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Putting it Online by Barbara J Starmans

One rainy Saturday, I found an email waiting in my inbox. The subject line was “Most Wanted - John Bulmer (1823)” and seeing it, I felt a surge of hope that this might be the day that I would finally discover what happened to my three times great-uncle. The email I received turned out to be from one of John Bulmer’s descendants. “I found John Bulmer’s details on your website under the ‘Most Wanted’ section,” it read, “and I think I can help you. John Bulmer was my great-great-grandfather...” The email went on to tell me about John’s emigration from England to Australia in 1852 and included details of his life in Australia up to his death in 1877 in Melbourne. My brick wall had indeed finally come crashing down, thanks to having my family tree online, where my distant cousin could find it with a simple Google search.

When it comes to putting your family tree online, there are many choices, ranging from creating your own website to uploading your tree to an online hosted website like Ancestry, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Explore the alternatives and decide which way is the best for you.

The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding (TNG)

Almost fifteen years ago, Darrin Lythgoe developed a software program to put his own family tree online and in April of 2002, he decided to make version 2.0 of The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding (TNG) available for sale to other genealogists (<http://lythgoes.net/genealogy/software.php>). So far, he has sold over 15,000 copies of his program and by March of this year, there were an estimated 7,500 active users in North America, the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia.

To use the TNG software, you will need to register a domain name and find a web hosting provider that supports PHP and MySQL. If that sounds a little daunting, Darrin recommends Simply Hosting, a low-cost hosting provider who will install TNG free and host your website for \$4.99 US a month, or less if you pay yearly. If you choose to install TNG yourself, Darrin provides both a simple ten-step express installation guide and detailed instructions explaining each step.

With TNG, your website can be fully searchable to maximise your chances of finding distant cousins, or it can be completely private, accessible to only you and the selected relatives that you choose to collaborate with. Import the GEDCOM file created from your desktop genealogy software and choose from one of the many prebuilt templates to customise the look and feel of your website.

View my TNG family website at <http://outofmytreegenealogy.com/family/>.

RootsMagic

The popular RootsMagic (<http://rootsmagic.com>) desktop software program lets you share your family tree online free on RootsMagic.com using a simple, easy to navigate wizard accessible from the Internet tab on the main menu. The wizard generates a home page, a name index, pedigree charts, family group sheets and individual views of your ancestors.

Choose which people and information you want to publish online and follow along through the steps to create your own website.

1. Enter a title for your website and write a brief introduction. Choose an image for your home page and enter your contact information.
2. Select the information you want to include on your website including notes, sources, photographs and even a downloadable GEDCOM file if you want.
3. Remove private facts from your published data and privatise the information displayed for living people.

View my RootsMagic website at <http://my.rootsmagic.com/bjstarmans/>

Online Family Trees on Paid Genealogy Websites

Entering or uploading your family tree to a paid genealogy website such as Ancestry, Find My Past, The Genealogist and My Heritage is almost always free and the process is generally easy with step-by-step instructions. However, because your online family tree is hidden behind the paywall of that website, it will not be found through a simple Google search, nor will it be visible non-members. Their primary motivation for allowing you to post an online family tree is to encourage you to subscribe to their record search subscriptions or pay-as-you-go plans.

With any crowd sourced genealogical data, the records from member trees may contain errors, have limited information or have no source citations. Each entry should be reviewed and individually verified using an exhaustive search of available resources and documents before you officially adopt the suggested ancestors.

Ancestry

Creating your family tree on Ancestry (<http://ancestry.co.uk>). Create an account and enter your name, age and gender and follow the prompts to enter as much information as you can about your parents and grandparents. Access your privacy settings by viewing your tree and then clicking on Tree Pages and selecting Tree Settings and selecting public or private.

Ancestry supports uploading your family tree from a GEDCOM file produced by your desktop genealogy program or create and synchronise your tree through Ancestry's own desktop software program, Family Tree Maker. Use the Ancestry app for iOS or Android to connect to your online tree from your smartphone or tablet. "Shaky green leaves" alert you to possible record matches.

Find My Past

On Find My Past (<http://findmypast.co.uk>), build your tree manually or use the new beta option to import a GEDCOM file from your desktop software program. Begin by creating an account and then choose 'Family Trees' from the main menu and select the suitable option.

Edit the tree settings to choose which person in your family tree is the home person, change the name of your tree and capitalise surnames by default. Privacy settings are limited to choosing whether to display living people and whether your tree is private or public.

The Genealogist

Put your family tree online at The Genealogist (<http://thegenealogist.co.uk>) by entering it manually or by uploading your GEDCOM to TreeView. The Genealogist's TreeView has options to import, export, and backup or restore your data and offers basic privacy settings including keeping your family tree private, viewing by invitation only or public. Once your tree is online, possible matches to your ancestors are suggested by a small tree in the upper right-hand corner of each square in the pedigree view. Potential TreeView matches from other users are shown as are suggestions for matches within the record search. Use the TreeView app for iOS or Android to connect to your online tree from your smartphone or tablet.

My Heritage

Put your family tree online with MyHeritage (<http://myheritage.com>). A basic account is free but is limited to only 250 people and has limited photo storage. The premium subscription allows a family tree with up to 2,500 ancestors, 1000 MB of photo and video storage and smart matches from other member trees. MyHeritage has several privacy controls including the option to let people find and view your profile, show your real name and your general age to members outside your family. You can choose to allow members to comment on your profile and decide whether you want to be notified when they do. Search Connect™ will track your searches of historical records and show other researchers who search for the same thing the results of your search and allow them to connect with you.

Online Family Trees on Free Sites

Family Tree on FamilySearch

Sign up to create a free account on FamilySearch at <http://familysearch.org> to add your genealogy data to their worldwide Family Tree. View a video to help you get started at <http://bit.ly/1mNZiBK> or just create an account and login and begin entering data about your parents and your grandparents. As you move backwards in time, data entered about living people will be saved to your family tree and Family Search will search millions of existing profiles on Family Tree to look for a match with your ancestors. Once you've gone back a few generations, view your tree to see the ancestors from user contributions worldwide.

Lost Cousins

Lost Cousins (<http://lostcousins.com>), with over 90,000 registered users, has been run single-handedly by Peter Calver since 2003. While not strictly speaking a place to post your family tree online, Lost Cousins has been reuniting distant relatives with incredible accuracy for over a decade by comparing the census record information each member entered for their ancestors.

When entering your ancestors on Lost Cousins, start with the 1881 UK census records since there are more potential matches to be found. Also supported are the Canadian 1881 census, the US 1880 or 1940 census, the Irish 1911 census or the England and Wales census from both 1841 and 1911.

When Lost Cousins finds a match between your census records and someone else's, a new contact will appear on the 'My Cousins' page. All members can respond to an invitation, but you'll need to be a subscriber to initiate contact with another member. Subscriptions cost only £10 a year.

Geni

In 2012, Geni (<http://geni.com>) joined the MyHeritage family but both websites continue to operate independently. While MyHeritage lets users maintain their own unique family tree, Geni's mission is to grow one large family tree and it currently connects over 77 million people around the world. To avoid the creation of duplicate entries on Geni, the website does not allow additions through GEDCOM upload and as a result, all entries must be done manually.

A free account is available or subscribe as a Geni Pro member for \$119.40 US a year for instant tree matches, enhanced search, unlimited media, premium support and the right to identify yourself as a Geni Pro member to family and other genealogists.