

Life in the Cloud

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SILICON VALLEY COMPUTER GENEALOGY GROUP

PastFinder

By Janet Brigham

Recently I was attending a conference in Boston when I received an urgent email from a colleague who needed a copy of an obscure file. The file was on my home desktop back in California. Home with the cat.

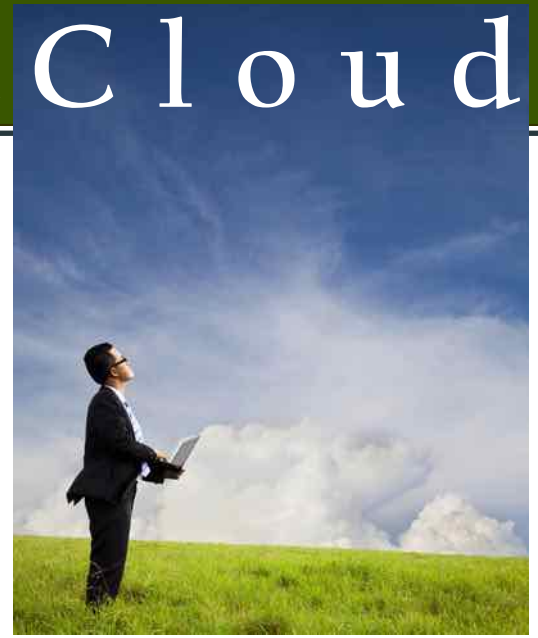
Retrieving the file — which no one had opened since 2010 — took less than a minute. I logged onto the website for the backup service that backs up my desktop hard drive early every morning, found the file in the online backup, and emailed the file to my colleague.

Throughout the trip to Boston, I accessed remotely stored files, exchanged files online, conducted web searches, streamed movies, communicated via websites, followed ballgames online, and checked weather reports with my smartphone. I may have thought I was in Boston, but I was actually in the Cloud.

The term *Cloud* is floated around (excuse the pun) a lot, but what is the Cloud, really? When we say we “store it in the Cloud,” what does that mean?

Rather than accessing information or software on our own computer, or on a locally connected server, we often use a *remote server* or network — in other words, the Cloud. Electronic information is stored and retrieved perhaps thousands of miles away in huge *server farms* located around the world. Google has more than a dozen of them, including the one shown at right — whose only resemblance to a cloud is a blue ambience. Server farms exist all around us and all around the world.

The Cloud is not in satellites, weather balloons, the International Space Station, or anything else poised overhead, including actual clouds. That said, satellites may transfer some information that comes and goes from



the Cloud, but satellites are not storage facilities.

The initial concept of the Cloud probably came from the design practice of graphically portraying a computing system schematically within a cloud. The name stuck like Gorilla Glue.

Much of our daily lives involves using digital information stored somewhere else. When we interact with that information, we access the Cloud.

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One of Google's dozen-plus server farms.

Outside and Inside

- Life on remote servers, above
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Life in the Cloud (continued)

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When we log into a bank website to transfer funds, we are banking in the Cloud. When a backup service saves what's on our computer to a distant server for safe-keeping, we are backing up to the Cloud. When we load our family history information into an online tree, we are "doing genealogy" in the Cloud.

The good

Plenty of good things happen in the Cloud. Because information in the Cloud is saved where the dog cannot eat it and where it won't accidentally get tossed out, the Cloud provides a handy backup solution.

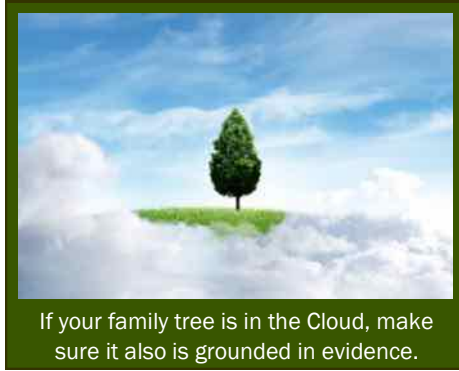
Recently a family member inadvertently deleted everything on her desktop computer, including irreplaceable digital photographs. Her computer was not backed up. She already had deleted the contents of her camera memory cards, since she'd backed them up on (you guessed it) her desktop computer.

As it turned out, she did have a backup of sorts; every photograph she'd emailed me (they were numerous) still existed on my desktop computer *and* was backed up with my other email files in the Cloud, in some server farm, somewhere in the world.

