

What's New at FamilySearch and the Family History Library?

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INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1894 as the Genealogical Society of Utah, FamilySearch International is the largest genealogical organization in the world. It is owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and as such, it is a non-profit, volunteer driven organization. It employs a limited number of staff around the world who oversee the daily operations and coordination of volunteers who organize, digitize, index, and manage the massive collections.

Over the last 125+ years, FamilySearch has been at the forefront of helping people trace and preserve their family histories and informational artifacts. This effort continues today as the world has moved into the digital age and the work has moved from paper to digital preservation.

Today, there are over 5,500 family history centers dotting the globe in 134 countries with the Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City anchoring the operations. Many of the collections available in the FHL are also available throughout the world, either online via the FamilySearch website, or as viewable content in on of the family history centers.

TIMELINE OVERVIEW

Here is a quick history of its beginnings to the present:

- 1894 - Founded as the Genealogical Society of Utah.
- 1927 - The beginning our first massive indexing initiative.
- 1938 - Microfilming begins to preserve records and increase accessibility.
- 1963 - The collection becomes so vast, that the Granite Mountain Record Vault is constructed to house over 3 billion pages of family history records.
- 1964 - Family History Centers, originally Branch Libraries are created to distribute microfilm and other resources.
- 1985 - Focusing on access to the general public, we created the largest genealogical library, the Family History Library, in downtown Salt Lake City Utah. The library is open to the public free of charge and houses millions of genealogical records from over 110 countries.
- 1998 - The first digital images arrive at the Granite Mountain Records Vault from cameras in archives.
- 1999 - In May of 1999, with the goal to increase accessibility of our records, we created the familysearch.org website.
- 2004 - FamilySearch begins to digitize its collection and continues that effort today. The full collection should be digitized by the end of 2021. Publication will follow.
- 2007 - The first digital images from were published online on FamilySearch.org.
- 2013 - In March 2013 the FamilySearch Family Tree was launched to the public.
- 2014 - Introduction of two new mobile apps. FamilySearch Family Tree and FamilySearch Memories.
- 2017 - African Oral Genealogies project is launched to gather a disappearing heritage. Also in 2017, the Discovery Center is opened in the Family History Library.
- 2018 - A purpose-built engineering building is completed in Lehi Utah. All FamilySearch engineering efforts are centered there.
- 2019 - In conjunction with RootsTech 2019, we released DNA help information online.
- 2020 - Online consultations are launched to assist during the pandemic.
- 2021 - RootsTech Connect goes virtual, attracting over 1.17 billion people

RECENT IMPROVEMENTS TO FAMILYSEARCH.ORG

The Family History Library has launched new web pages on the FamilySearch website. To view the pages, go to: www.familysearch.org/family-history-library. The webpages are divided by five major areas, including:

Collection

This section gives useful tips on how to access the collection as well as the new library layouts for the building. There are also areas of interest for helping to build the collection and steps for making donations if you choose, but cash donations are not solicited. Information on the extensive book collections, periodicals, microfilm, maps, pedigree charts, CD-ROMs, and restricted materials is all included in this area. Perhaps the crown jewel that has emerged in the last decade is the online book collection in the FamilySearch Digital Library, now housing over 541,000 free genealogy books, family histories, maps, yearbooks and more.

Services

The Family History Library has the most impressive experience for beginners to experts on the main floor with the Discovery Experience launched in 2017. This proves to be particularly engaging for young people and those new to family history who want to explore their heritage. In addition, there are a number of resources to assist you to convert older media types to new digital forms, including scanners, audio, and video formats from reel-to-reel, cassette, VHS, slides, and everything in between.

Learning

The learning center hosts a variety of training videos and webinars that cover the spectrum of genealogical topics and geographic areas and people around the world. Taught in English and numerous other languages, it is intended to reach a worldwide audience.

Visit

Are you planning to visit the Family History Library soon? Check the webpages for information on the hours of opening post COVID-19. This page will keep you posted with the latest information. See: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/family-history-library/>

Research Help

During the closure in 2020, the Family History Library launched an online consultation service to book appointments with the reference staff and expert volunteers to assist with reference questions and problem solving. Each consultation is for twenty minutes except for DNA consultations which are held for forty-five minutes. The consultations are currently available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Chinese. Consultations are available for a few specific topics, such as immigration, Native American, and African American specialties.

Booking an appointment is easy and there are no charges for the service. When you enter your time zone, all the adjustments are made automatically, so the time you're given is the time in your area. There are both daytime and evening appointments available.



