FamilySearch Roadmap: Past, Present, and Future

Brian Edwards, Group Product Manager at FamilySearch
Email: brian@familysearch.org
Twitter: @bljedwards

In this class, we will discuss recent changes to the FamilySearch website and mobile apps and give some insight into important improvements that will be coming in the future. Come learn how to get more out of FamilySearch by using these new tools and enhanced features.

Personalized Home Page

When a user logs in to FamilySearch, we now present a personalized home page with content tailored for that person. Some of the features of this page include:

- The first 3 times you see this page, there will be a box inviting you to learn about the new features of this page.
- **Memories Feed:** Since the Family Tree is shared, often other users may upload memories of your ancestors. This feature will show the most recent memories (photos, stories, documents, and audio) added to your ancestors.
- **Recommended Tasks:** The system will look at the ancestors in the first 4 generations of your family tree, and at these ancestors' children and their spouses to look for record hints, missing information, and other suggestions that can help you to improve your tree.
- **Recent Ancestors:** This is a list of the people you have most recently looked at in your family tree. By default, it shows the last 5 people visited, but it can expand to show up to 50 people.
- **To-Do List:** This is a place where you can create to-do lists of things you want to do. Use this space to keep track of what you are searching for, information you want to find, records to look at, or anything else you don't want to forget when visiting FamilySearch.org.

In the future, we intend to continue to improve the personalized home page by:

- Searching further back in your family tree to look for record hints in more generations
- Adding more types of recommended tasks
- Getting better at suggesting things appropriate to a user's experience level and situation
- Adding functionality to help walk a new user through a task, such as attaching a record to someone in the family tree, cleaning up data problems, merging people in the family tree, etc.

Memories

In the last year, FamilySearch made several key changes to the "Memories" experience.

- The new **Memories Gallery** was launched which provides an easy way to see and organize all of the memories you have uploaded or created on FamilySearch.org.
- The Gallery contains a **grid view** to see the photos, stories, and other memories uploaded.
- It also contains a **list view,** which allows the user to quickly scan the memories and also quickly see if a memory is missing a title, location, or date, or if it has been attached to someone in the Family Tree.
- Patrons found that in the list view, it was sometimes hard to see the details in a photo so now, hovering the mouse over a thumbnail will show a larger view of the memory.
- New features were added to the gallery to allow the user to rotate a photo, download it, change a photo to a document (or visa-versa) or to add a memory to an album.
- The process to upload stories, photos, documents, and audio was made simpler with new links in the Family Tree.
- **People Page**
  - The people in the first few generations can be sorted by last name.
  - View My Relationship now finds relationships by looking from the user back up to 15 generations and back down another 15 generations.

This year, the Memories experience will be enhanced. Some of the changes we expect to release include:

- The ability to rotate, download, or move a memory to an album from the individual memory page.
- The memory pages will load and respond more quickly.
- The capability to import photos directly from Facebook, Instagram, and Google Photos into FamilySearch.org.

Family Tree

Notable changes to the Family Tree in the last year include:

- **Performance Improvements and Shutdown of Old NFS Systems.** We fully shut down the old new.familysearch.org system and moved to a new, cloud-based system that is much more stable and can handle more traffic. As part of this change, IOUS's can now be merged.
- **View Number of Watchers.** Users have been able to "watch" people in the Family Tree. Now, when someone goes to make a change on a person in the tree, if others are "watching" that ancestor, the person making the change will be notified. We hope this will help people think more carefully about making changes in the Family Tree.
- **Limits on Deleting People.** The delete feature in the Family Tree was sometimes causing damage to the Family Tree. Now, a user can only delete a person in the Tree if he or she is the only contributor. If others have made any changes to the person, no one can delete it.
- **Better "View My Relationship."** Previously, the View My Relationship link only appeared if the person in the Family Tree was within about 4 generations. The new version can calculate a relationship back 15 generations and down another 15 generations.

Here are some of the changes we are working on to improve the Family Tree. Some of these will take more than a year to complete.

- **Sources on Living Persons.** We want to allow users to add sources to the living people in the Family Tree. This will allow us to better document the lives of ourselves or people we know.
- **Sharing of Living Persons.** This is a very complex change that will come out after 2017, but users really want to be able to share and collaborate on living people in the Family Tree. This change will allow users to opt in to sharing living information and view the same information, photos, stories, etc. on living people.
- **Family Tree Lite.** To help people who live in areas with very slow bandwidth, we have created a version of the Family Tree that uses very little bandwidth. We are also applying some of these principles to the core Family Tree to make it faster.
- **Contributor Notifications and Data Protection.** We are continually looking for ways to make the tree easier to use while also encouraging the addition of good data and discouraging the addition of bad data.

Mobile Apps

Recent enhancements to search include:

- **Records:** Users can now search for records, analyze record hints, and attach records.
- **Merge:** We recently added the ability to merge people in the family tree.
- **Tasks: "**Ancestors with Tasks" and "Descendants with Tasks" look at the ancestors or descendants of a person in the Family Tree to find record hints that may help expand your family tree, add missing information, or fix errors.
- **Maps:** Users can now see a map of where their ancestor lived, was born, died, and buried.
- **95%:** The Family Tree and Memories mobile apps now allow users to do 95% of the most common tasks people do on the website.

Future enhancements include:

- **Tasks:** These features will soon also point out potential data problems and will also make research suggestions, similar to what is done on the website.
- **Multiple Tabs:** Users will soon be able to open multiple tabs to be able to more easily compare information and move around in the app.
- **Change Log:** Users will be able to view the change log to see what changes have been made on a person in the Family Tree.

Search

Recent feature enhancements include:

- **Improved Search Results:** Search results now show additional information about each record.

- o **Attached to Family Tree:** When you are logged in, you will see a pedigree icon next to records attached to the Family Tree. Looking at the person in the Family Tree may help you discover more records, additional information, photos, stories, and more about the person in the record.
    - o **View Index:** Clicking this icon allows you to view the indexed information.
    - o **View Image:** Clicking this icon will take you to view the image.
    - o **Image on Another Website:** This icon will link to an image found on a partner's website.
- **Image Grid View:** When viewing a record image, there is an icon that will toggle between viewing just the particular image vs. seeing thumbnail images of the images in that section of records. This can be helpful when you are browsing through images and want to jump ahead or look for a different image type.

Future search enhancements and work:

- We are working to speed up the search, source linker, and the match system.
- We will replace the current tree search and the search for duplicates in the family tree with the same system used to find record hints. This should improve the accuracy of duplicate checking and search.
- We will continue to add more record hints to the Family Tree.
- We are looking for ways to make attaching records easier to understand and do correctly.
- We will start experimenting with ways to allow users to report errors in indexed records and to get those errors fixed and back onto the site.

Help

Some key improvements in help include the following:

- We have improved the **Help Center** by incorporating categories to help you narrow down you search.
- The "**Get Help**" screen is now simplified and you can also search for information directly from the drop down in the box titled "What can we help you with?". The search takes you to a page with the top results from Help articles, Lessons, and the Wiki.
- The **Consultant Planner** is now available to Church members who help others at https://familysearch.org/ask/planner.

In 2017, we will continue to add more contextual help to assist users in learning what they can do and helping them find out how to do the most common tasks in core sections of the website.

Indexing

RootsTech attendees will be able to get early access to the web-based indexing tool. This new way of indexing removes the need to download and install a desktop application and will run in any browser that has sufficient real estate—tablet size and larger. This will allow people to index wherever they have an internet connection.