



## Unit 1 - Lesson 8 - A Look at Genealogy Software

In her article “Genealogy in the Information Age” NGS Quarterly, Volume 91. No. 4, December 2003, author Elizabeth Shown Mills describes the three types of genealogist:

### **The “Family Tree Climber” or non-professional genealogist**

*This is a person who has incomplete knowledge of the techniques and values of genealogical traditions.*

### **The “Traditional Genealogist”**

*This is the professional researcher that adheres to the tried and true practices of traditional genealogy, recording the vital statistics data with no supplementary family information.*

### **The “Generational Historian”**

*In this group we see the professional who, expanding on the work of a Traditional Genealogist, incorporates the additional information that defines a family historian.*

Each one of these groups would require a computer program best suited for his or her style of research, and there are certainly enough programs on the market to provide each group with a wealth of options.

In today’s lesson you will be introduced to the types of programs available and the features they offer. When you have completed this lesson you will be able to make an informed decision on what type of program would be best suited to aid you in your continuing research. While making your decision, take into account both your immediate and future needs so you do not have to purchase more software down the line.

Please note that it is not the purpose of this lesson to review the multitude of programs available. There are far too many to list and it is only you who can decide what will work best for your unique needs.

### **Table of Contents**

- Introduction - page 1
- The Function of Genealogy Software - page 1
- Benefits - page 1-2
- Features - page 2
- Demos - page 2
- GEDCOM - page 2
- Practice & Wrap-up - page 3

*The benefit of using a software program is it allows you to easily change your data.*

## **The Function of Genealogy Software**

Genealogy software is designed to record, organize and publish the data you collect on your ancestors’ individual *births*, *marriages* and *deaths* as well as the relationships that existed between them. The benefit of using a software program is it allows you to easily change your data. The technology for genealogy software has been available since the early 1980s and has been the impetus for change in genealogy research. It has greatly affected the methods used today in terms of research and information sharing. The immense variety of programs now available has kept up to date with these changes.

### **Benefits**

The main advantage to genealogy programs is that they are great time and energy savers that will help you cut down on the work of duplicating data and organizing your family units. When using a good genealogy program, you should only have to enter the information once, in contrast to the old paper method where you would have to record duplicates of information onto several family group sheets.

Among the benefits of genealogy programs, you will find that you can call up information from lists and the program will warn you if you are entering any conflicting information (such as can happen with dates by mistakenly transposing numbers). Some programs have the ability to create family history books, and give you the option of importing photographs and scans of documents. With many programs you will also have the ability to create a web page that enables you to share your research with family members and other researchers.

When you are shopping for your genealogy program you will want to consider it from a user-friendliness perspective. Ease of use, cost, the number of events it will allow you to enter, and whether or not there is any user support for the product are all major considerations. When working with a program, you will want to make certain that you are happy with its look and feel, as you will be spending a lot of time with it. Ask yourself: Do you like the look of the screen? Is it confusing to work with the fields? What about HTML? Is it GEDCOM compatible? Can you readily locate the menu items?

## *Features*

Among the things you should consider before you choose your program is whether it includes the features you want and/or need. Some programs have features that will allow for the inclusion of:

- **Geographic locations**
- **Religions**
- **Generate kinship charts**
- **Record various types of spousal relationships**
- **Children born out of wedlock**
- **Fields that can house a family coat of arms**
- **Includes mapping tools**
- **Publishing options**
- **Source citations**
- **Different languages**

These features may influence your choice of program. If it is not important to you to include religious information, or if your family does not have a Coat of Arms, those features would be irrelevant.

## *Demos*

You do not want to purchase a program only to become frustrated with it. The wonderful news is that before you have to decide, you may, with some programs, have the option of a free trial or demo version. Demos are often limited versions of the programs that allow you to get the general idea of what it includes and how it feels to use it. Some demos will not include all features of the program, some will only let you enter a limited amount of ancestors, and some let you use all of the tools for a limited time before asking you to purchase.

## *A Word about GEDCOM*

GEDCOM, an acronym for Genealogical Data Communication is a uniform or standardized system that allows you to store data in a file that can then be exported into a genealogy software program for the purpose of sharing information. It was developed in 1985 by the LDS. It is my recommendation that no matter what program you choose it should be GEDCOM compatible.

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*When working with a program, you will want to make certain that you are happy with its look and feel, as you will be spending a lot of time with it.*

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## *Practice*

# Search for Software

Conduct an internet search for genealogy software reviews. Keeping in mind today's lesson, find three that you think will suit your needs. If they offer a demo, go ahead and give each a try.

## Wrap-up

There are several outstanding programs available in today's market. I am confident that you now have the information needed to make a well informed choice should you decide to purchase one. While you are doing your research, make sure to check out freeware and internet use options. If you have any questions about today's lesson or would like to further discuss Genealogy Software, go to Forums Genealogy Beginner: Lesson 8.

*See you in the forums!*

**Articles:** <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/category/lesson-8-articles>

**Glossary:** <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/category/glossary>

**Forum:** <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/community/a-look-at-genealogy-softwares-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-lesson-8/>