For a mere \$5 a month, she could have averted catastrophe and could have restored the contents of her computer. If she even had put family photos in an online tree or website, she would have digital versions of her photos, if not high-resolution originals.

Another recent disaster is instructive in a different way. A healthcare provider who visits patients in their homes kept her calendar and contacts on a smartphone. One day the phone died. She could access neither her schedule nor her patients' contact information. She didn't know who she was supposed to see that day or the next, or when. She was able to retrieve her contacts from her cellular provider, but the schedule was gone for good.

This highlights one major problem with life in the Cloud: **Information is available only if we can reach it.** A power outage, a dead battery, a remote location without wifi — all of these can make information and services inaccessible, perhaps when we need them the most.



One solution is to use a system with a built-in backup, such as a scheduling app that is backed up and immediately available on the web, not just on a smartphone. The app Calengoo, for example, syncs a smartphone calendar with the online Google Calendar (calendar.google.com). Similarly, contacts can be stored on the web (for example, through Google Contacts, available at

contacts.google.com). *But remember, the information is as secure as the servers housing it.*

Should we use the Cloud for backup? We often get only one chance to visit a faraway library, photograph an old structure, or interview a great-uncle. Whether we should trust it to the Cloud is a personal decision — but in any case, we shouldn't just trust it to fate or to the whim of a computer motherboard.

The bad


A related benefit of the Cloud is accessibility. Because several cousins have online trees on Ancestry.com, I can access their family history information, which dovetails with mine. This serves us well, as long as our information is evidence-based.

One thing spreads more rapidly in the Cloud than anywhere else: junk genealogy. Online trees and similar sites are glutted with haphazard pedigrees thrown together without concern for accuracy or even common sense. The Cloud too often hosts gigantic, gaseous billows of genealogy guesswork.

Junk genealogy is not new, but the current ease of its access and proliferation are new. That worries me.

The ugly

We are haunted increasingly by what I call *zombie ancestors*. They aren't really our ancestors, but someone has given them a sort-of life, along with virtual immortality, by encumbering them with incorrect information. They take on a virtual life of their own as misinformation spreads from online tree to online tree faster than we can contain it or correct it.

We probably cannot stop or even slow the march of misinformation. We can, however, do our own research and reporting correctly, knowing that in the end, only the true stories will ring true. 



How I found it

Making the search work for you

By Richard D. Rands

Most of us have encountered a circumstance where the time frame of an American family starts before and ends after the 1850 U.S. Census—the first U.S. census to list all family members. The result is that when the parents were young and having most of their children, only the head of household was listed in the census, and the rest of the family are indicated only by tally marks by sex and age.

Then from 1850 on, when family members are supposed to be listed, only the spouse and perhaps one or two of the last-born children are listed. If you can locate the family in the censuses prior to 1850, you have a considerable amount of research work to do to track down the names associated with each of the tally marks.

The following example of How I Found It illustrates a simple technique that can save you lots of time in finding tallied family members.

The Massachusetts town of Pelham (the *H* is silent) in Hampshire County was first settled in 1738, primarily by Presbyterian Scots-Irish immigrants forced from their homeland in Scotland during the turmoil in the Scottish Highlands.

- The family of David and Mary Abercrombie appeared in the 1850 U.S. Census in Pelham. David was 60 years old, Mary was 53, and a male named Stillman was listed, age 20.
- A decade later, in 1860, the census indicated that the family was still residing in Pelham, with David listed as age 70, Mary was missing, while a female named Lillie, age 51, was shown.

It is feasible that Stillman and Lillie were children, but it would be a challenge to prove it. A check of death records showed a grave for David Abercrombie in Pelham with a death date of 13 Jun 1871. This prompted me to locate David in the 1870 census, where he was listed as 82 years old, with Lillie, age 61, still with him.

I was unable to track down a death record online for Mary, but a search of the Massachusetts marriage records for 1633 to 1850 uncovered a marriage date of 18 Jan 1816 in Pelham for David Abercrombie and Mary Eaton.

At this point, Lillie must be disallowed as a child, since she would have been born in 1809, seven years

before David's and Mary's marriage. It is possible she was a second marriage, or perhaps a housekeeper.

But what about Stillman and any other children born before 1850, who then left the household before 1850? Since David and Mary were married in 1816, they should be listed in the 1820, 1830, and 1840 censuses, with David as the head of household. Furthermore, since David lived in Pelham until he died in 1871, it's possible that he lived in Pelham all during his years as a head of household.

