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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder

My ancestor was born...when?

By Allin Kingsbury

A date of birth is probably the second most used item of information for uniquely identifying a person. Without a birth date, it is easy to confuse persons of the same name and end up with the wrong family.

Research in medieval time is extremely difficult, because in a period before church records or any other source of birth dates, it is difficult to establish a reliable age. Many an age from this period are estimated from probate records based on the information about spouses, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Birth data from church records

If an individual was born in more recent times, ample sources might give a date of birth. The earliest records are usually church records, except for royalty whose birth dates were

recorded by historians and preserved. In most Christian countries, church records were required by law to be kept and preserved. The records often begin in the Fourteenth Century, but the earliest records vary in starting date from country to country. A few



European countries, such as Iceland, have church records that begin much earlier. The early church records for the Roman Catholic Church are recorded in Latin, the official language of

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The English Jurisdictions File: Now online and interactive (!)

By Richard Rands

While working at the Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City some years ago, I came across a wonderful computerized tool called the English Jurisdictions File. For anyone who had been researching in English parish records, it was a pain in the neck to remember which reference books contained the various details pertinent to parish research. For example, you had to look in one place to see when the registers and transcripts were first started, another place to find out if a parish had nonconformist congregations, and yet another place to find out which civil registration district the parish belonged to. Much to my great relief, the staff at the FHL had collected

all that type of information and much more for all twelve thousand plus English parishes into a single Excel spreadsheet.

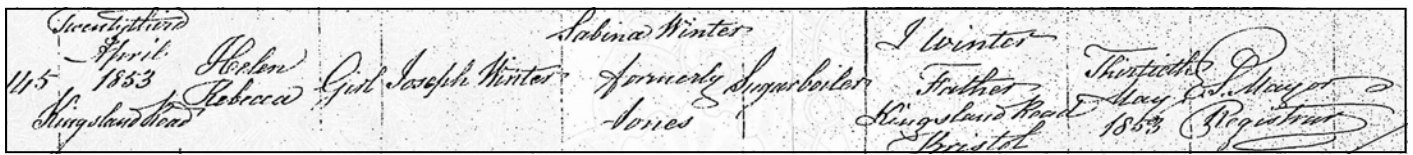
However, since the file was available only in an expensive Microsoft format, the library staff was not at liberty to

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Outside and inside

- Find birth records from any U. S. state, and locate those available through the Internet, above, and pages 2 through 5
- Using the new interactive English Jurisdictions File online, above and page 7
- A potpourri of new and familiar providers of genealogy ideas, services, software, and enthusiasm, page 6

My ancestor was born...when? (continued)



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the church. Birth dates were not recorded in the early records, but christening dates, usually a few days to a few months after birth, were recorded and are the best available substitute for an actual birth date.

Government records

Government birth registration of births did not begin until much later. The towns of New England began the practice of recording births in the town minutes as these towns were formed. The practice was not universal within the New England colonies, and was not done in all the other American colonies. The requirement for vital statistics began with births and death records in the Nineteenth Century, but varied from state to state.

For a few states and counties, birth registration did not begin until the early Twentieth Century. Even though laws were passed requiring birth registration, full compliance with the laws was not achieved until years later. In some states, counties began registration of births before state registration. It is best to check for these records if the county of birth is known.

The U.S. Census asked the age of each individual, starting with the 1850 Census. The accuracy of census records is only as good as the informants' knowledge.

Other sources

Family records such as Bibles, manuscripts, letters, and other documents can be good sources of birth, marriage, and death dates. The problem is finding these documents. They could be passed down to a living family

member, the birth date is more likely to be correct.

Monument inscriptions, cemetery records, death notices in newspapers, and obituaries also may provide the birth date or age of the deceased. The problem with these sources is that the information may not be preserved, and the records may be difficult to locate. Cemetery markers weathered with age and broken stones were often removed and not replaced. Newspapers with obituaries and death notices seldom are indexed and may be scattered. Efforts are underway to digitize old newspapers and put them online, some on subscription sites and some free.

Military records are a good source for birth information. World War I and World War II draft registration cards give the full birth date and place of birth. Pension applications, particularly those for the Civil War, have not only the birth date for the veteran, but may have birth dates of the veteran's children and spouse.

Family trees

Compiled genealogies are the most easily obtained source of birth dates. The accuracy of the data is dependent on the quality of the research. A spot check of a few of the dates can give an indication of accuracy. If sources are listed, and if primary sources are listed for the birth dates, the information may be reliable. If

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PARIS ANCIEN

Naissance

NOM Descurie Polot

Prénoms Clotilde Eugénie

Né à 71^e

Le 23 Janvier 1855

Légitime par mariage à Becon

En date du 23 mai 1863

Nom du père Henri François Descurie

Nom de la mère

Observations

member; donated to a library, museum, or historical society; or destroyed. These documents can be a source of important historical data not found elsewhere.

