Run, Jump, and Collecting Coins:
Gaming and Family History

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Catching Up

At last year's conference a small group discussed some potential ways gaming could be useful within family history. The following components were introduced to guide the discussion:

- Approach family history from a three-dimensional view, rather than from a flat "names and dates" perspective.

- Enable a player to interact with their past - either through its people or places. Games need to provide an element of discovery and excitement.

- Have an "end point" or a "final level." Unlike in family history, players should know they could eventually "beat the game."

- Engage players into a larger community. While some gamers will be happy to play in isolation, games that encourage and build communities will offer natural starting

- Be fun. Developers should work to take their knowledge of what makes a game popular and engaging when creating a game geared towards family history.

Encouraging the Next Generation

Born after 1980 and raised with rapid advancements in technology, the next generation represents one of the largest portions of potential family historians. To develop tools that will engage this new community it is essential that societies understand **who** they are, **why** they are interested, and **what** they are seeking.

> **WHO**: Younger than a stereotypical "genealogist," this generation is overly capable of using technology. In other words, the incorporation of technology into genealogy is not difficult and requires no learning curve. In fact, genealogy **without** technology is as foreign to the majority of Generation Y's as the idea of genealogy **without** printed books is to many traditional genealogical society members or library visitors.

WHY: While some might focus on filling in gaps on their pedigree charts and family group sheets or on diving beyond the names and dates they have gathered over the years, this new generation of genealogists are rarely immediately focused on the "big picture" of how many ***current individuals*** define genealogy and family history. They are primarily interested in discovering an individual or specific family and relating their own family to a larger historical and/or familial narrative. Their focus is on *people* and *stories* not names, dates, and methodology.

WHAT: For many members and patrons we can easily pinpoint what a typical member is seeking. This new generation is seeking genealogical societies, libraries, and their resources - though they might not yet realize it. They are searching for educational opportunities to guide them through the maze of online records, a community to interact with, and above all a current, relevant, and active organizations to join.

Additional Thoughts

As we begin a discussion of potential uses for gaming and family history, let us also consider:

Expanding Our Definitions

To many, family history is a traditional research based activity that is not seen as a game. While enjoyable to millions, genealogy certainly has a learning curve that can be difficult to overcome - even for the best genealogists. In a renewed focus on stories, it is essential that we expand our definitions of a "family historian." In expanding our audiences, not everyone who has an interest in family history will become a genealogist - or even foster a long-term interest in their own family history. Gaming allows us to be open to new communities, while offering a resource to harness the interest had by many who are not ready for (or do now know the value of) a dedicated, methodological research process.

Harnessing the Crowd

Gaming can assist us to harness the power of the crowd. Gaming might allow us to gather an even larger number of volunteers for projects and data collection. From indexing to capturing records, gaming has the potential to enable access to more records at a lower cost.
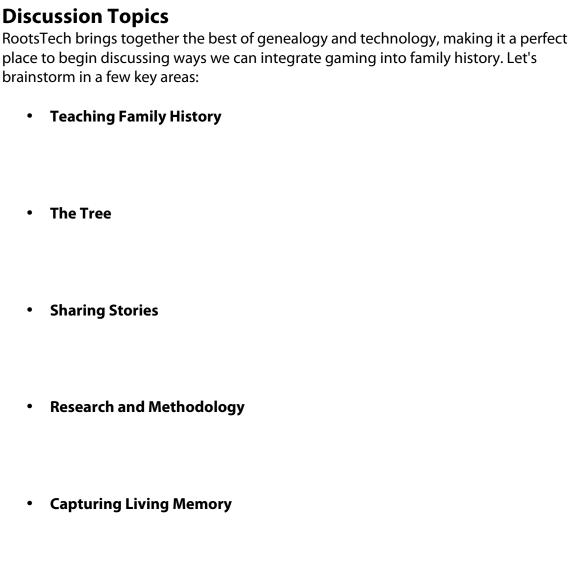
Capturing Living Memory

Consider the amount of living memory that could be captured and preserved within a game. Gaming could be a potential platform to ensure members of the current generation leave behind a record of their lives.

Think Globally
Developments should be global. While many countries in North America and Europe have ready access to smartphones, tablets, and high-speed Internet connections, this is simply not the case when speaking from a global perspective. We should consider ways to develop games that work on "older" cell phones, where text messaging is still a new and developing technology.

Discussion Topics

RootsTech brings together the best of genealogy and technology, making it a perfect place to begin discussing ways we can integrate gaming into family history. Let's brainstorm in a few key areas:

- **Teaching Family History**

- **The Tree**

- **Sharing Stories**

- **Research and Methodology**

- **Capturing Living Memory**

- **Photos**

- **Problem Solving**

- **Family Legends and Secrets**

- **Facts and Trivia**

- **Places**

- **Events and Happenings**

- **People**

- **Other**