SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder

Hints and misses

By Janet Brigham

Computers are getting smarter and smarter. It can seem that way, when nearly every day we get messages saying that new genealogy matches are waiting for us.

And when we go to a search site, we can view documents that a computer says will match our ancestors.

Other experiences in life convince me that computers are not necessarily that smart, and that algorithms are not necessarily as perceptive as my own thought processes.

For some sites, the matching is done outside my involvement in the site. For example, genealogy site MyHeritage.com continually alerts me to matches, most of which appear to be possible overlaps between my tree and others' trees at MyHeritage.

Am I interested in comparing my tree against others' trees, or in looking for suggestions that might resolve my dead ends? If I am looking for hints and clues, yes. But I have no interest in copying others' undocumented tree information into my tree. The risk of infusing junk genealogy into my genealogy is too high. Why would I risk adding others' possible misinformation in with facts gathered through my own research?

Another type of hints is in the relatively new feature of Record Hints on FamilySearch.org Family Tree, or Suggested Records on Ancestry.com. When you open the Person view in Family Tree, the Record Hints are in a box at the right. In the "Landscape" pedigree view, the existence of record hints is marked by a small brown book/magnifying glass icon:

Record hints and suggestions can save you considerable time. If (big if) a useful record has been digitized and

indexed, you can click on the hint to see if it's applicable. If it is, it can save you having to look up or track down those additional records. This can be particularly welcome if it eliminates the need to

Is this good news?

find census records for other years by going back to select the census years and locations you want. That type of searching can be awkward in FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, and other census sources.
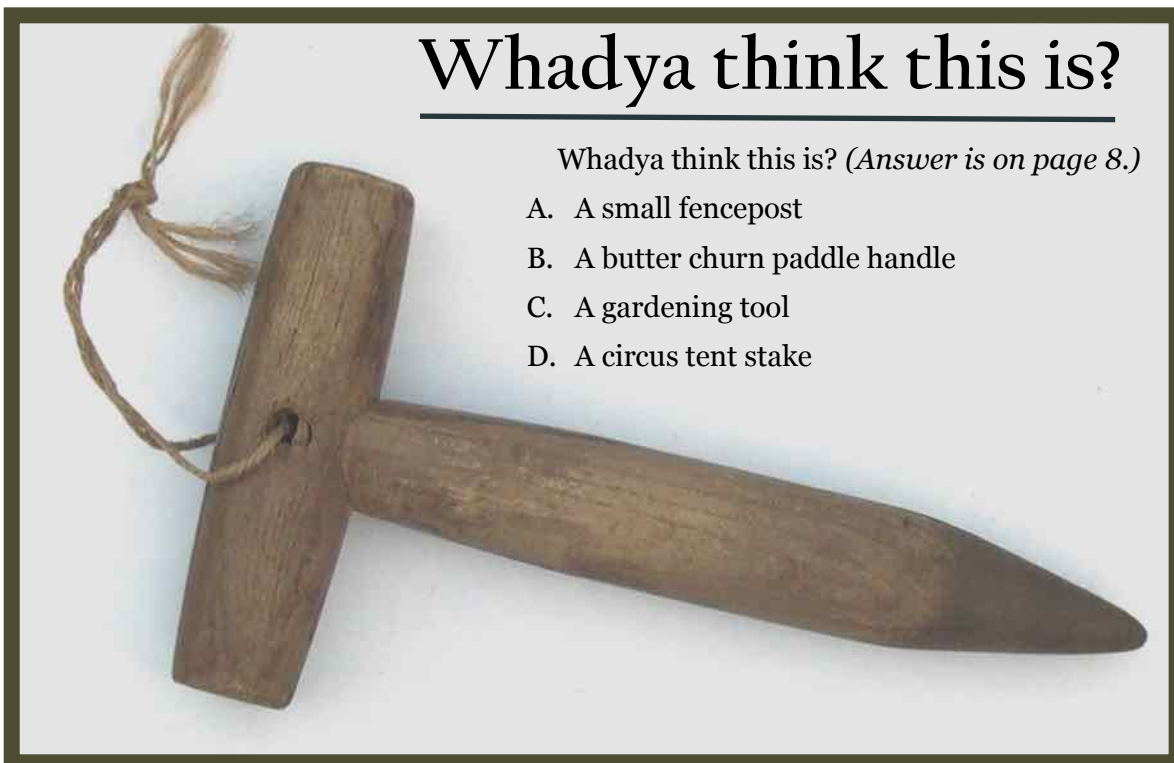
This is not to say that all of the record hints and suggestions will be useful. A recent FamilySearch Record Hints icon brought up numerous hints regarding my maternal grandfather, including records of someone with his name born in Wisconsin (he was from Idaho, which I had specified) and records of a marriage to someone other than his first or second wife.

