

Genealogy Registry and ProgenyLink.com

Why do this Project?

Doing good and making money

1. Doing good

The Church naturally does not advertise its problems or shortcomings, but in the area of temple work information, its computer systems and databases appear to still fall far short of ideal scriptural and doctrinal requirements. The Church has spent perhaps \$500 million on computer software and database development in the past 10 years addressing this and related problems, and has received perhaps another \$500 million of volunteer labor related to the database construction and correction process. During that same period it has probably also spent about \$1 billion on capturing, preserving, and processing the raw data assembled by photographing public records in various countries.

The Church thus has an excellent supply of lists of names for which individual ordinances can be performed in the temples. For example, it will soon finish transcribing the 140 million names contained in the 1940 U.S. Census. If we guess that the Church requires 5 million names for use in Temple worship each year, then they will have compiled enough names for about 28 years of temple activity.

Completing all this records processing is a tremendous feat, but it should still be noticed what things have *not* been accomplished. It is important to observe that while all *individual* temple ordinances can be completed using these lists of names, the process of sealing these people into families and multi-generational patriarchal structures cannot be done using the information which is normally available to the Church from these lists of names taken from census records and other such records. Additional detailed and difficult work must be done to tie all of these lists of names into complete family structures before all the sealing work can be done. I will guess that no more than 5% of the names which are processed through the temples each year are in a form which allows all necessary family sealings to occur.

(We might also notice that when processing census records, as with the 1940 U.S. Census record transcription project, about 80% of the names will be duplicates of names in earlier sets of census records, and other public records, which have been transcribed and processed through the temples. The only way to avoid that high level of duplication is to assemble complete and high-quality genealogy records which tie all persons together into families. In that situation, all applicable public records can then be linked to the single correct person, rather than have that person appear perhaps a dozen times in Church ordinance records as though they were that many separate and different people.)

I don't recall Church leaders ever making reference to this continuing problem of a "sealings gap," but it is a giant shortcoming in our genealogy data processing procedures today.

I assume that if the Church ever found a solution to this problem, they would trumpet that accomplishment to the world. Of course, that would also be a delayed admission that the problem had not been solved in any of the prior decades.

Here is an opportunity to make the data which goes to the temples the most complete and of the highest quality that the world's physical records permit. Correcting this deficiency might need to be done somewhat quietly so as not to embarrass those who were forced to overlook it in the past, but the benefits of fully complying with the doctrinal requirements would be plain and clear to everyone .

"128:24 Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand; and who can abide the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple, when it is finished, a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance."

Having watched this process for more than 10 years, I can say that there is no credible evidence that the Church has a plan to solve this problem, or that there is any significant chance of them changing direction to solve this problem within the next decade. Unfortunately, this apparently is not the sort of topic which can be openly and frankly discussed in Church administrative circles. Perhaps someone with extraordinary personal access to top Church leaders could ask the question and get confirmation or corroboration concerning what has been said here.

We might also notice that if only 20% of the transcribed names from the 1940 U.S. Census are new, unduplicated names, that also means that instead of a 28-year supply of names, the 1940 U.S. Census would really only supply about five years of "perfect" names, assuming those names were fully and completely researched. This just points out again that handling the data correctly means it also must be done far more efficiently than is being done today. Even with these far more stringent requirements on data completeness and quality, the procedure which I am proposing would still result in quickly compiling a high-quality, fully researched set of names which would supply the needs of temples for 200 years. The new procedure truly can be 1000 times more efficient at assembling a high-quality names than the procedures we are using today.

2. Making money

If the institutional Church were willing to use the process I suggest, it might use its vast number of volunteers to finish the project at minimal financial cost - essentially free to the Church and to the world. Of course, nothing is really free, and those hundreds of millions of labor hours could be invested in missionary work, for example, if they were not being absorbed by these genealogy processes.

A group of 5000 trained volunteers could accomplish all that I suggest through a continuous process lasting perhaps 15 to 20 years. For a 3 year period they would first do the 70 million names of people who died before 1930 in United States, and then they would go on to do the same for a similar number of names in Europe. In the end they would have completed about 1 billion names over that 20 year period. That 1 billion names would be a 200 year supply for Church temple purposes, assuming 5 million names a year are needed.

