

Technology Helps FamilySearch Volunteers Hit Major Milestone

By Heather Whittle Wrigley, Church Magazines

FamilySearch volunteers expect to have transcribed more than 325 million names by the end of 2009, just three years after the organization began its online indexing program.

The milestone was a number once thought impossible to reach in such a short period of time. In 2006, a few thousand volunteers indexed only 11 million names. But thanks to continuing advances in technology and a growing number of volunteers—more than 100,000 across five

continents—an estimated half million individual names are indexed each day.

At that rate, Paul Nauta, FamilySearch public affairs manager, expects that 500 million names will have been indexed by the end of 2010.

And yet all this work barely makes a dent in the vast stores of historical records throughout the world, which grow by more than 100 million records (each with multiple names) every year.

“We are not catching up,” Brother Nauta said. “In preserving records alone, there are more records created in one year than we could ever film in decades with

current technology.”

To hasten the work of making important historical records available online, the Church’s Family History Department is continually working to develop new ways to preserve records not only as quickly as possible but at the highest quality possible. This has resulted in specially designed digital cameras, innovative scanning technology, and new software and applications.

“It is not necessarily that we want to be pioneers in this field and this technology,” Brother Nauta said. “But we are compelled to do it.”

Capturing the Records

Representatives of the Church’s Family History Department oversee the effort

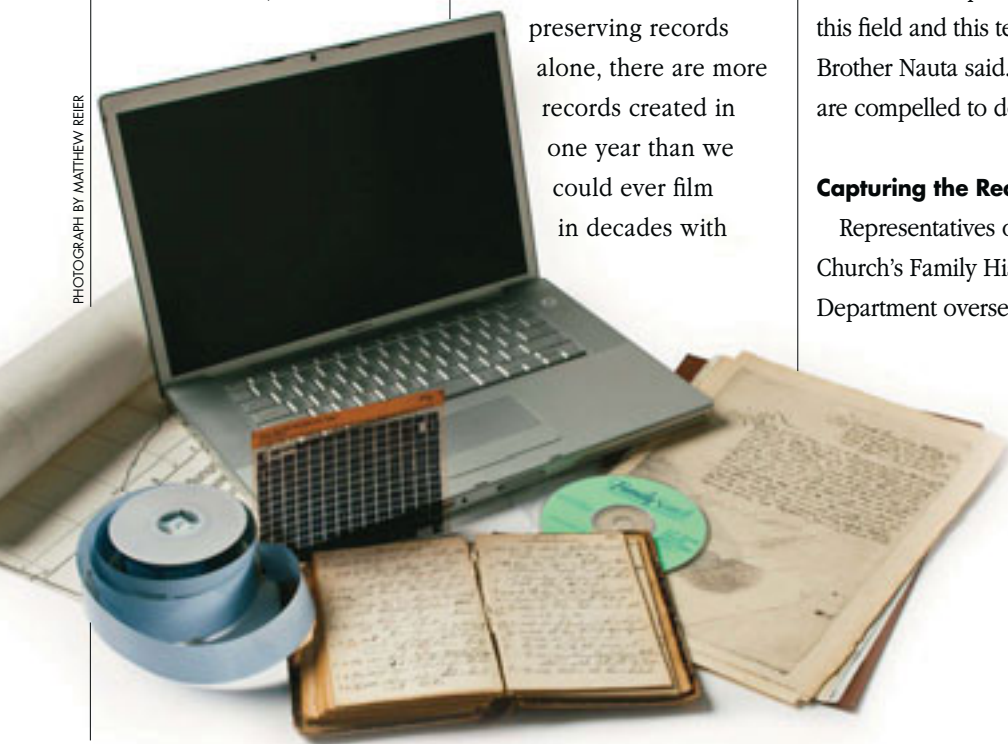
to acquire records, beginning with prioritizing what records would be most valuable to the public and matching limited human resources to gather them.

Employees of the Family History Department then work with various churches, municipalities, archives, and governments to acquire or create copies of those records. Most institutions welcome the Church’s efforts. “We have a good reputation as an organization that cares about the records as much as the archivists do,” said Steven L. Waters, strategic relations manager for Europe. “In general, they are thankful to have an organization like ours that puts so many resources into preserving history.”