Outside and Inside

Whadya think this is?

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

A. A small fencepost
B. A butter churn paddle handle
C. A gardening tool
D. A circus tent stake

# Hints and misses *(continued)*

(Continued from page 1)

In defense of computers, a computer program wouldn't necessarily know my grandfather's life story. Also, a user entering search information might not know much about the subject's life. FamilySearch did give me a birth record from Wisconsin — which, as far as I know, is a state he never even visited; but FamilySearch had no way to know or appreciate my certainty.

It pays to open each link and, if possible, view the image of the original document, even if you suspect it might not be a match. Until you view the hinted record, you can't know for sure.

It's less likely at present to find hidden-gem items through this type of record hint — you might not encounter a revealing newspaper snippet. You are more likely to find an indexed census , birth, or marriage document — a document of high enough priority that it has been digitized and indexed.

For all the rest, you still will need to search, old-style.
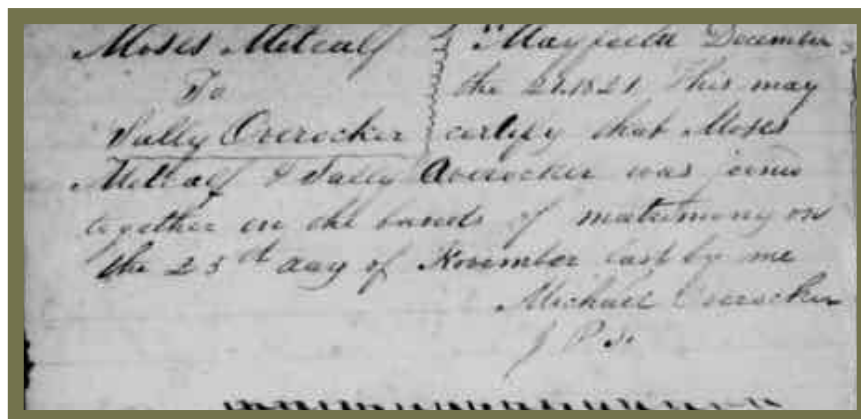
A digitized marriage entry Record Hint in FamilySearch Family Tree

Ask The Doctor

Finding a grave in Findagrave.com

Q **I often search for death information online by using cemetery listing sites, including BillionGraves.com, Interment.net, and Findagrave.com.**

My question is about Find A Grave. I have trouble using their search to find ancestors — sometimes I find a headstone once then can't find it again using the same search names. And then when I find an ancestor's listing, sometimes I want to fix incorrect or missing information. What am I doing wrong?

It probably isn't you. Although Find A Grave is a terrific resource which we use frequently, it has a challenging search engine. When I say *challenging*, I am politely saying that it isn't easy to use.

For example, entering my father's given, middle, and family names, I got no hits. Entering his given and family names with a middle initial resulted in no hits. Entering just the given name and surname resulted in a hit.

The hit came with a big *however*, however. The Doctor was aware — having been involved in ordering the headstone and having photographed it for Find A Grave — that the headstone includes my father's middle initial and his middle name, on different lines. So why is it findable only when the middle initial or middle name is excluded from the search?

Contrary to what you may think, the Doctor cannot answer all questions. The Doctor recognizes good programming, though. In this case, The Doctor recognizes having been spoiled by more sophisticated search engines than that of Find A Grave. The Doctor is used to entering a search term somewhat haphazardly and still getting results — which will happen in major web search engines such as Bing.com and Google.com and on genealogy search sites such as FamilySearch.org.

Think of it this way. Some programming relies on *binary logic*, in which a match either fits or doesn't fit. Looking for the name *Smith*? Binary logic will search relentlessly for those letters *s-m-i-t-h*, and if it finds them will pop them up in the results like an energetic dog that has retrieved a soggy tennis ball.

However, don't expect subtlety from a binary search. It's a bit like a humor-impaired relative who stares blankly at you when you crack a joke. It doesn't make intuitive leaps.

