New Family Tree
By Renee Zamora

Several weeks ago I had the privilege of attending a private viewing of FamilySearch's new feature Family Tree. On 29 Dec. 2005 beta testing officially began, which I am happily now a beta tester.

Like all of the LDS' undertakings this new feature was designed for LDS members to help them do temple work for their deceased ancestors. It just so happens that everyone else benefits from their efforts. Family Tree will have a gradual release. It will be rolled out by temple districts. If you are interested in finding out what temple districts are, and what temples are for; you can find information on it at http://www.lds.org under temples.

We have all experienced the frustrations of the current FamilySearch website at http://www.familysearch.org. You have the International Genealogical Index (IGI), Ancestral File (AF) and Pedigree Resource File (PRF). Some of the problems are the lack of being able to make corrections, additions, merges or link-up those records. With FamilySearch's new feature, Family Tree, those problems have now been addressed.

Family Tree was developed to address church President Gordon B. Hinckley's concern. He recently said in the opening session of Oct 2005 General Conference: "One of the most troublesome aspects of our temple activity is that as we get more and more temples scattered across the earth there is duplication of effort in proxy work. People in various nations simultaneously work on the same family lines and come up with the same names. They do not know that those in other areas are doing the same thing. We, therefore, have been engaged for some time in a very difficult undertaking. To avoid such duplication, the solution lies in complex computer technology. Preliminary indications are that it will work, and if this is so, it will be a truly remarkable thing with worldwide implications."

This complex computer technology is now called Family Tree. It is designed to be used in various internet browsers. It can be used in multiple languages. (I counted 51 Worldwide Support phone numbers.) You can enter names of people and places in almost any of the characters used in the world's languages. You can enter diacritics and characters from Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Greek, Russian and other languages. Everyone is given their own Personal Identifier number. Family Tree has over 100 billion numbers reserved. In time it will stop the flowing of various GEDCOM's with different versions of the same family trees. People will be able to be united in their efforts and prevent the duplication of genealogy work. Eventually the system will go out and search for possible ancestors for you to link to. I think of this as similar to OneGreatFamily and GenCircles' GenSmart features. But, Family Tree was totally designed from scratch; we have a whole new standard.

If you are LDS you will need your membership number, confirmation date, and email address to create your username and password to log onto the system. This allows you to have access to temple information. Those that are not LDS will not be bothered by seeing this information or having LDS features show that you are not interested in when you log on. For the remainder of this article I will address how Family Tree functions with the

LDS researcher in mind. I will also refer to Family Tree as FamilySearch, since it is a feature of the overall website.

For those that are LDS FamilySearch means you will be able to stop using the current TempleReady program. The current 16 steps and knowing 3 different computer programs and making floppies, to process names for the temple, will be reduced to one computer program, 6 steps and a sheet of paper with a barcode. You can prepare names for the temple in the privacy of your own home with a very user friendly computer program.

FamilySearch's 6 Steps to doing Temple work are:

1. Simple add our ancestors information into a common pedigree. (Family Tree)
2. Select who you want to do the work for. (System in the background will check to see if that name has been done before.)
3. Print out a family ordinance request, paper with barcode on it.
4. Take paper to the temple, they will scan the barcode, print out the cards.
5. When ordinance is done, go home and look it up on the internet to see if ordinances entered correctly.

The benefits of Family Tree's features are:

- Reduce duplication of research and ordinance – real time feedback.
- Simplified process for clearing names.
- Clearing names anywhere you have an internet connection.
- No disk – TempleReady will go away.
- Instant preservation of your family history.
- No one can change your data.
- Emphasizing Sources.
- Purge bad dates, stop the myths.
- Instant sharing of important data (Turning the hearts of the children.)
- Easily, grow your tree.
- Contest and correct bad research/myths.
- Way to publish your information that is safe and secure.
- Searching becomes a lot easier because we are combining data.

When you first log into FamilySearch you have the option to watch a main overview of the new feature. There are several overviews which are very informative and very well designed. No one will be lost on how to use this program. This is great when you want to do family history in the middle of the night.

The home page will welcome and identify that it is you using the program. There are several ways to access options on this page. There is a row of tabs of the top of the page that will remain on every page. (Home, Me and My Ancestors, Search, Add Information, Do Temple Ordinances) On this home page you have a directory of links to choose from.

- Help Me Get Started with Family History (Gives training on how to use the system)
- Learn How to Use FamilySearch

- See Me and My Ancestors
- Search for Ancestors
- Add Information (This is where you add information on people that are not connected to you. Good for when you know someone must be related to you but you have yet to prove the connection. You can also contribute a GEDCOM File here.)
- Do Temple Ordinances
- Sign in to Help Someone Else (Will allow you to see all living individuals' information on the line you are helping with and record all information under their id.)
- Update My User Profile
- Help Center (to ask questions)

There is also a small icon of a temple letting you know if you have families or individuals needing temple ordinances. If clicked on it will bring up a list of those needing their temple work done. You will also find on this page, and all the others, a link "Help with this Page". This link will bring up a help menu with common questions on that page and a link to the overview and guides you will want to see.

The main link you will want to go to is: "See Me and My Ancestors". You will immediately see a Family Pedigree. This is a little different from the typical pedigree chart. You will see four generations, yourself & spouse in the middle block, your children to the left and your ancestors to the right grouped by couples instead of individuals. You can change your view options and add the ability to see, on the bottom of the screen, personal information on any individual you chose.

