Future of FamilySearch Family Tree

Ron Tanner, Group Product Owner

FamilySearch
tannerr@familysearch.org

Introduction

Today FamilySearch provides the website new.familysearch.org to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and invited public users. The site was built to allow for users to work together to build a common pedigree. This session will discuss the future of this site and the tree it provides. The future tree will be referred to as the Family Tree.

Family Tree Site

The Family Tree will be integrated into the existing www.familysearch.org website. The existing new.familysearch.org site will redirect the users to Family Tree on www.familysearch.org. The reason for this move is two-fold: 1) to consolidate all FamilySearch tools and products into a single site, and 2) to open the Family Tree to all users of www.familysearch.org, including public users.

Evolution to Family Tree

Family Tree provided on www.familysearch.org will behave differently and have new features than what is provided in the current new.familysearch.org website. In this evolution, the team is working to resolve current constraints and improve usability and genealogical soundness of the tree.

The goal of the Family Tree is to gather the most accurate, sourced, and complete genealogy that can be found and to make this information freely available to everyone, preserving this data for generations to come. By sharing this information, it is hoped that research will no longer be duplicated and the efforts of those interested in family history can be focused on finding new ancestors.

new.familysearch.org Constraints

Today the common pedigree provided through new.familysearch.org presents a model where everyone can gather and record all of their individual facts about an ancestor. The system also prevents one user from changing another user's facts. Many facts on an ancestor come from entries in previously submitted genealogies found in Ancestral File or Personal Resource File. Consequently, there may be data on the ancestor that users of the system know is incorrect, but they are unable to fix the data because they are not the owners of this information.

Additionally, new.familysearch.org provided source forms to be entered when a user adds a fact to an ancestor. Often multiple facts can be validated from the same source, yet the system

requires that the user re-enter the source information for each fact that is added, even if the source information is identical.
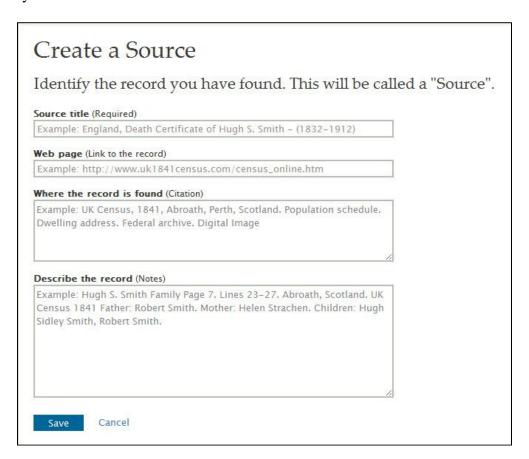
Family Tree Evolution

The Family Tree on www.familysearch.org evolves the user experience into a different model where users provide conclusions about an ancestor, along with re-usable sources to validate those conclusions. The Family Tree will be more collaborative and open, allowing users to fix erroneous data, even if they did not contribute that information.

Emphasis on Sourcing

As the system desires to move towards accuracy and completeness about an ancestor, there must be more and better sourcing to provide evidence that the conclusions are the most correct at this time. All should recognize that a conclusion is valid until additional evidence is found that may require a re-analysis and potential change to that conclusion. Consequently, sources are the basis for sound genealogy and conclusions.

The FamilySearch Family tree will introduce new sourcing that will allow reuse of sources that users can create and attach to ancestors and attributes (such as birth, death, christening, etc.). Each of these sources may be reused and attached to multiple ancestors and attributes within the system.

A FamilySearch source will also allow you to reference an image that may be found on the Internet and in the future will allow users to upload any saved images directly into the system.

Open Editing

Open editing allows all users to correct any data, removing the constraints that prevented users from fixing data in new.familysearch.org. In Family Tree, the emphasis initially will be conclusions rather than all user facts or opinions. For example, there will be only one preferred name, gender, birth, christening, and death conclusion on an ancestor.

When editing, the user is presented with screens that show them the current values, contributor, and justification for the conclusion. Should the users choose to modify the conclusion, they just edit the existing values and update the justification. When the conclusion is saved, the modifier will now become the contributor of this new information. All changes are seen by all users of the system.

Change Log

With open editing, there is a need to allow users to easily recover from erroneous editing, either because the changes were wrong or improperly sourced to show their validity. Consequently, Family Tree will include a new Change Log feature, where all changes are recorded on an ancestor and where a user can recover previous values that were erroneously edited.

Collaboration Features

In order to have a healthy system where all are working together, sharing information, and searching for sources that will result in sound conclusions, it is imperative that the system provide features that allow users to discuss and coordinate their work. FamilySearch Family Tree will initially include several collaboration features and then continue to add more in an effort to facilitate genealogical work.

Current collaboration features include Discussions and Watch or Notify.

Discussions

In order to facilitate communication (without the need to use e-mail systems), the Family Tree will continue to provide discussions. In discussions, users may post a discussion note and then

get collaborative comments on that post. Through this mechanism, users may talk about various information that is found and how to come to a common conclusion about certain facts regarding the shared ancestor.

Watch or Notify

Watch or Notify allows users to request notifications through e-mail when identified ancestors are changed. This allows users to go and review any changes on these ancestors and then respond accordingly if the change is valid or not.

Conclusion

The FamilySearch Family Tree, which will be included in the www.familysearch.org website, will allows all users to correct any bad data or source conclusions, and they can collaborate on ancestors in an attempt to reduce research duplication and to preserve for generations that most accurate representation of common ancestors.