

# Use new tools to find old relatives!

By Bruce A. Love

If you know anyone who has been bitten by the genealogy bug, you know someone truly obsessed. It has been 18 months since my wife first became afflicted, and her condition appears serious. She caught the bug from my mother, who was exposed to it several years ago when our family was “discovered” by a similarly afflicted, yet previously unknown, distant cousin. Through the combined efforts of these obsessed individuals, our family tree has now grown to include over 1500 relatives, with some tree branches dating back over 500 years.

Genealogy is the study of family, and the identification of ancestors and their pertinent information. It is one of the fastest growing and most popular hobbies today, but its origins go back to the dawn of civilization. In the book of Numbers, from the Old Testament, the Lord instructs Moses to conduct a census, a fundamental tool used by genealogical enthusiasts. In the two books of Chronicles, also from the Bible, the results of the census are reported and describe who begat whom. Throughout history, family heredity has influenced status and power, and has even been the cause of some notorious feuds and wars. For these reasons, genealogy can be both educational and interesting.

In the past, digging up old relatives has required lots of correspondence, and trips to the Bureaus of Vital Statistics, cemeteries, and Family History Centers. Recently, however, Internet technology has enabled genealogists to conduct much of their research online. Some very useful Internet tools are free, while others require paid subscriptions. One free tool that offers immigration details is the Ellis Island web site ([www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org)). On this web site, you can search for ancestors and view ship manifests, which provide names and details of immigrants. You can also view photographs of the boat on which your ancestor arrived!

Other free resources include [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and [www.RootsWeb.com](http://www.RootsWeb.com). On FamilySearch, researchers can enter ancestor names and dates (if known) and often find relatives online along with the names of the

ancestor’s parents, siblings, and children! RootsWeb offers similar capabilities, plus it also provides message boards that can be viewed, and used to post inquiries about ancestors. Message boards are also a good place to find living relatives looking for the same shared ancestry.

After developing your genealogical skills using the free online services, you may want to sign up for a free (usually 2-week) trial of a subscription-based service such as Ancestry.com or Genealogy.com (or both). These very powerful search tools will enable you to research census records, death indices, and other miscellaneous databases. You can also use Ancestry.com for free at your local Family History Center. Family History Centers are affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons). The Mormon religion places special significance on family history and, as a result, has become the keepers, and transcribers of various genealogical records found online.

As you start to assemble your family history, you will need a way to organize your findings. There are several computer programs that are designed specifically for this task. Family Tree Maker (the most popular Genealogical software), for instance, accommodates every type of family relationship, and accepts narrative text, sound, and even digitized video. These programs place your family tree at your fingertips and enable you to print reports and trees in a variety of formats.

If you become infected by the genealogical bug, you will soon be finding cousins by the dozens. As a family historian, you will soon discover that when you shake the family tree, you must be prepared to gather the nuts that inevitably fall out. These are the colorful individuals that make family history interesting.

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