Births from death records

A death certificate usually has a birth date. The accuracy of the date will depend on the knowledge of the informant. When the informant is a

dates and places are missing, the data may have been copied from the research of another person, with possible transcription errors in the process. One thing to check is whether christening dates from parish registers are incorrectly entered as birth dates. Another thing to check is

Vital records from the state of Texas were free online about a year ago, but now Texas has limited the information and charges for access services.

missing dates after 1850, which might easily be found in a census or other published, searchable records. If the author did not bother with easily available sources, this is an indication that the research might not be thorough.

Sloppy research does not necessarily generate bad data, but the data may be incomplete. I use it cautiously until it can be verified and corrected. The only penalty I have had to pay has been undoing misconnected linkages when unrelated individuals were assumed to be the same person. I have had to delete parts of families found later to be wrong. The time lost in these instances was more than offset by the time saved by finding good information found by others.

Compiled family trees are available in large numbers at FamilySearch, Ancestry, RootsWeb, and similar sites. For individuals living in the United States during the 1800s, I have been able to find most of my family in at least one family tree. I have not

computed the percent of family members found, but the percent likely is greater than 95%, and probably closer to 98%.

Birth dates for living people

Birth dates for living people can be found on several Internet sites. These include:

- **www.classmates.com.** This site lists members of graduating classes for many high schools. The age at graduation is usually 17 or 18. The site has some pictures.
- **www.peopleSearchUSA.com.** This site is for finding living people and will give the full name, age, residence, and possible relatives. Other sites do similar searches.
- **www.birthdatabase.com.** This site lists full birth dates for a name that you enter. It does not always find a birth date for a living person. When it finds the date that you request, it has a complete birth date. A site called publicrecordcenter.com does a similar search.
- **www.facebook.com and other social networking sites.** Some individuals list an age on their social networking site pages. Ages are not necessarily accurate.

Birth certificates

Birth certificates are considered the most reliable source for a birth date. In many states, access to birth certificates is now restricted to near relatives such as parents, spouse, siblings, or children. In other states, the person requesting a birth certifi-



cate may be asked for identification and may be asked to state the purpose of the request.

Table 1 lists the availability of birth certificates by state. There is considerable variation from state to state. For other countries, an Internet search may be helpful in locating the information needed to obtain a copy of a birth certificate.

Table 2 lists some birth information sources on the Internet. This information is constantly changing, both because of records being added and records becoming unavailable.

For example, vital records from the state of Texas were free online about a year ago, but now Texas has limited the information and charges for access services. On the other hand, FamilySearch and Ancestry are continually adding records to their sites.

Counties, cities and towns kept birth records, and some of these records are available online. An online search for birth records by the state and county should find such records if they exist.

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My ancestor was born...when? *(continued)*

Table 1. State-issued birth certificates

State	Time covered	Comments	State	Time covered	Comments
Alabama	From 1908		Missouri	From 1909	
Alaska	From 1913		Montana	From 1907	
Arizona	From 1909		Nebraska	From 1904	
Arkansas	From 1914		Nevada	From 1911	
California	From 1905		New Hampshire	From 1905	Some back to 1640
Colorado	From 1910		New Jersey	From 1923	
Connecticut	From 1897		New Mexico	From 1923	Some from 1889
Delaware	From 1920		New York	From 1881	Except NYC, Albany, Buffalo, Yonkers, from city
Dist. of Columbia	From 1874		North Carolina	From 1913	Full compliance by 1920
Florida	From 1917		North Dakota	From 1923, 1893 — 1895	
Georgia	From 1919		Ohio	From 1908	Some earlier records
Hawaii	From 1911	Delayed birth certificates	Oklahoma	From 1917	Early years incomplete
Idaho	From 1911		Oregon	From 1903	15 counties' early records at state arch.
Illinois	From 1916		Pennsylvania	From 1906	Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Erie, Scranton, from city
Indiana	From 1907		Rhode Island	From 1894	Earlier records at state archive
Iowa	From 1880		South Carolina	From 1915	
Kansas	From 1911		South Dakota	From 1905	
Kentucky	From 1911		Tennessee	From 1914	
Louisiana	From 1910		Texas	From 1903	
Maine	From 1923		Utah	From 1905	
Maryland	From 1950		Vermont	From 1991	Earlier records at state archive
Massachusetts	From 1906	1841—1905 at state archive	Virginia	From 1912	
Michigan	From 1867		Washington	From 1907	
Minnesota	From 1900	County records from 1870	West Virginia	From 1917	
Mississippi	From 1912		Wisconsin	From 1909	
			Wyoming	From 1907	