Sure enough, the family was listed in Pelham all three prenominal (i.e., before full name-listing) censuses. By plotting the tally marks in the three censuses, I saw that the marks for David and Mary fit perfectly, based on their respective ages in the later censuses. The remaining tally marks are in this table:

1820	1830	1840
2 males less than 10 years old	2 males under 5 years old 1 male age 5 to 9 2 males age 10	2 males age 10 to 14 1 male age 15 to 19
No female children	1 female age 5 to 9	No female children

The only inference I could make from this table was that if Stillman were one of David's and Mary's sons, who was 20 in the 1850 census, he could be one of the male children under 5 years old in 1830. At this point, I needed to find a source of birth records for Abercrombie children born in Pelham between 1816 and 1850. Although we could concoct many plausible explanations for the age progressions from one census to the next, we prefer to uncover actual names and birthdates.

One good way to solve such a problem is to use a nifty feature in the search engine at FamilySearch.org on a collection of digitized and indexed birth records for Massachusetts, "Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915." This collection of records covering the time period when David and Mary were having children was indexed and put online exactly one year ago, with 4.6 million records. Selecting the collection brought up this search page:

(Continued on page 4)

How I found it (continued)

The results of the search comprised 17 hits of children of David and Mary Abercrombie:

Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915

Description

Name index to birth, baptism and christening records from the state of Massachusetts. Microfilm copies of these records are available at the Family History Library and FamilySearch Centers. Due to privacy laws, recent records may not be displayed. The year range represents most of the records. A few records may be earlier or later.

Learn more »

Search Collection

First Names Last Names

Restrict records by:

Batch Number

Search with a life event:

Birth | Marriage | Residence | Death | Any

Search with a relationship:

Spouse | Parents

Match all terms exactly

1-17 of 17 results for > Name: Abercrombie, Event: Birth, Place: Massachusetts, Event Range: 1816-1850, Father Name: Number of results to show: 20 | 50 | 75

Fanny Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	03 Jul 1821 1821	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Emerson Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	07 Sep 1823 1823	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Horace Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	04 Nov 1827 1827	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Stillman Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	11 Apr 1830 1830	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Wyman Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	24 Jun 1816 1816	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Austin Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	18 Jun 1818 1818	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Fanny Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	30 Jul 1821 1821	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Wyman Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	24 Jun 1816 1816	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Austin Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	18 Jun 1818 1818	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Emerson Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	07 Sep 1823 1823	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
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Emerson Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	07 Sep 1823 1823	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
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Stillman Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	11 Apr 1830 1830	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M
Wyman Abercrombie Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	birth: residence:	24 Jun 1816 1816	Pelham, Hampshire, M Pelham, Hampshire, M

You will notice a search feature, just above the Search button at the bottom, called *Search with a relationship*. Using this feature allowed me to perform a search of the entire record collection for every birth of a child with the surname Abercrombie who was born between 1816 and 1850 to parents David and Mary Abercrombie. This is how I entered the search criteria:

Search Collection

First Names Last Names

Restrict records by:

Batch Number

Search with a life event:

Birth | Marriage | Residence | Death | Any

Birthplace Year (Range)

Search with a relationship:

Spouse | Parents

Father's First Names Father's Last Names


Mother's First Names Mother's Last Names

Match all terms exactly

Eliminating duplicates caused by multiple indexers resolved the list to six children, with birth dates:

Wyman, 24 Jun 1816	Emerson, 7 Sep 1823
Austin, 18 Jun 1818	Horace, 4 Nov 1827
Fanny, 3 Jul 1821	Stillman, 11 Apr 1830

Matching each of the six children to the tally marks provided an exact match, assuming that by the 1840 U.S. Census, Wyman (24), Austin (22), and Fanny (19) all had left the family home.

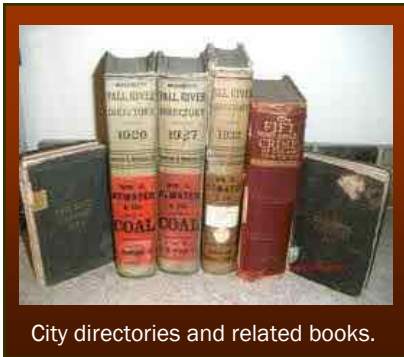
Using the search with a relationship gave a quick, easy way to determine the names and birth dates for the Abercrombie family in Massachusetts. 

