

Objectives, Methods and Habits

Objectives

My main objective is to build family trees and present the results to as many people as possible. In today's world, that means on the internet. Many people out there are doing great research about their own and related families and many have gone to the effort of publishing their research in places like RootsWeb.com and Ancestry.com. I have happily added my contribution to that growing body of information with the hope that not only will my information increase and improve as a result but others might utilize my information to do the same for themselves. If we all work together, all will benefit.

Community Genealogy - What Is It and Why Am I Doing It?

Like most people who get hooked on family history and genealogy, I started with my own family tree and just kept on going. I loved the work so much and got such satisfaction from building trees for families I was familiar with in the local area that I just kept going from one family to the other, collecting what I could to make the trees as complete as I could. After a while doing this, I began to realize that my database was turning into a kind of history story for the local area. Many times I was browsing through the people seeing the names of spouses for a family and recognizing that all these early settlers were related to each other by marriage, one way or another. In the early years of the 1800's, in particular, people married their neighbours. Travel was difficult and expensive so most people in rural areas, which was most of Upper Canada, interacted with the other people across the fence, down the road, in the next concession or in the closest village where everyone went to attend church and do shopping. This closeness of families over decades of time often resulted in family trees showing the same surname married to more than one of the siblings of a family. Even more interesting, when you look at the names that a set of siblings married, you can identify the main settlers in that immediate area. This is where genealogy or family history get to be more like local history and we can work with the two disciplines in tandem to develop a better understanding of the dynamics that caused the communities to develop into the places we know today.

TreesByDan and RootsWeb.com

My family tree data is published to RootsWeb.com, the internet's largest database of genealogy research. Researchers can use the powerful search engine of RootsWeb.com to find a name included in the GEDCOM I publish there and then, if they want to see more details, they can click the link to go to TreesByDan.

The people in both places are the same but details are limited in RootsWeb.com since it's strength is searching not archiving. TreesByDan contains all of the notes and sources and details I enter into my genealogy database for each person. If it isn't here, then I don't have it.

Software - The Master Genealogist

Family Tree software is a very personal thing and we tend to be rather subjective about our own choice. I'm no different. The important thing is that you are happy with what you have. I use The Master Genealogist Version 6. I prefer TMG because it was designed a long time ago for serious genealogists rather than to make everything easier for novice users. I am a computer consultant by profession and software is my toolkit. My experience with database programs tells me we must estimate our needs a lot higher than can be imagined right now since we will probably outgrow even that if we stick with the work. TMG handles huge data sets and has more features than I will ever use. One reason in particular I have liked TMG from the days it was a DOS application is the design on its main data entry screens and the different views it provides. The Person View shows me a lot of information on one screen and every upgrade in the software has improved the flexibility available to tailor that view more exactly to my preferences. I like to see more information on one screen rather than less and TMG satisfies that desire. Of course, there were some lean and frustrating years as TMG struggled to move fully into the Windows world. However, in the last years as the corporate situation stabilized, the product has improved significantly. Now it is more stable and more full-featured than ever.

Software - Second Site

In the fall of 2005 I looked around for a better program to generate web pages from my TMG database. For the last three years I had used GED2HTML, a shareware utility built by some guy in his basement in Germany some years ago. It did the basic job I wanted and has served me well for three years. However, I had always wanted the pages to look better and for more information to be available on the page for a person. I had downloaded Second Site earlier in 2005 and dabbled with it briefly, not ready to make any major changes. Late in the year I looked at Second Site again and, with some encouragement from John Cardinal, the creator and supporter of the program, I took the plunge and experiment with publishing my database with Second Site. Wow! I saw right away that it was worth the effort. The flexibility built into the program allowed me to present the information as I wanted and the ease-of-use of the program allowed me to experiment until I was happy.

In addition, I had decided that this was the time to start including the digital pictures of grave stones with the person's information. I have done much cemetery surfing over the last few years and have thousands of pictures linked to people records. I could see them in my database but viewers of the web site could not. That problem is also solved easily with Second Site which displays the pictures that are linked right there above the information for a person. A major bonus is that the process of creating the web pages directly from my TMG data takes only about ten minutes which means I can run it over and over again until I see the perfect result and still have time left for sleeping. I like that a lot!

Then, in early 2009, I spent some time working with Second Site to add my history writing to the web site in a way that would be handy for viewers. Eventually I worked out a way to make sub-pages with links to pdf files containing my stories. Once I got the hang of it, the process of getting it right was easy. Now that I've jumped over this hump, there could be more and more added to www.treesbydan.com – stay tuned!

No Info for Living Individuals on the Web

My information in both RootsWeb.com and TreesByDan contains no information about living individuals. This is accomplished by running a report that sets the Living field for each person to the appropriate Yes or No value. A simple algorithm in the report checks each person first to see if there is a death tag, in which case the value is set to No. When there is no death tag, it looks at the birth date and determines if the person might be over 97 years of age, in which case it assumes the person is deceased but the death information is not available, and the value is set to No. Then I export the data for only non-living people to a GEDCOM file which is the format needed to upload into RootsWeb.com. The Second Site program has a feature for this built in so I don't have to do anything but click that box to make the same thing happen when I create the web pages.