

## GRANDMA, IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE US NOW!

By Laura Kirbyson

Back in the 1980s, my maternal grandmother introduced me to her new hobby of tracing our family tree. She organized all her materials in binders, envelopes and folders. I know because I worked on them with her and subsequently I inherited everything. Even while she was still using a paper-based system, I started using a software program called Family Tree Maker. Our options have come a long way in the past 25 years and, as I sit down to write this article, I'm faintly astonished at all the technology I now regularly use in my research.



Grandmother Isabel White with a young Laura Kirbyson  
Credit: *Laura Kirbyson family files*

Generally, my research begins with turning on my laptop with the extra monitor attached so it's easier to see all my open windows. I prepare a research plan including the repositories and resources I plan to peruse using templates loaded in Word. A laptop means I have much less to carry when I visit myriad locations and I tend to print a lot less. Another portable tool I use is a mobile Internet stick. With it and my laptop, I can access the Internet wherever I am (as long as my cell company has service in that area).

There are many research tools available on the Internet, but I have a few mainstays. Calgary Public Library's catalogue and its electronic collection are among the resources I appreciate the most. The connection to searchable databases is in my experience unparalleled. It's included in

the cost of the library cards. Joan Miller of our society explained blogs to me and now I'm hooked. I use Google Reader to review the blogs in which I'm interested (Joan, Dick Eastman and Thomas MacEntee, for example). I've found the Firefox browser works much better than Internet Explorer. I also subscribe to a few user groups and use an email address that is forwarded to my Blackberry, allowing me to review posts whenever I have a few minutes waiting in line. Something I haven't used yet, but which would work well in similar circumstances, is my iPod to listen to Podcasts by other genealogists and researchers.

When I'm at a research site, I use my digital camera to photograph any materials of interest. The card from my camera fits right into a slot on my laptop, taking seconds to load and organize into my folders. Where cameras are not allowed, I email items to myself at home, if that's an option, or I collect hard copies, which when I get home I scan into electronic format and catalogue into the folders with the rest of my collection. This process means almost my entire collection can be stored together and easily shared with my family, clients and other researchers.

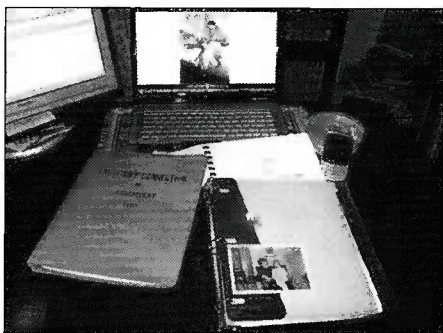
My family is close emotionally but certainly not geographically! Spread out across Canada and the United States, the Internet has made keeping in touch so much easier and provided a method through which we've been able to exchange photos and information.

"Back in the day" when Grandma wanted to share information, much photocopying and printouts were involved, which meant time and expense; neither of which need apply any longer. A case in point, my brother just became a grandpa and the entire family has been able to share in the day-to-day joy of this event. We've sent information and images via email and Facebook. We also use online photo albums, such as YouTube videos and Picasa Web Albums, to share the events of our lives without leaving a paper trail. Alternatively, we'll burn a

CD or DVD to be viewed on a computer or a television. Also, we use GoogleTalk, which is like Skype. This is how I visit with my brother and his family down in California.

Once I've collected the information and data, I make a record to share with those who want it now and save it for those who will want it later. I use a variety of software programs. I have two genealogy software programs to record my family history information, The Master Genealogist and Family Tree Maker. While learning and deciding which to use of what, I've stuck to one for my family and the other for my husband's. I use another database program, Summation, to track my research resources. I have it for my litigation support business, but its functionality is perfect for linking searchable records to their related images so I can type in keywords and review the electronic books, articles and images I've collected over the years.

Most often, I use Word for preparing reports about my research subjects. This past summer, my paternal grandmother passed away at age 98. I'd been fortunate enough to have her share so many of her memories, so I put together a narrative of her life, including her photos and some from the Internet of places she'd lived. It was a great way to share the details of her life with many family members at the celebration of her life. I don't do much image manipulation, but when I need to, I use Paint or I call my sister to ask her to prepare an electronic scrapbook. She can even get the books printed at a local store!



Laura Kirbyson's desk with paper and digital documents  
Credit: *Laura Kirbyson*

Using Microsoft Publisher, I've developed my own website and uploaded it using a file transfer protocol (ftp) program to the website host, GoDaddy. I haven't yet taken the plunge into

blogging, but Thomas MacEntee in his AFHS presentation last fall gave me an idea: I'm going to blog about my great-grandmother's trip to Egypt in 1911 and incorporate images of the pages from her trip diary.

One other way that I use technology is to further my education. I've taken many courses over the Internet, including working on my Certificate in Genealogical Studies. I can talk to people, see previously recorded videos or text with someone in a live conversation.

I use a variety of electronic tools, but I am aware there are many more options that can help us share our research. It's an exciting time when we can search for something, find it, record it and share it, sometimes within hours. ###

## COMPUTER TRICKS FOR THE GENEALOGIST By Jim Benedict

**Shorter URLs: What are they and why bother?** Or as one of our more experienced AFHS members asked, "I don't understand the problem. Why do people worry about retyping a long URL or finding shortening devices. I just highlight, copy and paste any URL into an addressing field and it seems to work just fine."

What is a URL? That, my friends, is the web version of an address box. This is what you see in that box at the top of your browser window that usually starts with, "http://www." and so on. Now, that means something to computer folk, but what follows means something to you. Usually you will see or type in Google.com or AFHS.ab.ca or what have you. That is the website's URL, or Uniform Resource Locator. The challenge gets to be the typing in of longer and longer URLs.

For example, you could find my great grandfather's genealogy web page, sort of his own Facebook, if you typed in:  
<http://www.genealowiki.com/bin/view.cgi/Benedict/JohnSmedleyBenedict1859>