

Beta 1 for Family Tree Ends

By Renee M. Zamora

This last Friday, 4 Feb 2006 Beta 1 ended for Family Tree. I am going to remark on some of the things I noticed about this new program.

One thing is very clear - it needs some work. Overall the concepts are great but I wonder how long it will take for needed changes to be made and then the start of Beta 2. We were told in an email that Beta 2 is projected to begin Spring of 2006. Personally I wouldn't be surprised if it was much longer than that. I know they do have some of the best people in the industry working on this program. In fact 200 of the brightest people in the industry have quit their jobs to work on Family Tree. This is a very important and serious matter to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and they have devoted a lot of time and effort to get this thing right. They have visited every country in the world to talk to the good saints who are doing family history work, and also non-members who are doing family history work; to find out what is standing in their way to be able to be more productive, to extend their lines and bring more fulfillment in the work they do.

The main purpose of Family Tree is to help members of the Church do temple work in behalf of their deceased ancestors - without duplication! If everyone plays by the rules this program will help accomplish that purpose. Some of the current needed rework is with this major feature. I found it simple to submit a GEDCOM of my family and have the system reserve all the names for me to do the temple work. The only problem was I now had thousands and thousands of names reserved with no way to release them for others to do or to simply search for just the one person I wanted to do work for. A major flaw is the lack of a search feature for reserved names. It makes me wonder how long it will take to fix this problem; you would think they would have to fix it before Beta 2. The programmers have got their work cut out for them.

Some of the unanswered questions still remain to be solved. What happens if I reserve a whole lot of names for me to do the temple work for and then I die? How will anyone get to take it over? What about all those disputes and the information I've added, I won't be around to make changes or for you to discuss your new findings with? I was happy to learn that the Church has thought of these potential problems. They are considering a model that will allow people to become owners of trees, or sets of data. You would be able to bequeath or pass on this ownership. If someone dies before bequeathing it you could go to arbitration to decide who the new owner is. You can see that right at the beginning they don't have a way to pass this information on. This is a problem they are still trying to work out. I can see it not figured out in Beta 2 but you would think you need it in place before final release.

Another facet of reserving or submitting names for temple work is how long can you hold onto the names? Here in the Wasatch front of Utah I think three months hold time is very reasonable. But if I lived in Iceland how often do you get to the temple in your lifetime? Three months would be way to short a time for them to go back to the temple. Well you will be pleased to know the church has again thought about all this. They have a General

Authority, who is over this, figuring this question of time frames out. Right now there are no set time frames.

They are even working for in a future release to have the ability to turn your names over to your ward, stake, family, friends, some group of people. That would mean you don't have to sit outside the temple trying to get people to do your family names. That function will be a welcomed relief. The goal is even to get ride of the cards altogether someday. We would put the names in the system, send them to the temple and have them help manage it for you. That would be way cool.

In fact here is a schedule of the future releases:

The beta versions are **0.9** - This is for Church members, and the focus is to prevent duplication and the Temple names process. It doesn't have everything we want in it but it's a start and then we can grow. They are finding out what it needs next.

The next version is **1.0** - This is for the general public and ordinary members of the church. This is the release to the world

The final version is **2.0** to the general public. The focus will be "Finding my Ancestors through Records". This release will connect everything together. Right now they have people working on various portions of this. You have the Family Tree project. Then there is a group working on a research model that will assist in doing research. Another group is digitizing the records of the earth (Internet Indexing) and getting them all in one place, so they can be accessed from anywhere. All these efforts are going on simultaneously. In the 2.0 time frame they come together. I want to be around to see that. Unfortunately I don't have any time frame when these releases will happen - neither do they!

You see the church has been thinking about all these efforts for a very long time. I have two quotes I want to share with you.

Nephi Anderson, 1912

"Then, as temples multiply, and the work enlarges to its ultimate proportions, this Society, or some organization growing out of this Society, will have in its care some elaborate, but perfect system of exact registration and checking, so that the work in the temples may be conducted without confusion or duplication. And so throughout the years, reaching into the Millennium of peace, this work of salvation will go on, until every worthy soul that can be found from earthly records will have been searched out and officiated for; and then the unseen world will come to our aid, the broken links will be joined, the tangled threads will be placed in order, and the purposes of God in placing salvation within the reach of all will have been consummated."

Archibald F. Bennet, December 20, 1947

"A universal system of intelligent cooperation will bring together on a record sheet every fact in existence regarding a particular family. This wealth of data will insure accuracy and banish error. Expensive and time-consuming duplications in research and repetitions in ordinances will be eliminated. No sooner will a new fact be uncovered in any part of

the world by a researcher that it will be communicated to the Archives center and be assigned to its proper place, on some family record."

I was thrilled to read these quotes. You know they were inspired men, and I know we now have inspired men working on the real application of these systems. This has got to work and it will work. The benefits of Family Tree are astounding.

1. Reduced duplication of research & ordinances - real time feedback
2. Simplified process for clearing names (from 16 steps to 5 steps)
3. Clearing names anywhere there is the internet
4. NO DISKS! - Temple Ready goes away
5. Instant preservation
6. No one can change your data
7. Sources win
8. Purge the system of bad data
9. Instant sharing of important data
10. Contest and correct bad research/myths
11. Pre-built website - publishing
12. Searching becomes easier to do

FamilySearch's Family Tree functions intent is to provide a place for people to record their conclusions about family history work, and eventually a place to help with research and making more conclusions about your work. Its main purpose is to help people clear names for the temple work, quickly and on line, without having to go to the family history center and without discs. Some people in the world don't have computers and they have even thought of how to fix that. Family Tree will let you sign in to help someone else. The neat thing right now about that feature is if you know someone beta testing you can have them sit with you and show you what the system has on your lines. I did this with my sister-in-law Tami and she was so excited about seeing this new creature. You see over time the church has used 12 different databases of names that have been collected and stored in various ways, mostly not linked together in families. We are bringing them together and attempting to link them together. They have some really smart people working on this stuff but they were smart enough to know not to write a program that would combine the whole thing together and make it all one tree.

