

Toolbox for the Modern 2023 Genealogist

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Genealogy Tools – Categories:

- Hardware
- Software
- Big Genealogy Search Engines
- Specialty Online Sites
- Specialty Offline Data
- The “Data Finding” Sites
- DNA Results
- Genealogy Learning Tools

The genealogy world has had sweeping changes in the past few years, with new sites, new data collections, new helpful features and apps, and the whole new world of DNA.

1. Hardware – a Desktop Computer and a Printer/Scanner

- A desktop computer is the preferred option because there are so many times you need to view data on a large screen, certainly larger than an I—Phone or a tablet
- Use an I-Phone as a secondary option –but transfer your data to your desktop computer
- Paper records can now be minimal because a scanner can copy those paper records
- Either a PC or MAC will work for you

2. Software –

- You will need a specialized genealogy software program to build and maintain your family tree – any of the major brands will work, such as Roots Magic, Family Tree Maker, or Legacy
- You can probably put your entire family tree into a single file – I have over 30,000 people in mine Some people prefer to have separate trees for their maternal and paternal sides.
- You can use your software to use a GEDCOM file to copy your tree on to the major search engine sites such as Ancestry and Family Search.
- You will probably want to keep the tree on your own computer as your “official and accurate” file. Other people can make changes to some of the posted trees, so if your tree is only on a site such as Family Search it may get changed without your knowledge or approval.
- **BE SURE TO BACK UP YOUR FAMILY TREE DATA REGULARLY, BECAUSE IT IS LIKELY THAT YOU WILL SOME DAY HAVE A COMPUTER CRASH.**
- Use your scanner to attach photos and documents to people in your tree.
- Use Word files to keep notes on your ongoing research so you will have an easy to find record of your research activities.
- Use Word files to keep track of your DNA results.

3. The Big Genealogy Search Engines

- Ancestry, Family Search, My Heritage, Find My Past, and Google.
- Family Search is the large free site owned by the LDS Church. It has the largest microfilm collection (now digitized) in the world consisting of many data collections.
- It is useful for you to copy your family tree on Family Search, because Family Search might add further data that they have that links to your own data.
- This new data may be useful; however, you will want to double-check to see that it links correctly. Be sure the new data is well sourced and accurate.

- Banyan Tree example. Our tree will have many branches going upward, that is, from one ancestor to the next ancestor, and so on. The tree will likewise have many, many more relatives going downward, that is, the children of certain ancestors – and then their children – and their children. Family Search can be a huge asset in finding those “new” downward relatives.
- Following on in the example of the ancestor with 14 children, Family Search can help us find hundreds of those downward relatives.
- Family Search has many data collections that can be accessed: BMD data; property records; etc. An I-Phone can be used for these functions.
- Defining an ancestral location is important because useful records may likely be found in that location. Use the Family Search catalog to find data for specific towns and counties.
- Ancestry is the biggest and most used genealogy site. Plan to make a lot of use of it. Ancestry has many data collections. Some time ago, Ancestry made a deal with Family Search to be able to have access to all of Family Search’s data.
- Ancestry is user-friendly, has easy access to US census data and immigration data. When focusing on an individual, the Public Trees are often useful. Typically, Ancestry will have many more entries for a given individual than Family Search.
- Using Ancestry in conjunction with Family Search is a great combo.
- My Heritage is the 3rd largest genealogy search engine. It has huge data collections, has a strong international flavor, is user-friendly, and is growing rapidly. It may have data not found on either Ancestry or Family Search.
- Find My Past is the 4th largest genealogy search engine, and is especially useful for British people.
- Google is useful not only as a general purpose search engine but a genealogy search engine. Many people post genealogy data on the internet but not on the 4 big genealogy sites. Google can find these postings, which are much larger in number than those found on the Big 4 sites.
- Google also has a number of apps that are useful for genealogy. Google also has an Advanced Search capability that works well with genealogy research.

4. Specialty Online Data Sites and Collections

- Many genealogy sites are focused on a single topic. These sites run the gamut in their topical coverage. Topics covered by specific sites include: newspapers; books; different regions, or different time periods.
- The many Family Search centers have access to 17 of these sites for free through its “portal.”
- Examples of the specialty sites include: Ellis Island; Myersgaz.com; Library of Congress; Kartenmeister; Find a Grave; and American Ancestors.
- Gina Philibert-Ortega has given a presentation on Legacy Webinars where she lists 50 useful genealogy sites.
- You may find some specific sites that are pertinent for your particular research, such as certain regional sites.

5. Offline Genealogy Data

- Even though the internet has a ton of genealogy data, there is still a huge supply of data that is not yet available on the internet.
- Examples include: historic newspapers; books; military pension data; probate and will data.
- Government data has traditionally been slower to get digitized.
- You can find good offline data at some of the larger genealogy libraries, such as the SLC FHL, at the San Francisco Sutro library, and at Government locations; and at on-site data locations.

6. Genealogy “Data Finding” Sites

- Family Search Wiki, Linkpendium, Cyndi’s List, Google.
- The Family Search Wiki family has over 96,000 articles on almost every topic imaginable. It is like an online encyclopedia that lists every possible genealogy topic and then tells what data is available to research that topic.
- Linkpendium is a bit more restricted in its scope. It groups its data by US states and counties – and also surnames. It may find slightly different groups of data than the Family Search Wiki.
- Cyndi’s List is a comprehensive list of virtually all genealogy sites grouped into different categories. If you are looking for data for a given county, these three sites should give you what you need.
- As we discussed when we were talking about the Big Genealogy search engines, Google has a special place because it may find genealogy postings that none of the other sites would even know about.

7. DNA Data

- DNA is the newcomer to this list of tools. As recently as 10 years ago, Ancestry didn’t even offer the DNA test; as recently as 5 years ago, DNA was still small potatoes. But not so today.
- Over 30 million people have taken DNA tests, and there are enough DNA results for so many people that DNA analysis has become an important part of genealogy research.
- Numerous people have found key genealogy data. Some adopted people have found their kin. Some people have found new close relatives.
- In my case, I have been able to confirm the validity of my paper tree, but more important I have found enough solid DNA results to extend my tree for several different sub-family groups. Also, I found one major Non-Parental Event that changed my biological analyses.
- To be successful with DNA results, first take the Ancestry test because they have by far the largest database; then transfer your results for free to the other major sites, My Heritage, FTDNA, and GEDMATCH. With some effort, you should be able to break down some brick walls.
- The deeper your paper tree is, the better chance you will have of getting good DNA results.

8. Genealogy Learning Tools

- Beginners can benefit from some “one-on-one” instruction from a friend or from a volunteer at a Family Search center or at a local genealogy society.
- “Learn by doing” is an important principle, and applies here.
- We are now living in a rapidly changing genealogy world, with new sites, new features and apps, and especially significant changes in the DNA world. We need to keep abreast of those happenings.
- To stay current, it is useful to pay attention to some genealogy blogs, classes, or webinars.
- For Webinars, Legacy Family Tree is the gold standard. They have the best and most webinars, over 1,800 covering a wide range of topics. Roots Tech is also a major webinar group, adding over 200 each year. Family Search and the BYU Family Search center each have a lot of webinars, and all are free. You Tube, owned by Google, has over 500 webinars.