Need color? Try local directories, histories

By Pamela Erickson

To add color and detail to your ancestor's lives, consider looking for entries in city directories and local histories.

First, let's look at city directories. Although a few existed much earlier than the 1800s, most came into being by the mid-1800s in the United States, Canada, and Europe in larger towns and cities. They provided information for salesmen, merchants, and oth-



City directories and related books.

ers who were interested in contacting residents of that area. The larger the city, the more likely that these directories were updated annually, but smaller areas were updated less frequently.

What did they include that made them so valuable? In addition to the alphabetical listing of residents, they might have included their home addresses, occupations and possibly the work address, the name of the spouse, and other helpful facts. You also may find other family members you didn't know existed in the same city.

City directories also included ads for businesses, which can give you an idea of what your family did for a living. For example, if your ancestor worked for Harker and Son, you don't necessarily know what he did. When you see the occupation listed in the city directory—for example, book-keeper—and understand that the business of Harker and

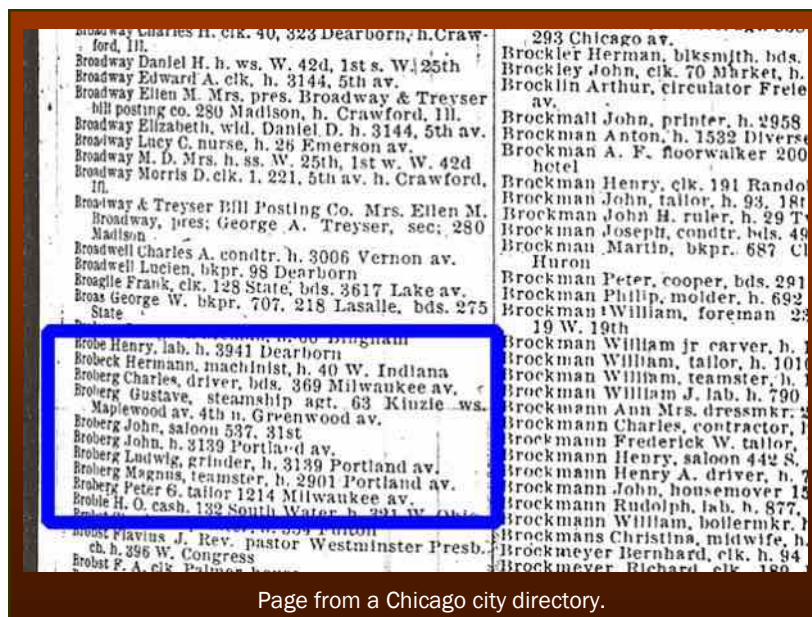
Son is, let's say, clothing, then you can better understand his daily routine at work.

Not only can you find your direct ancestors, you may find other family members in directories. Once you have an address, you can use it to help locate them in an unindexed census, especially a state census.

Accumulating the data for each directory took a long time, almost a year, so finding your family is only an approximation of when they lived there. Two examples come to mind. When your ancestor first showed up in a city directory, it may have been a good indicator of when he arrived in that city, and could help you pinpoint more closely when he emigrated. In my husband's family, seven brothers emigrated from Sweden in the late 1870s and early 1880s, all going to Chicago. Looking through city directories, I never found all seven in any year, but I found all of them at one time or another.

Another example also comes from my husband's family. They show up in the 1920 U.S. Census and the local city directory in Seattle, Washington. In August 1920, the family moved to Alberta, Canada, and never returned to Seattle. However, they showed up in the 1921 Seattle city directory. This tells me that the person surveying their neighborhood for the city directory arrived before the family's departure in August 1920.

Often you will find city or ward maps in city directories. They can help you locate family, discover street name and street number changes, and see how the neighborhood looked at that time. They also help you locate nearby churches, businesses, schools, funeral homes, cemeteries, post offices, courts, hospitals, benevolent associations, and newspapers. The Dublin, Ireland, city map, copied from a



Page from a Chicago city directory.

(Continued on page 6)

Local directories, histories (continued)

(Continued from page 5)

city directory, covered the area where one of my student's mother's family lived in 1912 (see map at right).

For many years, city directories listed a widow with her husband's name and death date the year after he died. That's certainly a helpful detail for our research. In other cases, if a wife didn't work outside the home, she might not be listed or might be listed in parentheses following her husband's name. The directories may also contain marriages occurring in the previous year.