Then there's *fuzzy logic*, which is what we're used to these days. You enter a name, and the search responds with names similar to and remotely resembling what you entered. It searches for a partial match — which is why it's so useful for genealogy searching. When do we ever have all the details? It also allows for spelling variations.

Find A Grave presents various links to Ancestry.com when you get no hits on Find A Grave. This *does not* mean you need to pay for Ancestry to see your Find A Grave hits. It's just advertising.

As for fixing incorrect or missing information, Find A Grave has a process for correcting entries.

Someone at a funeral home provided bizarre information for my father's Find A Grave headstone listing. Under the Find A Grave category *Transcription* was the name *Wilbert Monticello,* who is not a he, he is an it — a type of burial vault. So I edited my father's entry using the Edit tab at the top of the results page. I added birth information and changed the transcription to the actual text on the headstone. I forgot to correct the death date, however.

I'll have to go back and fix that later, because Find A Grave won't let me make additional changes to those I've already submitted for their consideration. (How binary!)

Grave Search Results

Sorry, there are no records in the Find A Grave database matching your query.

If you aren't finding the names you are looking for, try reducing your search criteria. For example if you were searching for Erich Weiss, just enter 'E' for the first name and 'Weiss' for the last name. Come back often as we are adding thousands of new names every day!

The no-hit message from FindAGrave.com can show up even if your ancestor is in the FindAGrave database. Follow the advice and simplify your search.

How I Found It   Missing Maxine

By Richard Rands

Recently I found myself caught up in the search for an individual who appeared to be missing from a family member's obituary.

As I began my usual census analysis for the family of a visitor to the Family History Center using the U.S. Census Collection on Ancestry.com, I first discovered the family in the 1920 census. To my delight, Ancestry's suggested records also presented me with a link to the family's entry in the 1930 U.S. Census.

In addition, the list of suggested records included a link to the husband's listing at Findagrave.com. This link was especially satisfying because if it turned out to be a correct link, it would probably save me a lot of work trying to find him on my own. Because of the large number of spelling variations for both his given name and his surname, I might never have found him at all. (See the Ask the Doctor article, page 3, about Find A Grave searching.)

Surprisingly, the Find A Grave entry contained a transcription of a newspaper obituary. When I compared the list of family members in the obituary to the list of family members in the census records, it was clear that the oldest child in the census had been omitted from the obituary.

It is not unusual for an obituary to list a child who does not appear in a census, because a child may have been born and then died during the ten-year gap between census enumerations. However, a child listed in a census but not in a family member's obituary is an oddity. My curiosity was piqued, and I determined to uncover the mystery behind this anomaly. I suspected a story needed to be revealed.

I wondered what circumstances would lead to omitting a family member from an obituary. Could the family have disowned the child? Did she marry the wrong person? Did she do something evil? Did she move out of the country or disappear? I wanted to get to the bottom of the story of the missing person, one Maxine Myers.

Since my census analysis showed that Maxine had lived in the family household through the 1930 U.S. Census in Iowa, my first step was to find her in the 1940 U.S. Census. From the prior censuses, I deter-

mined that she was born about 1908 in Iowa, so she would be about 31 in 1940. I verified that she was no longer living with her parents in 1940, so I began a lengthy search in the 1940 U.S. Census, using every trick of the trade I could think of. I varied the spelling of the names. I looked for all the Maxines for any surname.

I widened the scope of my search. The birth date range was widened, as was the birth place. I searched in the census collections indexed at FamilySearch.org, which, if you recall, were supposed to be significantly better than other census listings because of the double indexing/arbitration system used for the FamilySearch 1940 Census indexing project. Then I remembered that Iowa had done a state census in 1925 that is considered one of the best state censuses because of its thoroughness.