International Expansion

The FamilySearch website is now available in thirty different languages making the site accessible to over ninety percent of the world's population. Language options are available at the bottom of the home screen. With this increased language capability and the added pages in the Research Wiki in multiple languages, the FamilySearch website is geared to help a global audience.

New Help System

The new Help System found by clicking on the “?” on the homepage is constantly being updated to link to the most common questions and using several suggested topics. It was created with context-specific suggested topics. In addition, the Help Center, Community pages, and Helper Resources are all found here.

Discovery Pages

Discovery pages are now accessible with a Google search (or other search engines) on the name. This experience places the person in context of their life and creates both a contextual and graphic experience placing the subject in the context of history and adding photos and stories to their life taken from the data in the Family Tree. You can enhance the experience for other members of your family by adding additional information about your ancestors to the Family Tree and sharing memories in this space.

Search U.S. Census by Race

The feature to search the U.S. Census Population Schedules by race has been restored to the website. This feature is ideal for conducting research on people with common names, such as John Williams since it will allow you to sort them first by race and then allow you to view each of the images. You may still do a search for “any” and not specify a race if that is your preference.

Memories Feature

FamilySearch memories material may be shared on social media on all the major platforms, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, WhatsApp and of course by email. Search capabilities are greatly expanded, slide shows may now be shared, and memories can be made private. The introduction pages were also redesigned to be more inviting. To engage a younger audience, this is a terrific way to get them engaged because they will generally open something shared on social media but will often tune out when you try to sit them down and tell them about their family history.

Searching with Multiple Names

The ability to search people with multiple names in the Historical Records section of the FamilySearch website is a major leap forward. This means that a married woman may be researched by entering both her maiden and married names and conduct the search for both. In instances where there are multiple marriages, this search is invaluable. It is also a great tool for those you believe have changed their name and you want to connect the entries to the same individual.

Explore Images Improvements

Newly digitized microfilms are being separated by item number on individual microfilms. This makes searching items through the FamilySearch catalog easier since you can easily spot the item number on the ribbon view of the digital images.

FamilySearch.org/Mayflower

For the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower, FamilySearch, the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, and the NEHGS, have created a Mayflower experience on FamilySearch.org. The partnership digitized the Silver Books and the society's documented membership applications. We then merged all the records into a single representation for each pilgrim and their descendants coming down to the year 1910. You may view the experience at: <https://www.familysearch.org/collection/mayflower-descendants/>

New Records Details Page

FamilySearch launched a new Records Details page in March 2021 with a completely new look and feel. The information downloads nicer to Word and the features that we are used to using are all there, including the ability to attach to the Family Tree, hints to similar records, and existing similar records that may already be attached to that person's Family Tree entry.

THE FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY

During the closure at the Family History Library, there have been a number of substantial changes, and some are still in progress. There are five floors in the library. At the time of the closure, floors 2 and 3 housed the U.S. Canada collections, the B1 floor had the international collection minus the British and Australia collections which were housed on the B2 level and the main floor where you enter the building has the Discovery Experience and various other services.

The four floors housing the physical collections of books and microfilm have all received upgraded computer workstations with multiple monitors, microfilm scanners where appropriate, and added book scanners. Reference desks have been centrally located on each floor and signage throughout the building has been updated to reflect the changes.

When the library reopens, the international collection will mirror the U.S. Canada collection with all the microfilm from the B2 level moving to B1 and all of the international books on B1 moving to the B2 level. A new Global Map Area will be housed on B1 where a portion of the books used to be located. This will be for all the map cases in the library and will include an electronic map table for the digitized portion of the collection. Also consolidated to the B1 floor will be the Global Microfiche Area for viewing the existing microfiche collection. With the completion of the digitization of microfilm at the Granite Mountain Records Vault, the focus will shift to digitizing the microfiche.

The main floor will remain functionally the same in the Discovery Experience but has had some extensive renovations of the restroom facilities and currently there is a major renovation to the Vending and Snack area for guests. That area will be expanded to include the space currently occupied by one of the instructional classrooms, Classroom A which will add significant seating and access to outside windows along with a glassed-in wall to the rest of the floor. This will open the space up and make it considerably more inviting.

Previous feedback about noise levels should be addressed with the newly designed third floor and B2 designs which removed a substantial number of computer workstations and made the areas conducive to study. The published family histories are being returned to the library and integrated back into the collection. While there are thousands returned, there are thousands that need to be rebound or repurchased before returning to the shelves.