In capturing records, an area is set up on-site where special cameras are used to create digital images of the historical documents. The process can take from a few weeks to several years depending on the size of the collection, the type of

FamilySearch is using technology in new ways to both preserve family history and make it available to others.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REIER



documents being copied, and the workers' experience levels.

With cameras similar to those used by NASA and in other industrial settings, workers produce an image at a high resolution of 50 megapixels, using special software designed by FamilySearch engineers. Adjustments to the cameras, made by Church camera specialists, increase their lifespan from about 300,000 pictures to 500,000 per year for four years or more.

Once a project is complete, up to a terabyte (1,000 gigabytes) of images and information is sent to Salt Lake City, where the images will be processed, preserved, copied, and distributed based on the contract specifications. Many images are published on FamilySearch.org; some are published on commercial genealogical Web sites; sometimes the archive itself publishes the work.

"In the end, we may or may not get to personally publish the records," Brother Waters said. "But it's about making as many records as possible available to as many people as possible."

A Different Kind of Conversion

One of the most significant advancements for

FamilySearch in recent years was put into place in 2005, when 15 high-speed scanners were developed to convert images previously contained on microfilm into digital images. These scanners are converting 2.5 million rolls of microfilm from the Church's Granite Mountain Records Vault into tens of millions of ready-to-index digital images.

The scanners are like a camera: as the microfilm unwinds, the images on the microfilm are converted into a long ribbon of high-quality digital images. A computer program quality-checks the ribbon and uses special algorithms to break it up into individual images.

These rolls of microfilm include images of important historical documents gathered from all over the world—birth and death records, hospital records, family histories, immigration forms, historical books, and more.

"To our knowledge, there is no company that does the level of vital records preservation that FamilySearch does," said Brother Nauta. "The records FamilySearch contains currently, when digitized, would equal 132 Libraries of Congress or 18 petabytes

(1,000 terabytes) of data—and that doesn't include our ongoing acquisition efforts."

Taking It to the World

To make all of these digitized records available to the public, the Family History Department developed FamilySearchIndexing.org. There, anyone can download

in 2009—Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Swedish.

"We've come from transcribing by hand to delivering digital images on CDs through the mail to Web-based applications where virtually anyone can be involved," Brother Nauta said. "We are quantum leaps from where we began. It's faster, more reliable, and

"We've come from transcribing by hand to . . . [using] Web-based applications. . . . We are quantum leaps from where we began."

images of historical documents to a computer and transcribe the information to help create a database of names, dates, locations, and other information—free for all to search online at FamilySearch.org.

Anyone can participate in indexing. If a home computer doesn't meet the requirements to run the indexing application (available for download at FamilySearchIndexing.org), the application can be found on computers at any one of the 4,600 family history centers around the world.

Already available in English, French, German, and Spanish, FamilySearch.org indexing added four more languages

more efficient."

With the technological advances and the ever-increasing number of indexing volunteers, the Ellis Island historical records—which a decade ago took 12,000 volunteers 12 years to complete—would take three weeks to index today.

"That evolution of technology has been remarkable in getting everyone involved everywhere," said Paul D. Starkey, digital information process manager in the Family History Department. "The Internet has been an amazing technology to help this kind of work."

Beyond the Technology

Beyond the innovations in technology, at the heart of

the hastening of the work are people.

At any given moment, thousands of volunteers from around the world are working with FamilySearch Indexing. A growing number of them are not members of the Church.

For some, preserving historical records is a commission to preserve the identity and heritage of a nation, organization, or community. For others, it lends a deepened sense of personal identity.

“They confirm that they are part of a larger family fabric that has a rich history,” Brother Nauta said. “We quickly learn

that life as we know it isn’t just about us in the here and now. Knowing the richer context of our family history gives us and our posterity something more to live up to—a legacy to fulfill and pass on after doing our part.”

For Church members, there is added value in being able to perform saving ordinances for ancestors in the temple. But for all, this growing interest in family history work was foretold.

“It’s in the scriptures,” Brother Nauta said. “The hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers’” (see D&C 2:1–2). ■

More Than Just Indexing

FamilySearchIndexing.org is just one of a number of Web-based programs that have been developed to advance family history work.

FamilySearch Labs (labs.FamilySearch.org) showcases developing family history technologies. Users test them, and their feedback allows developers to refine the technology.