Next to each couple there is an icon of a temple that will let you know if temple work is completed or needs to be done. You will have arrows showing you if your descendants or ancestral lines go back further. There is a symbol to show multiple opinions on who someone's parent is. There is an option on the page to view a history list so you can return to someone you previously viewed. You also have the option to print the page.

The reason why you are able to see you and your family members (ancestors & descendants) when you first log on is because the information is coming from church membership records. (Church membership names are all capitalized; PAF, PRF and AF are all mixed case.) To protect the privacy of living individuals you can only see personal information on your children less than 18 years of age. The names of all my children regardless of age are linked to me. I can't see any personal information (other than name) on my father, but I can on my deceased mother. I also don't have my siblings linked to me unless they are deceased. You can see your current spouse's name, gender, and marriage information. You cannot see information about prior spouses.

To protect living individuals information FamilySearch has people it has deemed living on a separate sub-server than deceased individuals. Meaning you are unable to search for any living individuals. This will prevent hackers from getting into the system and accessing information on living people. I do have the ability to add living individuals' information to my personalized FamilySearch but no one else will be able to view those

records. You are deemed living if your birth is less than 110 years ago and no death information is provided.

When you view an individual's personal information you have several view options.

- Get to Know Me (Timeline, nice to see if you have someone dying before they were born! It will automatically include the birth and deaths of family members, their marriage and temple ordinance dates. You can add to this timeline. Any time you add information to an individual it will ask for your source.)
- Just the Facts (Gives a women's maiden and married name, includes birth and death information, you can add notes in this section and see merge details.)
- Parents and Siblings (You can see the parents' marriage information, add a marriage event or add or find parents. You can add or find siblings, view relationship details. FamilySearch assumes the relationship is biological unless you tell it something else like adopted, etc. You can also view or add family notes.)
- Spouses and Children (This is where you see an individual's marriage information. Add marriage event. You can add or find a spouse under spouse options. For children options you can add or find child, add or find child with an unknown father or mother, view relationship details, view or add family notes.)
- LDS Ordinances (This is where you can choose to do individual temple work needed or see completed ordinance information. The system will already tell you if you have enough information to submit the work.)

On the top of the personal information there are two icons, one of the temple and the other with a picture box of multiple people. These icons will tell you if temple work is completed or needs to be done or if you have possible merges for this individual. You are able to merge all those records from the IGI, Ancestral File and Pedigree Resource File. But here is where the fun begins.

FamilySearch has the best merge function I have ever seen. I just love this feature. It will give you the number of possible matches and present five at a time. Instead of choosing who to make primary and what information to keep it will automatically combine all information together. All the birth or death opinions will be listed together in their separate fields. But the neat thing is you can delete your merge! Now I haven't seen any genealogy software program do that yet.

If you go under the option "Just the Facts" you will see a link "Merge Details". You will see what the merged record looks like and then a separate box with each record you merged. The fields match up so you can see what information came from where. There is a check box next to each record so you can choose which records to unmerge. You can also view contributor information.

But one of the best things about the program is that you can now correct and add information on an individual. It is now possible for you and your second cousin to have multiple opinions show up on an individual. You have the ability to dispute each other's information and note the reason for the dispute. But you cannot change each other's information contributed. There is an icon that will show if information is disputed. All

information added will be maintained. You also have the ability to cite your sources. I guess the only draw back so far is the inability to add multimedia to a record.

Now let me get into a little more detail about the main purpose of FamilySearch – to do temple ordinances for deceased family members. There are two questions you need to answer when submitting individuals for temple work. Am I going to do the ordinances myself or assign someone else to do them? Here are some points about the new system.

- Assign ordinances – gives the ability to let the temple do baptisms and yourself to do endowments.
- I will do the ordinances – can reserve the names to do later. Clears names and you have the electronic card.
- Currently no time limit you can hold or reserve a record
- If you can't complete the work you can re-assign the work.
- Will print out an ordinance request form, temple will print out temple request cards.
- Reads a barcode, that can't be destroyed and will read every time.
- No one else can do that work because it is locked and in progress.
- Temple ordinances have to be done in sequence – in order.
- Will search for standardized versions of a name – Mike, Michael and in different languages.
- Searching for ordinances done is also searched by relationships
- Step-children can be sealed to you

I should mention that the current beta test does not provide the ability to download a GEDCOM of your information.

It accepts GEDCOM's from 23 different programs. You need to submit a GEDCOM with the UID turned on. PAF has this automatically turned on by default. My genealogy program Legacy needs to have this feature turned on. This will enable you to merge your records. When you load a GEDCOM to your file it will try to merge that file before it looks for background people to merge. The background merges will happen in a later release. All sources and notes are maintained from your GEDCOM.

I'm just getting to know this feature called Family Tree. Already I love it. I just focused on merging all the individuals in my four generations and now everything is combined. I can see all the lines that have been submitted to Ancestral File, Pedigree Resource File and the IGI. One line is back to the 1200's and I still have many people to merge. I understand the Church's Medieval File Unit has been quietly working in the background proving all the pre-1500 lines. I can't wait to see what they have done. It's amazing what FamilySearch can do. It has some bugs to work out, but that's what beta testing is for. I'm sure it will be worth your wait. "It will be a truly remarkable thing with worldwide implications."