There I made a useful discovery. Whereas in the U.S. census records Maxine did not have a middle name, or at most was listed as *Maxine L.*, in the Iowa 1925 State Census she was listed as *Lois M.* Knowing that she had a second given name opened a new avenue for research.
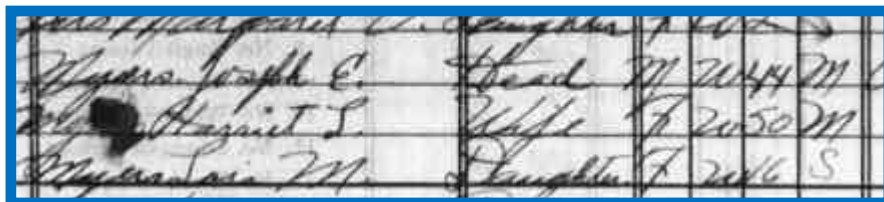
Family entry in the 1925 Iowa census (Ancestry.com)

With that information I was able to find her family in the 1910 U.S. Census with her as a two-year-old. But more importantly, I was able to do a better search in the 1940 U.S. Census. Still, the only hit that popped up for her in 1940 was in Alaska!

Alaska was still a territory in 1940, but the census was quite complete — it had her correct name, correct age, and correct birth place, but it listed California as her residence in 1934. Her occupation was listed as a teacher in the territorial school associated with the Alaskan Railroad Corporation. I was skeptical. A woman who had lived in her parents' home until she was at least 21, ending up in Alaska by way of California? It needed further research.

Family entry in the 1940 U.S. Census for Alaska, showing a lodger named Maxine L. Myers from Iowa (Ancestry.com)

So I turned to newspapers. To my surprise, the local newspapers in the Iowa county where she had grown up were readily available at the site Newspaperarchive.com. The local news columns in those issues recorded what seemed like every birthday party Maxine attended, every sleepover she had with grandparents, and every visit to or by a distant relative.

It was clear that through Maxine's adulthood, she was an integral part of her family, both with her parents, and with her sisters. Maxine's story was beginning to take shape, but I still could not tell how she was omitted from the obituary.

Then a local Iowa newspaper article in 1938 brought the search into focus. It reported that Maxine was home visiting her parents (who were named in the article) after teaching school for two years in Kodiak, Alaska, and was about to leave for California to visit her two sisters (who also were named), after

Maxine Myers, who has been teaching in Kodiak, Alaska, for the past two years has been visiting her parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Myers, of Afton, for the last two weeks. She left Tuesday to visit her sisters, Josephine Myers and Mrs. Catherine Navarra, in Los Angeles before returning to Alaska, where she will teach in the government school at Palmer.

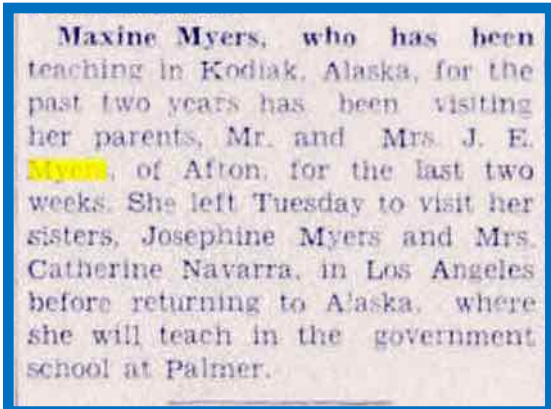Article from the *Creston News Advertiser*, 30 June 1938, Union County, Iowa

which she would return to Alaska, where she would begin a new job teaching in the territorial schools. Every bit of skepticism I had about the 1940 U.S. Census record was wiped out by one newspaper clipping. Even the California notation made sense. That sort of discovery doesn't happen often.

As I built a timeline of the events relating to Maxine's life, it became evident that she had been in Seattle, Washington, when World War II broke out, and she had married an officer named Charles S. Decker. After having two children, she and Charles divorced, and she then appeared in records from a variety of places, including towns in Alaska, Iowa, and Montana, where she had served as a teacher.

In 1950 the story took an interesting turn when she remarried Charles S. Decker when they both were residents of Helena, Montana. I wondered if this was a coincidence, or if Charles had moved there to win her back.

I never did figure out why Maxine was omitted from the obituary – perhaps we will learn that as we contact living descendants. Indeed, one living descendant remembers "Aunt Max" when he was a child, but she was thought of as being much older than the other aunts, and was not as frequent a visitor, so he did not remember her well. It is possible that Maxine was left off the obituary simply because the person who provided information for it didn't have any information about Maxine.

In any case, Maxine's marriage, divorce, and remarriage to the same man was a revelation to the surviving extended family.