The Research Wiki (wiki.familysearch.org) is an open, online community where research experts and genealogists share information on how to research sources for family history work.

Record Search gives access to millions of historical records—a culmination of all the digitizing of records that is being done. (Visit FamilySearch.org, click **Search Records**, then **Record Search pilot**.)

At forums.FamilySearch.org, thousands of users of varying levels of expertise can discuss products, research techniques, hints and tips, and even families in specific locations. ■



New Temple Presidents Begin Service

The following new temple presidents and their wives began serving on November 1, 2009, as assigned by the First Presidency.

Temple

Aba Nigeria
Accra Ghana
Albuquerque New Mexico
Boston Massachusetts
Bountiful Utah
Brisbane Australia
Cardston Alberta
Colonia Juárez Chihuahua Mexico
Denver Colorado
Frankfurt Germany
Fukuoka Japan
Guatemala City Guatemala
Helsinki Finland
Hermosillo Sonora Mexico
Houston Texas
Las Vegas Nevada
Manila Philippines
Manti Utah
Mesa Arizona
Mexico City Mexico
Montevideo Uruguay
Monticello Utah
Montreal Quebec
Oaxaca Mexico
Oklahoma City Oklahoma

Temple President and Matron

Douglas M. and Carol Ann Robinson
Julian P. and Gaye S. Breillatt
W. Douglas and Dixie J. Shumway
Robert S. and Dixie Jones Wood
Douglas L. and Jeannette M. Callister
John R. and Kathryn E. Gibson
Brent L. and Barbara Nielson
Robert J. and Raquel L. Whetten
Mark A. and Jane W. Baer
Peter J. G. and Ilona L. Berkahn
Asao and Kumiko Y. Miyashita
Clate W. and Paula G. Mask
Kari J. A. and Auli A. Haikkola
G. Farrell and Doratha R. Young
D. Channing and Charlotte M. Bradshaw
Bruce M. and Barbara J. Ballard
Moises M. and Amparo A. Mabunga
Ed J. and Patricia P. Pinegar
Daryl H. and Irene H. Garn
Santiago and Rosa G. Mejía Mora
Lynn R. and Alma Don M. Shurtleff
Vaughn A. and Karen C. Johnson
David B. and Frieda K. Galbraith
Adolfo and Josefina H. Ávalos Rico
Michael L. and Victoria M. Southward ■

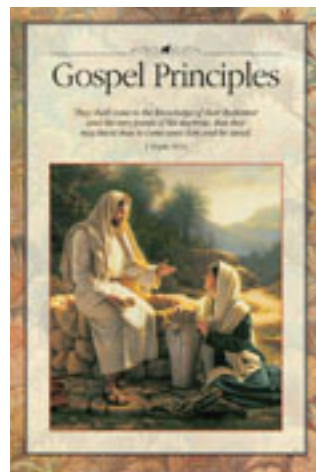
Revised *Gospel Principles* is Curriculum for 2010

Beginning in January 2010, adult members of the Church will spend two years studying the newly revised *Gospel Principles* manual on the second and third Sundays of each month.

Since 1998 most adult members have studied the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series in their priesthood quorums and Relief Society classes. During that time, millions have joined the Church. A return to studying the fundamental principles and doctrines of the gospel will bless not only those new members but longtime members as well, according to Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The new edition of *Gospel Principles* is larger, and the design has changed to match the *Teachings* volumes and to make it easier to read. All of the visuals, one per chapter, are in color.

Instructions for teaching from the manual in class or at home are included in the updated and simplified introduction to *Gospel Principles*.



The revised *Gospel Principles* manual will be studied in Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society classes beginning in January 2010.

Additional instructions are found in footnotes throughout the manual.

Questions at the beginning of most sections of the chapters help focus readers on important content in the chapter. Questions at the end of each section prompt members to reflect upon and apply what they have read. Teachers may use the questions to promote class discussion during the lesson.

“The more we reflect on the principles and doctrines, the greater our understanding becomes,” said Elder Kenneth

Johnson of the Seventy, who oversaw the revision of the manual. “They never grow old, and our understanding of them is increased and enhanced. The truth is not just an intellectual truth, but more of an understanding as the Spirit is present.”