But that is a huge volunteer effort lasting a very long time. And notice that the Church, amounting to only about 2% of the US population, would be doing this vast amount of work not only for the Church, but for the other 98% of the population in United States and Europe. We all share the same ancestors. Wouldn't it be more fair to have more of the nationwide and worldwide beneficiaries of this data be involved in creating this magnificent database? With a larger participation, it could also allow the process to be completed perhaps 10 times faster than with the 5000 Church member volunteers continually employed.

Rather than have the Church members bear the entire burden for this great task, why not arrange things so that everyone who benefits from this high-quality data puts in either money or labor to share the work and expenses?

I have estimated the labor and money inputs into the nation's genealogy industry at \$66 billion a year. Reorganizing current industry processes could easily bring 1% of that work into a professional setting, meaning that about \$6.6 billion could be captured as gross revenue over a ten-year period. About one half of that might be paid out to those who helped organize the data, leaving perhaps \$3 billion left as profits or as funding for the next stage of expansion of the database. This would allow payments from US genealogy enthusiasts to fund the assembly of high-quality genealogy data for most of the Western world,

at least. Even more of the amount of hobby and volunteer labor expended each year could be turned into a monetize-able professional process. The \$6 billion in gross revenue is the amount that would apply to the assembled names of the 70 million people who died before 1930 in the United States. These are the most valuable names in the world for generating professional income from genealogy activities. The process could then be extended to other locations and other time periods.

Finally Achieving the "Impossible"

"and let us present in his holy temple, when it is finished,
a book containing the records of our dead,
which shall be **worthy of all acceptance.**"
D&C 128:24

In the past, it has never been physically or technically possible to achieve the perfection of genealogical data which the Scriptures call for. But now we have all the procedures and technology to do it, and we can do it not only perfectly, but also quickly.

It appears that our long history of temporizing and accepting suboptimal results has made us so used to, and accepting of, low-quality data, that we seem to have forgotten that there is a higher standard in the Scriptures and that we should have a desire and duty to achieve it. Sealing all families completely into patriarchal lines has been essentially impossible in the past, but now we have no excuse not to fulfill the complete requirements of the Scriptures.

Some scenarios resulting in incomplete data

1. In Wilford Woodruff's day, the Saints had an interesting solution to the problem of genealogy data. Obviously, they were isolated thousands of miles from the original records which would allow them to do a proper and thorough job of finding and connecting their ancestors. So, if they were going to attend the temples and worship there, they had to have a temporary solution. Wilford Woodruff mentioned in his journal that on one occasion he attended the temple with a company of people. (Apparently when the Saints went to the temples in those days, they traveled with a completely self-contained functioning group. They would supply all of the ordinance workers as well as the patrons acting as proxies.) He notes that when they finished their labors at the temple, they had done about 300 names, and as they were leaving the temple, the company decided to give all those completed ordinances to Wilford Woodruff as a gift. It was a surprise, and he was delighted to receive them. Although Wilford Woodruff does not spell this out in detail, I believe we can safely assume that that company had no prepared list of names for them to use in doing ordinances. At best, they could use names such as Adam and Eve for each person, or perhaps they could simply use a number, or both.

The point is that a block of ordinances were performed for people to be named in the future. Wilford Woodruff could hold that reservoir of ordinances and apply them when he was able to do the necessary genealogy research.

Theoretically, we could apply that theory today, if we wished. Of the 1.5 billion names that appear in Church ordinance records, only about 50 million are unique individuals. The rest of the nearly 1.5 billion names are duplicates, averaging 30 duplicates per unique name, with some individuals having had their work done 10,000 times or more. In other words, we have already done the temple work for every person who ever lived in the Western world. We simply have not assigned the "extra" ordinances to a specific unique person yet.

2. In later years, a genealogical library was established, and serious research became possible. At least

when I was a child in the 1940s and 1950s, the genealogical data which was to be submitted to the temple was expected to be of quite high quality. The family group sheets contained data on three generations, and members were expected to fill them out and document them quite thoroughly. There were people at the ward and Church level who checked the work to see if it appeared accurate. The "Four Generation Program" came out of this time period.

The main difficulty was that the number of names produced through this laborious and exacting member research process was probably never more than 5% of what was needed to have enough names at the temples for people to attend whenever they wished.