HistoryLines

A review of a new online tree approach

By Pamela Brigham

Around the beginning of this year, I started getting emails from a new site called **History Lines.com**. They were looking for volunteers to test their beta website – I happily volunteered. Over the next several months, I joined many other users testing the website and provided feedback. In mid-April, HistoryLines opened the website to the public. I wanted to take some time to review what it provides for genealogists.

The site has several pros and cons. Although it is another option for creating an online tree, it's a lot more than that. You can enter basic information about an ancestor or import information (either by GEDCOM or by a link with your tree at Family-Search Family Tree). Once an ancestor's information is in place, you can create a printable life story about the ancestor, enhanced with editable historical context provided by the program.

Let's start with the pros of the website. The first pro is that the site provides **historical context** for your ancestor. This is key for genealogists to understand what an ancestor's life was like during their lifetime. The site provides information on childhood, medicine, transportation, religion, politics, and many other categories. All of these reflect the time in which your ancestor lived. This means that you will get important clues about what was happening during your ancestor's life, and these clues can help provide paths of additional research.

For example, my Great-Uncle Harrison Brigham was born in Idaho in 1888, when the agricultural industry thrived. This suggests that I might look for land records for a farm for him or his relatives.

Each section of the story generated by History-Lines is a text box that can be edited. This allows you to customize the life story of your ancestor. HistoryLines provides the information about agriculture, to which I can add specific information about my ancestor's land holdings.

You can also add sections to the story. For example if you want to include a digital copy of your ancestor's obituary, you could add that image and the text into a box labeled *Obituary*. This information then will show up in the timeline and the map of the site.

A second pro is that the site provides a **clickable timeline** for each ancestor. The timeline integrates the life events of the person (including birth, marriage, children's births, and deaths), and the major events of the location as well. Below the timeline is a listing of how the spouse, parents, and children fit within the timeline. This is useful for easily seeing what major events happened during an ancestor's lifetime.

Another good feature of the timeline is that everything is clickable. You can click on the name of each person listed below the timeline to navigate to a
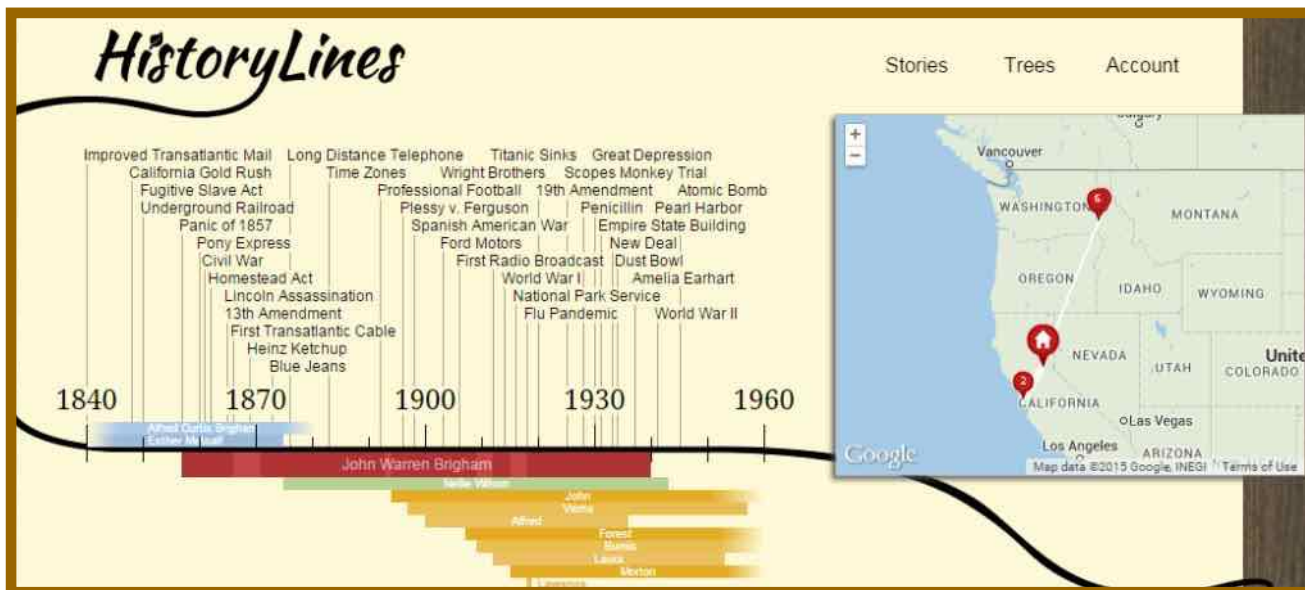
HistoryLines review *(continued)*

person's information. You also can click on each event within the timeline, and a box with information on that event will come up. These boxes offer choices of editing, closing, scrolling, or providing feedback. The timeline provides visual cues for seeing how events may have affected your ancestors.