Table 2. Internet sources for birth records and indexes

State	Site	URL	Years
Arizona (index)	state	genealogy.az.gov/	1855 – 1934
California	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1905 – 1995
Connecticut	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	pre-1970
Delaware	familysearch.org	www.labs.familysearch.org	1861 – 1908
Illinois	archives	www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/birthintro.html and	pre-1916
Cook County	familysearch.org	labs.familysearch.org	
Indiana	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1871 – 1922
Massachusetts (by town)	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	pre-1850
Michigan	familysearch.org	www.labs.familysearch.org	1867 – 1902
Michigan	familysearch.org	www.labs.familysearch.org	1900-present
Minnesota (index)	historical society	people.mnhs.org//bci/	1935 – 2002
Missouri	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1851 – 1910
New Hampshire	familysearch.org	www.labs.familysearch.org	early – 1900
North Carolina	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1800 – 2000
Rhode Island	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1636 – 1930
South Dakota	state ancestry.com	www.doh.sd.gov/VitalRecords/ and www.ancestry.com	pre-1910 1856 – 1903
Texas	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1903 – 1997
Utah	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1895 – 1905
Vermont	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1909 – 2008
Washington	ancestry.com	www.ancestry.com	1891 – 1919
West Virginia	familysearch.org	www.labs.familysearch.org	1828 – 1907
Wisconsin	historical society	www.wisconsinhistory.org/vitalrecords	pre-1907



Connections: A potpourri of services and software

Listed here are some of the organizations featuring their services and products at the 2010 National Genealogical Society conference. Some are new, some are commercial, and some may meet your needs:

AGES-Online

Internet family tree builder
www.ages-online.com

Ancestor Detective, LLC

Creator of Clooz software for organizing genealogy records
www.clooz.com

Ancestor Tracks

Early Pennsylvania landowner maps and landownership information
www.ancestortracks.com

Ancestral Atlas

A location-based networking website for mapping, searching, and sharing family history
www.ancestralatlas.com

AncestralHunt.com

Web-based collaboration site for location-based strategies
www.ancestralhunt.com

Ancestry Games

Customized games to teach and promote family history
www.ancestrygames.com

Archive CD Books

Makes digital reproductions of old books available to the public
www.archivecdbooksusa.com

Brookhaven Press

Digitizes and reprints histories
www.brookhavenpress.com

Bureau of Land Management

Automation of land records; view, print, request documents
www.glorerecords.blm.gov

Criminal Research Press

Genealogical research of American criminals
www.ronarons.com

Czechoslovak Genealogical Society

Research into region in 1918
www.cgsi.org

EasyNetSites

Websites for nonprogrammers
www.easynetsites.com

Eneclann Ireland

Research services, publications, records online
www.eneclann.ie

Family Odyssey

PC game with your ancestors as characters in the game
www.familyodyssey.com

Findmypast

Scanned images of historical, census, and passenger lists
www.findmypast.co.uk

Geneartogy

Custom family tree artwork created online
www.geneartogy.com

Generation Maps

Chart printing service
www.generationmaps.com

Genlighten

Genealogy lookups online
www.genlighten.com

Genline

Swedish records archive
www.genline.com

GenMerge

Find, merge duplicates in databases, any genealogy program
www.genmerge.com

Godfrey Memorial Library

Library and databases
www.godfrey.org

International Society for British Genealogy & Family History

Encouraging British and Irish research anywhere
www.isbgfh.org

International Society of Family History Writers and Editors

Encouraging excellence in writing and editing
www.isfhwe.org

LifeStory Productions

Comprehensive family history software management system
www.heritagecollector.com

Names in Stone

Preserving cemetery information, map-based technology
www.namesinstone.com

New York Genealogical and Biographical Society

Emphasis on New York city, state, and region
www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org

Ohio Genealogical Society

Ohio heritage resource with library, periodicals, lineage societies, databases, and more
www.ogs.org

Photoloom

Preserve, organize, tag, share, index photos online
www.photoloom.com

Sacramento German Genealogy Society

German family history
www.sacgergensoc.org

ShipIndex.org

Specific ships, vessels in various media; free and paid sites
www.shipindex.org

Youth Genealogists Assoc.

