PARTNERSHIP WITH SMALL, RURAL HISTORICAL SOCIETIES
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> "I long to accomplish a great and noble task; but it is my chief duty to
> accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble."
> -- Helen Keller, American author and lecturer

It is a great privilege to be invited to participate in the FHT 2001 Workshop I consider myself a neophyte in the world of technology, but I am able to act as a "facilitator" who is willing to work with people who are completely unfamiliar with the workings of the Internet. I am willing to stay with them as they learn the basics so each one can become comfortable with, not only using Internet genealogy, but contributing to Internet genealogy.

Although I have worked on my personal family history off and on since about 1981, my involvement with genealogy and the Internet began in 1996 when I adopted three counties in Idaho as part of the IDGenWeb Project. IDGenWeb was part of the then-fledgling nationwide effort to coordinate genealogical research called the USGenWeb Project. A short time later, I adopted five more counties, mostly so they would not be orphans. My first web page was uploaded in August, 1996 for Gem County. I felt like I had given birth. Since then I have been continuously involved with Internet genealogy. The sites I maintain include:

IDGenWeb Project:
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/ada/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/boise/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/canyon/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/elmore/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/gem/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/idaho/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/lewis/index.html
http://www.rootsquest.com/~idaho/payette/index.html

Idaho History (for material which is not exclusively genealogy):
http://www.usroots.com/~idhistry

Surname Websites:
http://www.dill-family-reunion.org
http://www.ficklin.org

Emmett Public Library (non-genealogical)
http://www.emmettlibrary.com

Many people have contributed material to be posted on the web sites I maintain. Without the help of dedicated researchers, I don't have much to offer.   I have chosen to devote my time and skills to contribute to gathering families through technology.   However, there are many who would rather remain in the world of research, so they allow me to handle the nuts and bolts, so to speak!

How to involve smaller organizations with few members who may have difficulty entering the "high-tech" world of the Internet for lack of resources and expertise? Computers and the Internet can seem threatening to a fair part of the genealogists and historians in our country. While I readily hail computers as a gift from Heavenly Father for organizing our research, I still remember

the anxiety I felt as I learned how to put data online. It can be a frightening experience! I have a good friend who lives in Emmett. She researches her family in Gem and Payette Counties (Idaho). She has expressed interest in helping with IDGenWeb, only if she doesn't have to learn HTML! Not everyone wants to play on computers. The last thing I want to do is overwhelm my friend and others like her with a lot of technology to learn. One archivists I listened to recently had little good to say about electronic data. He disparaged electronic data because of the changeability of technology. His example was the difficulty we face with data stored on punch cards. His second objection was the possibility of electronic data being changed anytime. While his points are valid, I am confident we will find ways of handling both the longevity and the security of electronic data. For our generation, electronic data may become as reliable as something like 16th century handwritten parish records.

Small genealogical and historical societies have much to offer in the way of research experience, publications and research help, but few have monetary resources and fewer helping hands. These people are treasurers and are invaluable in helping researchers know what is available in their region. The small genealogical societies and historical societies across our country are unique resources, but remain untapped. Perhaps only because we don't know they are there. Therefore, I submit this paper, not has an example of any state-of-the-art technology, but a form of technology which helps beginners learn. I do not pretend to be any sort of expert; I've just learned a bit more than others.

The first experience I wish to share is a very small project from a very small state, but it illustrates the sort of facilitating on which I focus.

Mrs. Clara Ford, who lives in South Carolina, inherited her great grandfather's copy of *An Illustrated History of North Idaho Embracing Nez Perces, Idaho, Latah, Kootenai, and Shoshone Counties, State of Idaho,* by William A. Smith, Western Historical Publishing Company 1903. About three years ago, she contacted me, the county coordinator for Idaho County and offered to search her aging volume for individual researchers. The volume consists of 1238 pages and is divided into two parts: 1) history of the area from approximately 1500 to 1903, and 2) biographies of all the prominent men in the counties enumerated. We soon decided to put the index online to save researchers and Clara's time and effort as well as wear and tear on a priceless family heirloom.

A short time later, Shelley Kuther, of the Ilo-Vollmer Historical Society, approached the IDGenWeb group for help converting the same history volume to a format for online use. Since Clara and I already had a small beginning, I volunteered my services. The historical society had a volume of Smith's work which was already broken, so to take it apart for scanning did not destroy one of the few remaining volumes. With the help of the historical society and especially Dick Southern, of the historical society, we began. Dick scans the pages and using OCR soft ware converts the images to readable and editable text, proofreads them and sends them to me via email. Recently, Dick has learned about the process of placing material online, so he can upload material on his own if he wishes to, although I remain willing to do the final editing and uploading. Dick has taken another technological step!

Here is some information about this wonderful historical society and the people with whom I am privileged to work, written in Dick Southern's own words:

> The Ilo-Vollmer Historical Society (IVHS) at Craigmont (Idaho) is located in the former town jail attached to the city hall. A small workroom adjoins the larger meeting room. The group, which is a local unit of the Lewis County Historical Society, first started having regular meetings in 1990; however volunteers had been getting together to catalog material for a number of years before that. The Ilo-Vollmer collection consists of oral history tapes

with transcriptions, original manuscripts, video tapes, newspapers, microfilm, photographs and negatives, maps, books, business papers, along with records of various organizations, businesses, families, schools, and local memorabilia.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at 9 a.m. Members volunteer to staff the research room during that afternoon.

