**ABSTRACT**

This paper challenges genealogical technologists to add human interest to their systems. A number of genealogical systems that touch the heart as well as the mind are described. These systems provide individuals and families with identity, generate cohesiveness in groups, tie people to events and places, and add color and interest to our understanding of ancestors and kin. Some possible new systems are also proposed.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Genealogy is the identification of individuals and their relationships [4]. A pedigree identifies the ancestors of an individual. A descendancy chart or a published family history identifies descendants. The traditional approach to genealogy has been to record identifying information (names, dates, places and links) on genealogical forms, in computer files, or in published family histories. We often get so caught up with the finding of facts that we fail to remember that we are dealing with real people who were born, married, struggled, lived, loved, and died, and who deserve our appreciation and admiration.

In this paper we will review various efforts that have been used to maintain and enhance human interest in genealogical information. We will then propose a few future efforts that might be undertaken to make genealogy more than sterile facts, and that will put a heart into genealogy. We will finally draw some conclusions.

2. **RELATED WORK**

We will describe a number projects that have been undertaken to attempt to put the heart into genealogy.

In 1989 we created an LDS General Authorities Cousins Database from GEDCOMs of the LDS General Authorities and their wives. We used it to test some algorithms we had developed for finding cousins. We reported our results at GenTech. We cite this effort here, not for the algorithms that were developed, but for the reaction we received to the results.

As part of the Nauvoo Pageant put on each summer attendees are provided with a list of the people portrayed, whom they relate to. The attendees are shown how they are related to the individual portrayed and provided a picture and a brief biography of their Nauvoo cousin.

During the Utah Sesquicentennial people were provided with a description of the lives of their pioneer ancestors [2]. The results of this project will be reviewed for conclusions relating to human interest information and how it might be presented.

Recently FamilySearch Family Tree has started allowing the attachment of pictures, stories, and sources to their pedigrees through the windows on individuals (with the addition of a couple of clicks).

Each of these efforts have tried in various ways to put the heart back into genealogy. We will describe how well they succeeded in the following section.

3. **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

Family history systems have generally been focused on names, dates, and places. The previous section outlined a few projects that have attempted to touch hearts as well as to provide facts. In this section we will identify four of the ways in which people can generate systems that add color and interest to pedigrees. These include the following: supplying a sense of personal and family identity, generating brotherhood and cohesion, motivating interest in, and connectivity to, events and places, and bringing our ancestors and kin to life.

3.1 **Personal and Family Identity**

An article in the New York Times recently reported on research done at Emory University which found that children “who know a lot about their families tend to do better when they face challenges”. The conclusion reached was that “the more children knew about their family’s history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem and the more successfully they believed their families functioned.” [5]

Some of the questions the children were asked included the following:

- Do you know where your grandparents grew up?
- Do you know where your mom and dad went to high school?
- Do you know where your parents met?
- Do you know of something really terrible that happened to your family?

While many of the family history systems described in this FHT Workshop allow such information to be entered as a note or comment, not many of them are designed to call attention to and highlight human interest information, and make it easily accessible to younger and older users. The Emory University professors concluded that the “Do You
Know ...” test “turned out to be the single best predictor of children’s emotional health and happiness.” They were “blown away” by the result (as are we).

At the moment, the memories (photos and stories) option in FamilySearch Family Tree comes the closest to providing this capability but fails in at least two important respects: it does not allow for living people to be part of the system, and does not seem to cater to younger users. Some functions in ancestry.com also come close to helping. Over the past year we have conducted workshops for Primary children and youth at the Nauvoo FamilySearch Center (see figure 1) which have been extremely successful. But there is a desperate need for tools to help these workshops. It would be an interesting challenge to work on children and youth systems and to consider sound, color, and animation for these systems.

Technology offers a way to counter the current assault on the American family. Family History systems provide some hope that tools can be developed which can assist children, youth, and adults to “develop an intergeneration identity” and to “understand their family narrative” [5].

3.2 Brotherhood

The old adage that “blood is thicker than water” is a way of saying kinship is often stronger than friendship. Many people are interested in knowing if someone is a cousin, even a distant cousin. In 1998 we created an LDS General Authorities Database from GEDCOMs of the LDS General Authorities and their wives. We used it to test some algorithms we had developed for finding cousins and reported our results at GenTech.

As an afterthought we sent the results to almost eighty General Authorities and their wives. We were amazed to receive thank-you letters from over half of those we sent packets to. They expressed gratitude for our efforts and for the information they received. It was reported that Elder Ballard walked into Elder Holland’s office and called him “cuz”, and that President Hinckley noted at a General Authority training meeting that we are more closely related than we realize. President Faust sent an extensive letter expressing his gratitude.

This exercise was repeated in the Edgemont 13th Ward in Provo in 1999 (see figure 2). Ward members commented on a greater sense of unity and love that existed in the ward after they found how closely they were related. The experiment has been repeated with perhaps twenty other groups in the past fifteen years with the same results. We call this type of interrelationship effort group linkage. One of the results is that members of the group seem to develop a higher sense of unity, harmony, fellowship and cohesion.

An alternative type of linkage is to find the interrelationship between a single individual and set of individuals. The Edgemont 13th Ward effort also provided each ward member with a list of the U.S. Presidents to whom they were related and the LDS Church Presidents also. We might call this unilinkage (similar to unicasting in networking).

An even simpler goal is to answer the question: Am I related to a given person (perhaps someone whom I have just met)? Again in comparison to networking, this might be called person-to-person linking (similar to point-to-point communication).