Various solutions were devised to help fill the quantity gap, even though that inevitably meant a very large drop in quality. At first, it was decided that names could be submitted individually, rather than in the much more difficult and demanding family group sheets, and that only a modicum of proof was needed to establish the identity of each individual. It was not required to specify a relationship to another person.

3. The next step was to have volunteers at genealogy libraries do "name extraction" work which simply transcribed lists of people from census records and other public records so that those listed names could be submitted to the temples. Obviously, these lists of names did not supply the family linkages which are necessary to allow all the sealings to be done, but they were able to supply enough names to keep the temples busy.

4. Recent years have brought us the "Online Indexing" program which is the "name extraction" projects using a huge central boost from computers. This mechanism does ensure that there are enough names waiting at the temples for patrons, but it also means that at least 80% of the names are duplicates, and there is no way to do proper family sealings.

5. One interesting suggestion contemplates members scanning the indexes of all the public records – census, birth, marriage, death, land, etc. – for people with their surname. Even telephone books from the 1900s might be used for the same purpose. If temple work was arranged for all of those people, even though they were not sealed together as families, one could feel fairly confident that the basic endowment ordinances were done for all of "their" people.

A final scenario allowing for complete, high-quality data, quickly assembled

Using the Henry Ford model for specialization and cooperation, and applying it to genealogy research work, it is now possible to assemble high-quality, completely family-connected genealogy data up to 1000 times faster than has been achieved in the past. This means that our temporizing and incomplete methods could be replaced with accurate and complete methods, and a genealogy database could be constructed of the highest quality and with nationwide and worldwide reach.

Since all the nation's and world's genealogy hobbyists and professionals struggle today with the same massive inefficiencies that limit the productivity of Church members, it seems only fair that these people should contribute their fair share to completing this grand project, and I expect that millions of the world's genealogists would be very pleased to participate. If someone in the LDS community supplies the computer facilities and related expertise, millions of other people outside the Church can help make it happen, either through contributing data or through contributing money.

It seems unlikely that the LDS Church would be willing to organize such a grand project which goes far beyond just the obvious internal needs of the Church. But those who understand the needs of the Church and the needs of all the genealogists of the world, could provide this great service while receiving a generous return for their efforts.

The Beginning Steps

The preliminary tasks of documenting the concept, securing the patents, and building the necessary online software have been mostly completed. The next steps have to do with starting to build the actual database while verifying and improving all the related processes.

1. The first \$20,000 might be spent on a subproject to build a database of about 20,000 names. For example, five student genealogists from BYU might spend four months in building this initial database. The main focus would be on using a small community such as Spanish Fork, Utah, where a dozen pioneer families settled the area and gradually intermarried, causing them each to share much of the ancestry and genealogy of all the others.

The new procedures and software will demonstrate the efficiencies which researchers related to these various families will experience by division of labor, specialization, and "industrial strength" cooperation. The newly available techniques for greatly improving the quality and verifiability of the data would all be applied and tested.

This new database should provide many valuable lessons to the investors and employees, but it might be too small for more than a few local people to understand its power and value.

2. Assuming the money is available, this initial demonstration project would be expanded to a \$200,000 subproject, hopefully resulting in 300,000 names being assembled in a high-quality fashion. Successfully completing this number of names should be enough to show a significant part of the public what is possible using this new methodology.

This amount of data should have some actual commercial value, so that the financial aspects of the system can be completed and tested.

3. It would be ideal if we could again do a 10-times increase in budget with a resulting high-quality database of perhaps 3 million names. Certainly, at 3 million names, we should expect to have an encouraging amount of financial returns.

4. The first major goal is to complete a high-quality database for the 70 million people who died in the United States before 1930. There is every reason to believe that that database, if done correctly, should be worth \$6 billion over a ten-year period. It may not be possible to come up with the \$70 million needed to completely pay for that aspect of the project, but it might well be possible that genealogists will be willing at that point to enter their high-quality data using the rules of the new system and wait for royalties to come from their "publication." The return to the investors would be much larger if they could simply pay up-front for all of the names to be developed, but the "royalty" system might be an effective system to get up to and beyond the 70-million-name level.

5. The final goal would be to include about 1 billion names in the high-quality database. The sale of names in one country might be used to subsidize the development of names in other countries. If investors were willing to limit their return on investment, the database could possibly be extended to a much larger size.