Various members have on going research projects including but not limited to transcribing and computerizing our Lewis County census, land, obituary and cemetery records. Prior to 1911 Lewis County was a part of NezPerce County, so much research has been accumulated from the 5 county area including Idaho, Clearwater, NezPerce and Latah.

Since the age of computers arrived, members are able work on their projects at home and do the transcribing, scanning and editing of the information into text files in the comfort of their homes. This gives them even more time to spend on the project; time that would normally be spent commuting.   The information is then easily searched, saving an un-measurable amount of time when we need, or are asked, to help locate information. The preparing of the 1903 History of North Idaho for web site publication had been discussed for quite sometime by IVHS members who realized the vast amount of genealogy contained in the volume.   It has been a learning experience, as well as being very rewarding, from the comments of those who have located and used the information (from as far away at Australia).

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
Dick Southern, a local farmer and rancher, with a knowledge of homestead records decided to coordinate the task of preparing the History of North Idaho text for on line publication. As mentioned Clara Ford of Williston, South Carolina initially began this project, and had offered to do look-ups after the biographical index had been published on the Idaho History web site. Dick has recruited help from IVHS members with a scanner and a little time to spare in order to speed up the progress of the project. They include Bob & Francie Tatko, Jill Bowles, and Sherry Kammers. We can all attest to the stubbornness of OCR programs to recognize printed text, especially when it is 100 years old and done with a style indicative of 1903.

Another factor in helping the OCR programs decipher text, is to have the clearest and sharpest image possible. It was beneficial for us to copy the pages with a photo copy machine and enhance this old text as much as we could, then copy to a very white paper. One had to monitor the quality of the copy, constantly, making sure any deviation from "the best" was promptly corrected.

The pages of the books we were using varied from a light cream color to tan, and continually had tiny bits of paper or binding falling onto the glass of the copy machine. Having a small duster at hand was imperative. If the scraps were left on the glass, they appear as black spots on a page. If scanned in this condition the OCR programs would understand this garbage to be random punctuation marks.

When the material arrives in my inbox, I add the necessary information for displaying online. When we began the project in mid-1998, my only experience with converting old typing to online material was converting my own grandfather's book, published in 1912, which can be seen at http://www.ficklin.org/~ficklin/book/book.html Dick was willing to do the scanning and OCR work and I was willing to upload them to the Internet. Based on what I learned by putting my grandfather's book online, I chose to put each biography on a separate page to speed loading time

no matter what browser a visitor may use. The system also made it easier to track the biographies so we could be certain all were posted. To date, all of the biographies of NezPerce, Idaho, Latah and Shoshone Counties are completed, with only Kootenai remaining. Additionally, the Ilo-Vollmer Historical Society has been working on the history portion of the volume which is also nearing completion for Idaho, Latah and Shoshone Counties.

The project can be viewed at
http://www.usroots.com/~idhistry/idaho/idahobio.html
http://www.usroots.com/~idhistry/latah/latahbio.html
http://www.usroots.com/~idhistry/nezperce/nezpercebio.html
http://www.usroots.com/~idhistry/shoshone/shoshbio.html

The work we are doing is making use of the technical skills available to the members of this small historical society. By attending this workshop, I know I will be able to take home new skills to implement in this and subsequent projects. We do not yet have speed or exceptionally high technology, but we learn "line upon line." In time the society will be able to sustain their own website.

We plan to finish this project by early winter, 2002. Dick, as he mentioned, is in the farming business on the Camas Prairie of Idaho, so most of our work takes place during the winter months.

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The other Internet genealogical organization I devote my time to is the United States Internet Genealogical Society (USIGS) http://www.usigs.org It is an all-volunteer organization made up of over 10,000 registered members and a governing board of up to17 individuals. The common interest members have is an interest in genealogical research and secondly computer technology as a tool to further research.

We, members of the Board of USIGS, do not consider ourselves part of ground-breaking technology, but we keep up with what is available. We are eager to explore new ways of handling databases, search engine technology and image scanning. Shortly after the organization was formed in 1997, we began exploring ways of rapidly scanning microfilmed census records to digital images to provide online images for the volunteers interested in providing access to information on the Internet.

In connection with that, we wrote a brief abstract outlining our plans which we presented to Bill Barrett at Brigham Young University. We were warmly received and learned about some of the latest imaging technology. USIGS wished to assist the massive effort of the USGenWeb Project Archives in speeding the process of transcribing the US census records. Shortly after we began our research, USGenWeb Archives reached an agreement with a publishing company who had digitized images of many US census records. While the plan to develop a model for rapid scanning of microfilm images is still part of USIGS overall plan, it has been put on hold for lack of funds to proceed.

