

Family Finder Prototype

Grant Skousen (skousengn@ldschurch.org)

Introduction

The Family Finder Prototype was designed to test ways of making family history research easier and more engaging for novice genealogists. This paper will briefly describe the prototype and what our research team learned while testing it.

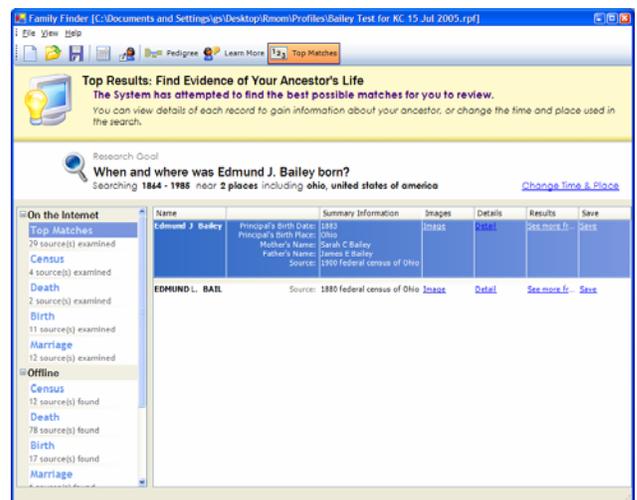
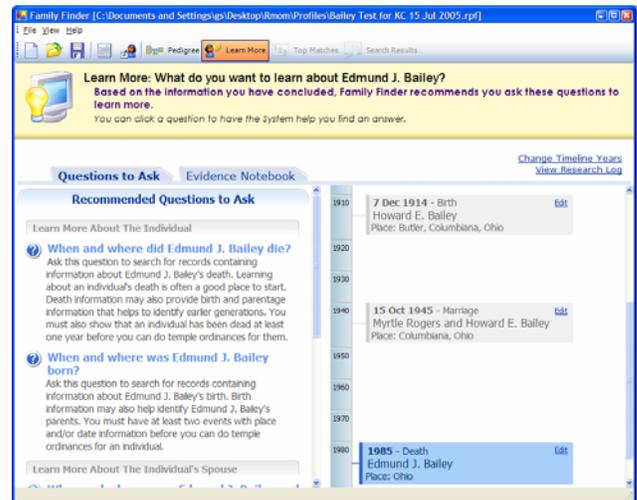
Prototype

From user studies, our team knew that beginning family historians struggle with:

- Deciding what information to look for – “Should I look for birth or death information first?”
- Visualizing the life of their ancestor – “If he was born in 1882, what years should I look for a marriage?”
- Where to look for information – “Should I use birth or census records?”
- What to do when the information is found – “Should I record the number of years married listed on the 1900 census?”

To address these struggles Family Finder prototype provides these features:

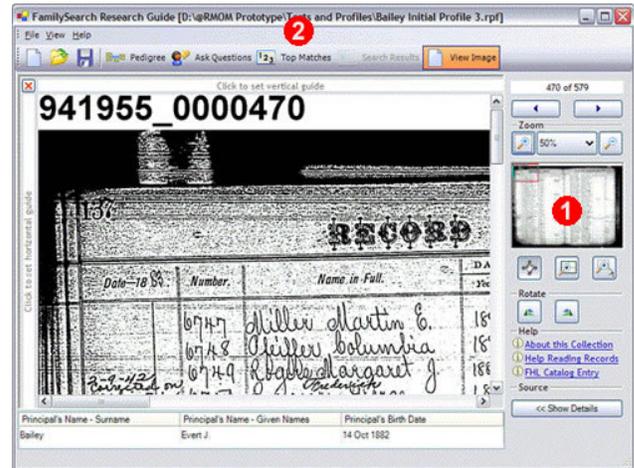
- Question Engine – To suggest questions based on information known about an individual.
- Timelines – To help patrons visualize what is known and not known about an individual.
- Possible Matches – To show best known records and/or record sources that may answer a user’s question.
- Guidance and Forms – To help patrons know what information to pull from a record and how to use it.
- Digital Images of Original Records – To show the patron the original record.



Testing

In order to test the prototype and compare it with current methods we conducted a survey to find patrons with little or no family history research experience. We then invited them to a Family History center and ran three types of tests:

1. Family History Center – the patron was able to use all of the resources in the center, including help from the staff.
2. Internet – the patron was asked to pretend they were doing research at home. They could use all of the computer resources available from the center.
3. Family Finder Prototype – two patrons were asked to use the prototype side by side so we could get them to ‘think out loud.’ (A facilitator presented a paper timeline for each individual found because our timeline implementation was not complete.)



Each type of test was given the same genealogical problem and a printed out family group sheet and pedigree.

Results

Overall the prototype was a success, though there is still much work to do with these concepts. Only one of four Family History Center tests was more successful than the Family Finder Prototype in finding ancestors.

These are some of the positive comments received during the testing:

- “Makes me feel like I’ve gone back in time.”
- “It was fun because I was finding things.”
- “I really like the questions on Learn More.”
- “This system would be great for someone like me who is green.”
- “It makes me want to start my own family history.”
- “I don’t know where to start, and this seems to make it easy to get started.”
- “I think I could have figured it out on my own at home.”

Acknowledgements

This prototype was a team effort. It involved skilled individuals preparing records and meta-data, experts giving input and ranking the records, and huge support from management. I would particularly like to thank our product manager, John Heath, and our development staff Grant Echols, Rob Edwards, Ernest Jones, and David Huntbach. Testers on this prototype included Judy Jones, Dan Lawyer, Emily Shultz and John Heath. Thanks also goes to all those who supported the tests at the Family History Centers and those who came in to try out the prototype.