Teachers of the Gospel Principles class for new members, investigators, and members returning to activity will also use the new manual.

In addition to studying the manual on Sunday, members can use the book in their personal study to better understand core principles and doctrines of the gospel. Parents can use the new introduction, questions, pictures, and notes to help teach their children these doctrines in the home.

In 2012 Church members will resume studying *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*. ■

New DVD Set Brings Old Testament to Life

The Old Testament just became a lot more accessible.

In October, the Church released the Old Testament Visual Resource DVDs—a set of three DVDs containing more than 300 visual resources to assist members as they study the Old Testament.

The first two discs contain videos, interactive charts, quotations from latter-day apostles and prophets, and paintings that supplement the doctrines and events found in the Old Testament.

A scripture-study activity accompanies each visual resource and can be used for personal, family, or classroom

study to help unlock understanding of the Old Testament.

The third DVD contains stories for children, based on the book, *Old Testament Stories*. People such as Joseph, Ruth, Elijah, Jonah, and Esther will come to life for children as they listen to the simple narrations and view the illustrations for each story.

Now available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, the DVDs will become available in 25 other languages over the next year.

The set of Old Testament Visual Resource DVDs is \$6.25 USD and is available through Church distribution centers and ldscatalog.com. ■

First Conference Held in Ethiopia

During July 2009 some 160 youth and young adults gathered for a day of friendship, workshops, dancing, and testimonies at the first youth conference held in Ethiopia.

Because the four branches are widely separated many members were not aware of other branches and Church members in Ethiopia. The conference allowed them to interact with their peers while being spiritually uplifted.

Wondwossen Amanuel, 23, who was submitting his papers to become the first missionary from the Awasa Branch, said: “Our branch is small, but [at the conference] we felt like family.”

The participants traveled by bus for up to five hours to attend the conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. More than half were nonmembers and investigators.

Romanian Young Women Hold First Camp

Six young women and their leaders from the Bucharest Romania District took part in the first Young Women camp in Romania from August 24 to 26. District Young Women president Dina Cojocaru led the camp with the help of senior missionaries Elder Don and Sister Edie Van Noy.

The young women and leaders held morning and evening devotionals, and Elder and Sister Van Noy taught workshops on virtue and how to give effective talks in church.

Alina Mateescu, one of the young women, said she felt assured she could become the exemplary woman God wanted her to become.

Romania, a country in southeastern Europe, has about 2,736 members in 17 branches. ■

Correction

An article in the June *Ensign* on the Church History Library reported that the library holds 13,000 photos. It should have stated that the library holds 13,000 collections of photos, likely totaling more than one million photographs. In addition, the number of vaults in the building is 12 rather than 14. ■

Giving Up the Game

“Just A Game” (August 2009, 46) really spoke to me. Before the Internet there were role-playing games, and I played. It negatively affected my schoolwork, my friendships, and my self-esteem. If I have any advice to give, it’s that there’s a whole world out there of much better entertainment.

*Joy Meyer
California USA*

Up For Discussion

“Leading Class Discussions” (June 2009, 24) has made a

huge difference in my Gospel Doctrine class.

I was guilty of answering the questions I asked after an “awkward silence” of only a few seconds, so class participation was subdued and I spent a lot of time lecturing. After I followed Brother Jones’s suggestions, class participation soared and the influence of the Spirit was tangible.

This article should be required reading for all teachers!

*Richard Rodney
Virginia, USA*

Members in Turkey Aid Flood Victims

Local priesthood and auxiliary leaders near Istanbul, Turkey, coordinated with civil authorities to give aid to those affected by flash floods in September 2009. Local leaders provided blankets, hygiene kits, school kits, shoes, and other supplies. At least 32 people died when the heaviest rainfall in 80 years triggered flash floods. More than 35,000 people were affected by the flooding. No members or missionaries were hurt.

Members Escape Wildfires

More than 70 Church members evacuated their homes because of wildfires in California and Utah, USA, in September 2009. Many of the evacuees stayed with other member families. Fires burned more than 123,000 acres in the Sacramento and Los Angeles, California, areas, killing two firefighters and destroying more than 100 buildings. In the area of New Harmony, Utah, fires consumed more than 10,000 acres and several buildings. In both states, local leaders assisted those affected. ■