Some of the projects we are carrying forward are:

http://www.usigs.org/library/books/
        The Books Online Project coordinated by David Blackwell.

http://www.usigs.org/library/military/index.htm
        An extensive list of links to military information.

http://www.usigs.org/library/memorial/
    Online collection of Memorials, Tributes, Life Histories and Obituaries

http://www.usigs.org/library/disasters/
    Information regarding national disasters.

http://www.usigs.org/library/state-help/index.htm
    Containing research tips and links to sites for additional information. The below outline
    envisions enlarging this part of the USIGS Virtual Library

However, during the time USIGS was researching imaging possibilities, my husband and I had
occasion to meet with David Rencher, of the Family History Department and president of
Federation of Genealogical Societies. During the short, informal discussion, Mr. Rencher
suggested to us that we concern ourselves with the small genealogical and historical societies of our
country. Many are suffering setbacks which make them short of resources. Many feel threatened
by the encroachment of Internet genealogy on their copyrights and their research fields.

This conversation has not been far from my thoughts as I focus my attention to the challenges of
maintaining my county web pages. I want to encourage small genealogical and historical societies
to continue their research, by offering my help to them. His comments were in my thoughts when
I volunteered to work with the Ilo-Vollmer Historical Society. I am so grateful for the generations
of research which has been done and preserved, it seems small work to offer what seems meager
knowledge about computers and the Internet.

In connection with my desire to contact the smaller societies, I wanted to take a focused, organized
approach to identifying those who need or want help. During the fall of 2000, Juvanne Clezie, a
member of USIGS and an associate of mine in Idaho research, began developing a network of
information to aid her own research efforts. She soon realized how helpful this information would
be to all researchers. Juvanne had decided to take a very focused approach to gathering
information for organizations – whether online or not. She contacted USIGS, through me, for
assistance in putting the data together and placing it online.

As well as her membership in USIGS, Juvanne is a member of the Association of Professional
Genealogists. She owns The Research Network (http://www.researchnetwork.com/), and Idaho
Connections, a United States and Idaho Research site. She is currently working towards her CGRS
from the Board of Certification. A mother of three children and grandmother of one. Juvanne
has a BA degree in English, Journalism, music, humanities, reading, and library science. She is a
general media specialist and holds both elementary and secondary teaching certificates. She works
part-time at the Idaho State Law Library as a Library Assistant on the Reference desk and part-
time as the Library Clerk at the United States Federal Courts Library; both in Boise.

Several factors were considered in developing the focus for this web site including:
1. How to provide the information for all entities that may be able to provide primary source
material. To be useful, the information should remain focused on the 11 categories identified.
Our reason for choosing the categories we wish to focus on will make it more organized as we
complete the project.

2. How to involve smaller organizations with few members who may have difficulty entering the
"high-tech" world of the Internet for lack of resources and expertise.

3. The small genealogical and historical societies have much to offer in the way of research experience, publications and research help.

4. Small genealogical and historical societies have few monetary resources and the very presence of online data tends to threaten their resources.

USIGS decided to help develop this project as a sort of bridge for individuals and societies who are certainly not new to genealogy, but may be new to the world of computers and the Internet. With Juvanne at the head of the project, we hope to provide information about as many US societies as possible within the identified categories.

Researchers can find many lists or links of places to research. However, Juvanne recognized the need for a more organized approach to specific places of research. Below are the steps we are implementing as part of the research aids in the USIGS Virtual Library. First, we identified approximately 10 locations to include for each state. Some of the locations will have numerous sub-locations and information to aid researchers. Steps I, and II are being implemented, as seen at http://www.usigs.org/library/gensoc.html . Please note: This a work in progress and has not been announced for public use.

I. Gather Information for the Following Entities, Whether Online or Available Through More Traditional Ways.

  A. Governmental
        1   State
        2   State Library
        3   County Association
        4   City Association
  B. Associations
        1.Library
        2. Newspaper see http://www.geocities.com/~wwwin/papers.htm for a listing of online
newspapers.
  C. Societies
        1. Genealogical
                (a) State. Quite a few states do not have an organized State Genealogical Society.
                In some states another private organization operates in place of a state gen soc (i.e.
                Hawaii has an organization called Sandwich Islands Gen Soc which functions as its
                state gen soc). Still others have their state divided into regions and each region has
                a society with no state society.
                (b) County. If no organization exists, researchers really need to know so they do no
                more fruitless searching.
                (c) City
        2. Historical
                (a) State. As mentioned above, some states may not maintain a historical society
                (b) County
                (c) City

II. Gather Information about Contacts at Each Entity

  A. Directors or other contact person(s)
  B. Mailing Address
  C. Telephone, email

III. Gather Information about the Data Available, Whether Digital or More Traditional Forms of Publications
  A. Online (link to site)
  B. Offline (provide address, charges, etc.
  C. Researchers and area of expertise
  D. Publications offered by the association or society

IV. If an Organization Is Not Online, Why Not, and Most Importantly, What Can USIGS Do to Assist Them?
  A. In Developing a Website
  B. Hosting their website as a shared non-profit organization (no advertisements)
  C. Help develop a digital version of their research works.

To sum up my feeling about the work I do is to say it is all about putting families together. As more people in my circle of influence work together and learn new skills, the better family histories we develop, no matter the part we play.