a map of the

FamilySearch revisited *(continued)*

world and a search template. You can use the template to search indexed records by filling in details about the person whose information you are searching for. *Search Tips* in the lower left area of the screen can help you decide how much or how little information to enter into the template.

You can restrict your search in several ways, but the default is restriction by location. In most searches, less is better. If too many results show up from a web search, add more information to filter and shorten the results list. This template searches only indexed records. To locate unindexed records, digitized and filmed, use the catalog.

You can use the asterisk (*) as a wildcard to substitute for one or more letters. Searching for Sm*th* will return Smith, Smyth, Smythe, Smeth, and any other similar variations. You can choose to *Match all terms exactly* in your search, if applicable. However, the spelling algorithm works well, so you usually won't have to try searching name by using different spellings. (Slovakian names seem to be the exception!)

The search template can be restricted by batch number or film number. This is valuable if your location of interest has been indexed. For instance, if you want to search in a particular location using a batch number and/or film number in the source reference, you can search for a surname by restricting the search by batch number or film number and locating names of persons with that surname in that location.

Leaving the name fields blank will return all the names in that batch. So it is possible, for instance, to see a list of all the christenings in a particular parish in Europe or all the marriages in a particular county in the time period covered by that batch. This can be an amazing help in researching a location.
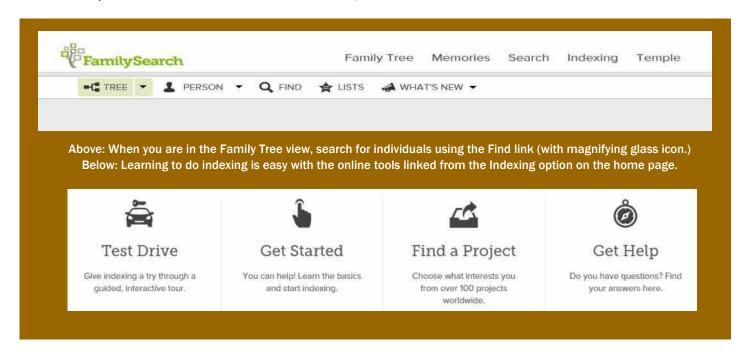
Caution: more than one batch number may be in the indexing project for a single location. If you see a camera icon by the name in the Results list, you can click on it to see the original image.

In the general search template, you can find all the children of particular parents by entering a surname, the location and the names of the parents. Perhaps it's not as quick as rolling a microfilm on a reader, but you can do it in the comfort of your home.

Genealogies

Some pedigrees have been uploaded to FamilySearch through the years; that information has been included in Family Tree, along with the name of the original submitter. You can upload a pedigree with a GEDCOM for inclusion in Family Tree. User-submitted genealogies also are available through the Search link on the site's home page.

Part 2 of this series will be in the March 2015 issue.

Above: When you are in the Family Tree view, search for individuals using the Find link (with magnifying glass icon.)
Below: Learning to do indexing is easy with the online tools linked from the Indexing option on the home page.

Test Drive
Give indexing a try through a guided, interactive tour.

Get Started
You can help! Learn the basics and start indexing.

Find a Project
Choose what interests you from over 100 projects worldwide.

Get Help
Do you have questions? Find your answers here.

How I found it   Mind the gap

By Richard Rands

Every once in a while a gap appears in a lineage. The challenge becomes finding the missing link or links. Because it can be tempting to insert seemingly logical people in the gaps, we need to be purposefully careful to avoid jumping to conclusions without solid evidence.

I say this because I spent many wasted hours researching one of my father's lines after a careless researcher attached an incorrect family to the lineage 75 years ago, which ultimately led to a dead end. Only after I calculated the ages between a son and his purported father did the gap become apparent.

The example here involves the line of a Burnham family member who died 20 years ago in San Mateo County, California. My objective is to trace the Burnham line back to the location of immigration, which, according to family lore, was England.

Paul Frederick Burnham was born in Chicago in 1902. His father, George A. Burnham, was born in Maine in 1874, the son of George W. Burnham, born in 1849, also in Maine. The line can be traced back through extant records in Maine through George O. Burnham, born in 1818, and Noah Burnham, born in 1790.

After that point, the records are no longer solid sources. Noah was born in a town called Parsonsfield, York County, Massachusetts, now Maine. The earliest town and vital records for Parsonsfield listed in the catalog at FamilySearch.org go back only to 1785. I studied the historical and geographical background of the area to determine whether nearby townships might have played a role in Burnham family history.

The land containing Parsonsfield was first purchased from Native Americans in 1668. In 1771, the land was purchased by Thomas Parsons and surveyed into 100-acre lots. In 1785, it was incorporated as Parsonsfield, which was in a section of Massachusetts called York County in the District of Maine. By the time Maine gained statehood in 1820, York County had been divided into nine separate counties. A web search found an article, "History of Parsonsfield, Maine," from *A Gazetteer of the State of Maine* by George J. Varney, published in Boston in 1886 and transcribed by Betsey S. Webber. The article contains a brief history of the town but nothing specific to the Burnham family.