All family members who worked outside the home were listed together when living in the same house. You may also discover that your family had boarders, so you will see their full names, occupations, and the word *boarder* to indicate that they were not immediate family members.

If you are an ethnic minority, you may find your people listed in another part of the directory. This practice, primarily in the United States, continued well into the mid-1950s. Always read through the various categories of information contained in each directory. You may be pleasantly surprised at your discoveries.

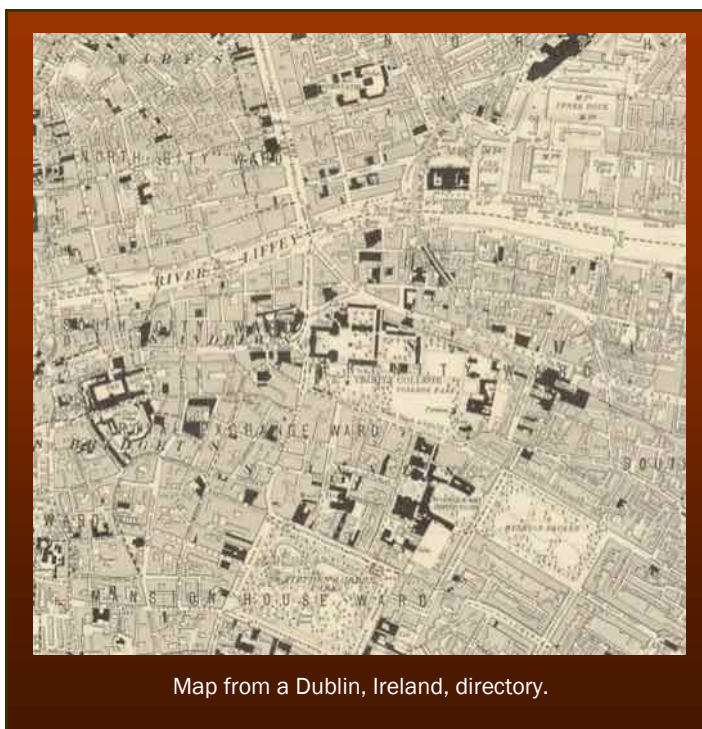
(See also "City directories: Mining for gold," *PastFinder*, October 2012, 23:10, page 1.)

Local or county histories

Next, let's look at local and county histories. Local histories describe a town or city at a specific time, while county histories represent the whole county. They incorporate social and cultural aspects of the community and often have multiple biographical sketches of the wealthier and more politically connected members of the area. You can find them in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and many European countries.

Why should you look through a local and/or county history?

- They provide clues about your ancestor, including a possible biographical sketch.
- They are readily available.



Map from a Dublin, Ireland, directory.

- Some information may not be found anywhere else.
- Descriptions may provide insight into your ancestor's environment and neighborhood.

Biographical sketches

Biographical sketches often were interviews of the person by a visiting writer, so much of the flowery writing compliments the person and shows him or her in a good light. If your ancestor appeared in a history, use this as a guide for your further research, not as a primary source. For example, it may reveal when an ancestor immigrated and from where, but you will need to search for immigration and naturalization records.

If your ancestor did not appear in a history, don't despair. By reading the various entries, you gain insight into what was important in the community at that time.

About biographical sketches:

- Many are unindexed.
- You may find family history back to the original settler in the county.

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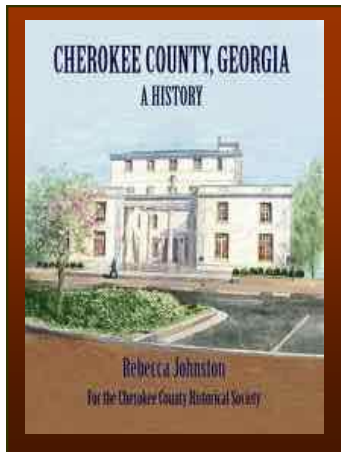
(Continued from page 6)

- You may find out about siblings and where they settled.
- You may find out about the children and what happened to them.
- You may discover the political, social, and religious affiliation of your family.
- You may see copies of signatures, record abstracts, or drawings of occupational tools .