There are two reasons why:

1. They will get it wrong; computers are not as smart as the spirit. They can't write a computer system that is so smart that revelation is no longer needed. We need people to look at things. What they have written is a system that will suggest two people are the same to you and you can look at it, and through your channels of information/spirit you can decide if in fact these two people are one person. They give us the tool to combine them together.
2. Even if they could write a computer program that took out the need for us to pray about and be directed by the spirit in doing family history work, I don't think the Lord

would have us do it. That would remove the benefit to the living the blessings that come from sacrifice and work. There are blessings that come from the work.

So when you first use this system and see your great-grandparents listed in there 40 different ways and you have to merge each record don't complain. It's all part of the program. As you merge you will feel something special going on. You will see the book of life being cleaned up and organized. You will have to merge each parent, child and spouse individually it will take a lot of time for some lucky people. You are not only helping your ancestors and others but also yourself. Your spirit and testimony of the worth of this project will grow. I promise you that! Like Nephi Andersen I can see this used into the Millennium.

I know your just chomping at the bit to use this system. To see what has been created. Just know it might be some time before Beta 2, they have some things to rework and fix for us. But it will be worth the wait. The other thing I want to say is be patient with the developers of your genealogy software programs. Why? Because they are working on making your programs synchronize with this system. You might think your software developer needs to fix this or that bug, make better charts for you, or whatever but you don't really realize what they are working on for you in the future.

Family Tree will revolutionize how we now do genealogy. It will solve the problems we have trying to coordinate our research and changes to our databases with each other. All the software developers out there are working on making their programs work with this. Let's just say it was the LDS Church that created the GEDCOM standard, now they are developing something different. I think it was back in 1987 that GEDCOM was developed by the Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to provide a flexible, uniform format for exchanging computerized genealogical data. Its purpose was to foster the sharing of genealogical information and development of a wide range of inter-operable software products to assist genealogists, historians and other researchers.

Give it time but GEDCOM I predict will be gone. So will all the problems that now go with it such as sharing information correctly between different software programs. You see Family Tree will work even if you are using a Mac or a PC. The church is developing a web services interface to this and are going to be open sourcing this project. They will be soliciting the world to write their own interfaces to this thing. There will be other websites using this information. You see different cultures use different ways to show their family trees and they couldn't hope to write them all. Instead they are writing a way for everyone to interact with this system so they can write it. Maybe someone will write a lite PDA version without pictures to get text to your PDA. The heavens are open and the sky is the limit. The happy day will be when you have to stop teaching people how to make a GEDCOM.

They didn't base the program on anyone else's program. They based it on research. They did two years of research to find out what people really wanted and really needed, and that is what they are trying to build. This is a completely new thing, and I think it is

wonderful. And I think you will think it too. "It will be a truly remarkable thing with worldwide implications". (Gordon B. Hinckley)

May I make some suggestion to those of you that want more information on Family Tree. Right now the only resource I know of that you can watch a recorded presentation of the system is on a DVD/Video from the Utah Valley PAF Users Group (UVPAFUG). If you are a member of the group and live in the local area you can borrow a DVD. If you want your own copy you can purchase a videotape for \$2.00 and a DVD for \$3.00. If you're out of the area you can have it shipped for about \$3.00. How if you want this DVD it's #74 called "The Future of Managing Your Genealogy Online - Family Tree" by Brad Christensen, 14 Jan 2006. The UVPAFUG also recorded his Question & Answer session following his main presentation. This is on DVD #74A - same title just with Question & Answers added to it. <http://www.uvpafug.org>

Now if you want to see a live presentation of Family Tree I only know of it being shown at the St. George Genealogy and Family Heritage Jamboree, that is this Friday and Saturday 10-11 Feb 2006. I have no idea if they are going to videotape this, but they should. Their website is <http://www.myancestorsfound.com/jamboree/jamboree.htm> maybe you could check with them and see if they will have a videotape of the Church's presentation. Other than that I have no idea where you can see a presentation. Let me know if you hear of any, I'll do the same on my end.

Now if you want to be a beta tester for beta 2 you can get your name on the mailing list that will send invitations to all members of the UVPAFUG. Once again I don't know any other source for getting the invitation to beta test, let me know if you find another way. They had 3,000 people doing beta 1 and they said a whole lot more is needed for beta 2. You will have to complete a survey and they will decide if they can use you. They want to make sure they have people with a wide variety of skill levels and computer access.

You also might want to look at some of my past blogs on Family Tree - the main one to look at is my 9 Jan 2006 article <http://r zamor1.livejournal.com/2006/01/09/> - New Family Tree. I hope this has been helpful and I'll see you tomorrow for tomorrow is always another genealogy day!

UPDATE: As of 17 Feb 2006, no more family history enthusiasts are needed for beta 2. Joining UVPAFUG will not get you on the mailing list to become a beta 2 tester. For more information read: <http://r zamor1.livejournal.com/2006/02/17/>