There are an infinite number of questions that might be of interest to answer. For example:

13th Ward Cousins for Dell Cox

Sherry Kay Cox (Bryan Dell Cox)

1st cousins
Dorothy A. Bramhall’s Dad (Oris Lysander TERRY) -- 1 times removed

2nd cousins
Sharon Bateman’s Dad (Thomas John REES) -- 1 times removed

3rd cousins
Sharon Bateman (Thomas John REES)

6th cousins
Edmund C. King (Mary DIBBLE) -- 1 times removed
Eugene Bramhall’s Dad (Ezra PERRY) -- 2 times removed

7th cousins
Scott R. Baird (Rees DAVIES)
Juna Griffiths (Thomas POWERS) -- 2 times removed

8th cousins
Daniel J. Lotham (William ADAMSON)
Larry E. Neble (Ezra PERRY)
Geri Engemann’s mom (Jacob PARKER)
Camille C. Anderson’s Mom (Jacob PARKER) -- 1 times removed
Betty Jo Ivie (Alice RICHARDS) -- 1 times removed
Evan L. Ivie (Walter POWERS) -- 1 times removed
Kyle E. Bateman’s Mom (Jacob PARKER) -- 1 times removed
Velma L. Allen (Thomas DIBBLE) -- 1 times removed
Susan Brown (Walter POWERS) -- 1 times removed
Tamara Johnson’s Mom (Walter POWERS) -- 1 times removed
R. Michael Allen (Ralph SHEPHERD (SHEPARD)) -- 1 times removed
Bill Fillmore’s ancestor (Thomas BURGESS) -- 1 times removed
Jukee J. Bateman (Jacob PARKER) -- 2 times removed
Kyle E. Bateman’s Dad (Jacob PARKER) -- 2 times removed
Linda Ritchie (Jacob PARKER) -- 2 times removed
David Adams’ dad (Jacob PARKER) -- 2 times removed
Jean Bailey’s dad (Thomas POPE) -- 2 times removed
Steven Lynn Kay (Alice RICHARDS) -- 2 times removed
Carol A. Allred (Jacob PARKER) -- 3 times removed
Q. Bryant Hatch (Thomas POPE) -- 3 times removed

Figure 2: Example of Ward Cousins
Am I a descendant or cousin to any of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence?

Did any of my ancestors fight in the Revolutionary War?

Am I a cousin to Abraham Lincoln?

Did any of my relatives live on Staten Island?

Am I related to the author of this novel that I am reading?

Do I have any cousins living within 10 miles of Interstate 80 between Omaha and Cheyenne?

Am I related to anyone in this meeting that I am attending?

### 3.3 Interest in Places and Events

As part of the Nauvoo Pageant put on each summer since 2005, attendees are provided with a list of the early Nauvoo people (those portrayed in the pageant) to whom they are related (see figure 3). The attendees are shown how they are related to the individual and provided a picture of the person and a brief biography of each. Of all of the pre-pageant activities the pageant staff tell us that this activity is the most popular. The pageant runs for about a month each year and there are about 5,000 people who try this activity.

Eliza Roxey Snow is at the top of this list of early Nauvoo people who are cousins to pageant attendees. She is a cousin to 87.7% of the attendees. Parley Parker Pratt is second at 87.1%. Brigham Young turns out to be the closest relative for about 12% of the attendees. We have not done a controlled survey of the reactions of people to this activity but we have observed a high level of interest.

On July 24th and 25th for the Utah Sesquicentennial we provided people with a page listing their Utah pioneer ancestors, brief biographies (electronically generated in sentences) of those ancestors (see figure 4). We were able to generate a page for about 5,000 of the 7,000 people who came to the BYU Harmon building during the two days of the celebration (see figure 5). Our goal was to directly link each individual with the settling of Utah so that they felt a personal and direct connection to the event. We did not measure success with a survey but we did observe their reactions. There were smiles, tears, and hugs. Young people asked questions and were motivated to learn more about the history of the State. After all, they were their ancestors who had accomplished this great feat in history. A little old lady from a small Utah town hugged one of the developers with tears in her eyes. This was not just a page from a history book, but these were her great-grandparents who had done this.

### 3.4 Sense of Familiarity

A fourth possible human interest effect that a genealogical program might provide is allow the user to feel a familiarity with a given person, perhaps an ancestor or a cousin, almost as if they knew them. The FamilySearch Family Tree has achieved this over the past few months, with the addition of the photos and stories mentioned above [1].
4. OTHER POSSIBLE EFFORTS

Let us propose a few new efforts that could be undertaken that would provide human interest to genealogists.

We have done some experimentation of a smartphone app that can create a Personalized GPS tour of the sites in a given area related to a given family. For example when someone comes to Nauvoo they could be guided to the locations of the original homes of the individuals ancestors, where they worked, where their children went to school, etc.

A Genealogy-Based Kiosk could be created that provided customized connections to the site where the kiosk is. For example, we have had some discussion with the Lincoln museum in Springfield about a kiosk that would tell visitors how they are related to the Lincolns, the Todds, etc.

The third idea is LDS based. LDS members have two responsibilities. They are to identify their kindred dead and they are to perform the temple ordinances needed by those kindred dead [3]. An Extended Family Ordinance Request could be designed to provide not only the ordinance cards but also a card that shows the connection of the patron to the individual whose ordinances are being done (see figure 6). Also it could provide a brief biographical sketch of the common ancestor and of the individual whose work is being done.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From our experiences we are convinced that adding a human interest component to a genealogical program or system will greatly increase the number of people who enjoy using the system, the amount of time they spend on the system, and the benefit they obtain from it.

6. REFERENCES


[4] Regional Representatives Seminar, April 3, 1987. “The terms ‘family history’ and ‘genealogy’ are synonymous for Latter-day Saints, Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, said. ‘The process by which we identify our place in our eternal family is called genealogy. Genealogy is family history’.”


Figure 5: Newspaper Article about Interest in Utah Pioneer Ancestors

Figure 6: Example Reverse Side of Ordinance Card