A third pro is the **clickable map** with clickable pins for each of your ancestor's major events. Clicking on a pin brings up a box listing events that happened in that location for your ancestor. You can then click on an event listing for more information. As does the timeline, it allows you to edit, close, scroll to, or provide feedback about the information.

A fourth positive feature is **saving and printing the life story for sharing.** This is both a pro and a con. The site does allow you to print and save the life story to a PDF file. This is great if you want to share this file with other family members. The only con to this is there's no customization for the PDF file.

The first four pros are really about once you're working in the site. The next pro pertains to just getting started with the site. The site allows you multiple ways to create or import a family tree into the site. You can either enter the data by hand, import a GEDCOM, or connect to FamilySearch Family Tree. The site makes it easy to add a tree so that you can see your ances-

This variety of topics can be included automatically in an ancestor's story, and you can enter any other information.

For a limited time, HistoryLines is offering SVCGG members a 30% discount on subscriptions. Use code SVCGG2015 when entering subscription information at HistoryLines.com:

https://historylines.com/subscribe.jsp?coupon_code=SVCGG2015

tor in historical context. Unlike in FamilySearch Family Tree, HistoryLines allows you to have multiple trees (as would be the case at some other tree sites, including Ancestry and MyHeritage). This makes sharing reasonable.

Once you add a tree, you can either click on the tree symbol within an ancestor's name box to view that person's tree or you can click on the book symbol to view the life story. The tree is easily navigable, similar to other online trees. A search box makes it easy to find names as well.

The last and certainly not least pro is **the responsiveness of the support team for the site**. If you leave them feedback and ask any question, they are very quick to respond with answers. I haven't had any difficulty getting a quick answer for any feedback I've submitted to them. This is unusual among online genealogy sites.

The site definitely has more pros than cons, but it does have a few issues that the support team is continuing to work on.

The first of these is dealing with sources and notes. If you've been doing family research for some time, then your GEDCOM file might contain a lot of sources and perhaps extensive notes. HistoryLines currently doesn't do anything with either of these. They retain all of the information in the GEDCOM files, suggesting that the information will be accessible at some point. The HistoryLines team is deciding exactly what to do with this information.

The next con is that there's currently no way to export a GEDCOM file. If you create a tree by hand or add people to an imported tree on this site, then you

What didja think it was? Were ya right?

(Answer to question on page 2:)

C. A gardening tool, specifically, a *dibble*, also called a *dibber*. Its documented use dates back to the Romans. It is used for digging a hole in soil so that a seed/seeds can be dropped into the hole for planting. Dibbles can be made of metal, wood, or plastic. An advantage of the pictured T-handled dibble is that is allows even pressure and, consequently, consistent hole depth.

HistoryLines (continued)

can't later easily export those data to be used in another tree. This is something the History Lines team hadn't initially envisioned being part of the product; however, based on user feedback they are now looking into implementing this in the future.

The last con is more of a minor annoyance than anything else.

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.

9 May 2015, 9–11 A.M.

- History of marriage, for genealogy researchers
- Bringing your family history to life
- Using Ancestral Quest
- Reunion 11 overview
- Getting started in genealogy

13 June 2015, 9–11 A.M.

- Finding a missing person
- Archiving photos
- Using Ancestral Quest
- Reunion 11 for the Mac
- Reunion 11 basics
- Getting started in genealogy

When you first import a tree from FamilySearch, the site downloads seven generations of ancestors in a direct line from the home person. It initially doesn't download siblings, spouses, or children of those ancestors. This means that when you first start working on those lines, you can spend time waiting for the site to pull in more information from Family Search. Once the information is there, the tree can be navigated readily.

On a final note, this is a subscription site that launched in mid-April. The current price is $59/year. Members of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy group can receive a discount to the site (see box on page 7).

Overall, the site is worth using just to get a historical context for any family member. It can provide clues for where to look for additional information. And for a history buff, it provides the story of what was happening during your ancestor's lifetime.

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.

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