Devoted to young genealogists
email: starrcamp@aol.com



The English Jurisdictions File (continued)

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make the file available to the public. Knowing how valuable the data would be to our members, we secured permission to distribute the file to our members. The Jurisdictions file has been included on our flash drives ever since.

The value of this database has not gone unnoticed, and recently the FamilySearch team implemented an online, interactive version of the database. It can be found in Current Projects at www.labs.familysearch.org, called England Jurisdictions 1851, or it can be accessed at www.maps.familysearch.org. Because the program does such a great job of connecting the parish details to an England map, it could become known as the English Maps project. I have been told that it is still in beta test, so the development team will appreciate suggestions for enhancements.

When you first open the web site, you see a color map of English counties, which can be dragged with a mouse, and zoomed in and out with a mouse wheel or a navigation tool similar to that on Google maps. Each county can be selected by clicking anywhere within the boundary, but Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are conspicuously not clickable.

County boundaries are not the only jurisdiction displayed on the map. Just above the top left-hand corner of the map is a pull-down menu that allows you to select eight alternative jurisdictions including parish boundaries, civil registration districts,

rural deaneries, hundreds, and more. Regardless of which set of boundaries you select, each jurisdiction is clickable so that you can display pertinent details. Switching between different sets of jurisdiction boundaries will require a few seconds, so be patient.

The value of this database has not gone unnoticed, and recently the FamilySearch team implemented an online, interactive version.

For example, if you select parish boundaries and click on the parish of Tillington in Sussex, a popup box will appear stating that Tillington is an ancient parish in the county of Sussex, that the parish records began to be kept in 1572, and the Bishop's transcripts began in 1571. Furthermore, you are informed that there were no non-Church of England denominations within the parish.

At the top of the popup box are two additional tabs, Jurisdictions and Options. The first will display a scrollable list of details that includes the civil registration district, probate court, diocese, rural deanery, poor law union, hundred, and province. The Options tab will allow you to request a list of contiguous parishes, perform a radius search, link to a place search in the FHL Catalog, or search the FamilySearch Wiki.

The program is designed to allow you to switch between jurisdiction boundaries, but I have found that the system can be very slow and occasionally


generates a spurious error message. Keep in mind that the program is still in beta.

At the left side of the map are a Search feature and a Layers tab that allow you to specify which boundaries you wish to make available. When you enter the name of a place, the search engine will identify everywhere in England where that place name exists, and the map will be updated to show a corresponding numbered tag for each location.

For example, if you enter the name *Winston*, the search will show a Winston in four parishes in different counties, Durham, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Hampshire. In addition, in Norfolk, and Hampshire counties, the name of the corresponding parish is something other than Winston, and the other towns in the parish are displayed along with Winston.

The map part of the program alone is fun to browse and develop a better understanding of the neighborhood around the places your ancestors lived.

The only drawback at present is what happens when you do not have a correctly spelled name for a jurisdiction. The search engine does not support wild card searches. So if your place name has been incorrectly spelled through poor transcription, or difficult-to-read documents, there is nowhere to turn if the search engine cannot locate the place. A solution is in the works.

Meanwhile, I intend to keep the spreadsheet file available for searching the place names for possible matches. 



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About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVCGG is the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, a nonprofit group of some 600 genealogy enthusiasts. The group is based in Silicon Valley in the Bay Area of northern California, but members are all over the world.

Meetings

The 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, CA. The group offers classes, workshops, and seminars to help family historians with computer technology and research techniques.

Membership

Membership dues are US\$15 per household per year, US\$20 for

Canada, and US\$25 for other international locations. Members receive the newsletter each month except December, and receive discounts on books published by SVCGG.

Publications

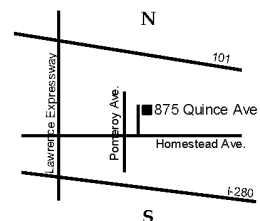
PastFinder is the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group, a nonprofit organization. Published monthly except December, *PastFinder* is distributed at

meetings to members in attendance and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter by e-mail.

SVCGG offers research tools and materials through its website, www.svcgg.org. Materials include the *Family History Documentation Guidelines*, *Better than Sliced Bread: Genealogy and Technology*, Stuck-on-Sources pads, and flash drives for backups. 

Next meeting, 12 June 2010, 9 to 11 a.m.

- **Land records**, Marcia Holstrom
- **Software utilities for family historians**, Chuck Fenton
- **Reunion for the Mac**, Bill George
- **Getting started with Reunion**, Pat Solomon
- **Beginning Genealogy Q & A**, Richard Rands



www.svcgg.org/directions.html