What else might a local history contain? For any person or group of people:

- Full name of the person.
- Arrival in the area.
- Immigration date and from where they came.
- Information about related family members.
- Immediate family members named and relationships defined.
- Location of grown children.
- Occupation
- Religious, political, and organization affiliation.
- Any military experience.
- Death/burial if already deceased.
- List of holders of pews in churches.
- Original land grantees.
- Drawings of tools commonly used in the area.

Getting the most from a local history



You will need to look through the entire history so you don't miss something important about your family. Consider making a list so you know you have checked through the following:

- Cover and bibliographical information.
- Table of contents.

- Photographs.
- Businesses.
- Churches and when they were established.
- Tribute to first settlers and what land they owned.
- History of the founding and settling of the area.
- Clubs and Organizations.
- Military service honor roll.
- Natural disasters.
- Names of newspapers and when they operated.
- Special landmarks or historical locations.
- Hotels.
- Drawings of farms, homes, and businesses.
- Maps.
- Unique historical articles that show what defines this area.
- Indexes.
- Political appointments.

Reading tips

To ensure that you have gained as much insight as possible, I offer the following tips:

- Read the general county history section.
- Read the township portion of the history for your ancestor, even if there is no biographical sketch.
- Search for the surnames of spouses.
- Check the portrait listings. The picture may not be near the biographical sketch.

You can find local histories in many locations, including the Web. Try looking at Google Books, Heritage Quest, Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, US GenWeb, or Our Roots (Canada).

Using city directories and local or county histories can provide new insights into your ancestor's life. The Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group website has a handout from the March 2013 meeting that provides some links for these useful resources: svcgg.org/documents/2013-03_Erickson-City-Directories_Local_County_Histories_and_Your_Family_handout.pdf

Happy hunting!



Ask the doctor Trees, trees

Q I heard recently that it's "selfish" to maintain a database on my own computer, and that I should use only online trees. What does the Doc think about this?

The Doctor is glad you asked this question, because SVC GG is a strong proponent of using the best tools in the best way. An online tree is a fine place to share information, and SVC GG encourages sharing. That said, we encourage sharing *correct* information.

The power of a database program is its ability to link source information, generate reports, sort and clean records, and analyze and organize large amounts of information. Today's genealogy software programs do that exceptionally well. Online trees don't.

Verifying and organizing family information before making it pub-

Upcoming meetings

The group meets monthly except December, on the second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11 A.M. at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, California (see map at right). The group is not affiliated with any church or other group.

13 April 2013, 9–11 A.M.

- Germans from Russia 1 (Richard Rands)
- Life in the Cloud (Janet Brigham)
- Macintosh group (Lane Pendleton/Pamela Brigham)
- Reunion 10 basics (Debbie Callan)
- Getting Started in Genealogy (Carleen Foster)

11 May 2013, 9–11 A.M.


- Germans from Russia 2: Cemetery markers (Richard Rands)
- New search sites (Janet Brigham)
- Reunion 10 for Mac users
- Mac Family Tree (Pamela Brigham)
- Getting started in genealogy 

lic is not selfish; it's responsible. What's selfish is posting a tree that lists unverified relationships, or merging information just because you can. The Doctor calls this Anti-Genealogy — even worse than the dreaded Junk Genealogy.

Family history is not something we can simply grab out of the Cloud and blissfully incorporate. Anything unsubstantiated by careful examination is, at best, a clue, not evidence. Just because you can access information easily and readily does not make the information meaningful or correct.

If this isn't your cup of tree, at least pledge to include only verified information online, even if it doesn't go back to the Mayflower, William the Conqueror, Attila the Hun, or Adam and Eve.

Q How do I download a GEDCOM from my Ancestry.com tree to import into my database?

Go to your Tree on Ancestry. At the menu bar next to your Tree's name, pull down the *Tree pages* menu. Choose *Tree Settings* from the drop-down menu. A green button, *Export tree*, will appear at right. Click it, wait while Ancestry creates a GEDCOM, then click *Download your GEDCOM file*. Your tree will download, and you can import it into genealogy software. 

About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVC GG 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 live all over the world.

SVC GG offers classes, seminars, and publications to help family historians improve their skills in using

PastFinder
First place winner
Local/society newsletter
National Genealogical Society, 2012
Website: www.svcgg.org
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Meeting site has ample free off-street parking, with a wheelchair-accessible entrance at the front.

technology for genealogy research.

PastFinder, the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group, is published monthly except December. *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to members and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter electronically by emailed download link. 