I turned to the amazing, immense collection of free historical information at www.archive.org (not to be confused with commercial site www.archives.com) and discovered a book digitized by the Sloan Foundation, *A History of the First Century of the Town of Parsonsfield, Maine*, written in 1885 for the town's centennial celebration and published in 1888. The entire 500-page book is downloadable and searchable online. A search for mentions of individuals named Burnham gave me more than 20 hits, ranging from a T. W. Burnham who served on one of the many committees that planned the centennial ceremonies to nearly a full page of detailed genealogy of the Burnhams in Parsonsfield .

The Burnham family section begins: "It is asserted on good authority that the first settler in this country by the name of Burnham was one Thomas, who came from England and settled in Ipswich, Mass. From him descended Paul Burnham, of the third generation, who settled here in 1795. He was born in 1760, in Lee, New Hampshire, and married first, Sally Weymouth, and second, Comfort Pease. He died June 2, 1832. By his first wife he had eight children, viz.: Betsy, Abigail, Asa, Noah, Sally, Anna, Polly, and Susannah."

Obviously, this book is not a primary source, but since it had been compiled by a committee of men diligent in their efforts to gather as much historical data as they could,

Listing of the record with the parents' name blank

How I found it *(continued)*

CHILDREN OF SECOND WIFE.

Nancy,	b. Mar. 3, 1803, m.	d. Feb. 7, 1853.
Polly,	b. Mar. 31, 1805, m. May 6, 1829,	d. Feb. 25, 1868.
John,	b. Nov. 29, 1806, m. Oct. 15, 1831, Lydia Burbank,	d.
Julia Ann,	b. Feb. 16, 1809, m.	d.
Comfort M.,	b. Nov. 23, 1813, m.	d.
Joseph,	b. Jan. 5, 1816, m.	d. Aug. 5, 1833.
Susan,	b. Aug. 31, 1819, m. Lafayette Davis,	d. Feb. 27, 1858.

Paul Burnham was a soldier of the revolution. He was born in Epping, N. H., but at the close of the war settled on the farm in Parsonfield, Maine, still in the possession of his descendants.

Details about Paul Burnham in *The Burnham Family* book.

(Continued from page 6)

it provides a good source of details to formulate a possible lineage one generation beyond Noah Burnham, born in 1790, who at that point was my dead end.

Further examination of the extensive text detailed each family member, including Noah's father, Paul, who served in the Revolutionary War as a major, and two of Noah's siblings who married into the Parsons family. However, nowhere in the book was there a hint of the family's link to Thomas Burnham the emigrant.

Suspecting and hoping that this Thomas Burn-ham might be mentioned, I searched typical sources of such information. In the end, a search using Google Books (books.google.com) proved my suspicions accurate when I discovered the downloadable book *The Burnham Family; Or, Genealogical Records of the Descendants of the Four Emigrants of the Name, who Were Among the Early Settlers in America*, by Roderick H. Burnham and published in Massachusetts in 1869.

Genealogical records started on page 29, and the index started on page 521. I hoped that the three-generation gap between Paul and Thomas might be in that span of nearly 500 pages.

Whadya think this is?

Whadya think this is? (Answer is on page 8.)

A. The first X-ACTO knife

B. A saddle maker's tool

C. An instrument for blood letting

D. A 19th century toenail trimmer

E. An instrument used for male circumcision

What didja think it was? And were ya right?

(Continued from page 6.)

Answer: C. An instrument for bloodletting. This device, known as a *fleam*, was used for opening a vein for bloodletting. The screw on the top allows the blade to be retracted and shielded or extended for use. The screw is stamped *Maw London*. Maw worked in isolation in London from 1826 until S Maw & Son started business in 1866. Bloodletting has been used only infrequently in Western medicine since the 1900s.

How I found it *(continued)*

(Continued from page 7)

I downloaded the book and began my quest to fill the gap and track the family's history back to the English Domesday Survey in 1080. For sure, the first emigrant mentioned was Thomas Burnham of Ipswich, who was recorded as serving in the Pequot Expedition in 1636-1637. The Burnham book's genealogy did not reveal a link between Thomas and Paul. However, the index contained an entry for Paul Burnham of Parsonsfield. On pages 459-460 was an entry (see illustrations, newsletter pages 6 and 7).

This appeared to be the same Paul Burnham mentioned in the history of Parsonsfield, but Paul's parentage was blank. Furthermore, this section of the book was called "Burnham Families, who do not, or have neglected to trace their Lineage back to either of the Four Emigrants."

This information, compiled from the Burnham genealogy that was known as of 1869, did not fill the gap but provided a starting point. My task now is to examine the Burnham family genealogies from the book and search for more recent information to complete the missing link in the gap.

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 meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, California (see map at right). SVCGG is not affiliated with any church or other organization.

14 March 2015, 9–11 A.M.
- What's free in Irish research
- The best of RootsTech
- Reunion 10 for the Mac
- Reunion for the Mac Basics
- Getting started in genealogy

11 April 2015, 9–11 A.M.
- Azores/Portuguese research
- Data backup strategies
- Using Ancestral Quest
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting started in genealogy

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

About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVCGG, the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, is a nonprofit group of more than 500 genealogy users. 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 historians 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.