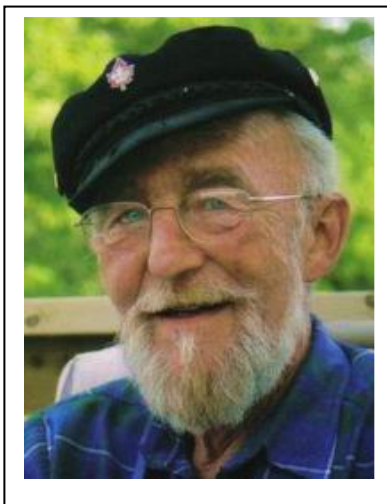


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #71

Family Websites



An increasing number of Family Historians is resorting to the Family Website as a strategy for communicating their findings to other researchers and for reaching out to yet unknown family members who may also be researching the same or collateral families.

I have been aware for a while that I would have to think about doing one myself sometime. Friends and colleagues try from time to time to prod me in that direction. I assure them that I am thinking about it but that I am very busy at the moment.

This blissful state of denial was shaken recently by an e-mail from reader Randy Weekes, of Hopetown. Randy is very excited about the results from their Family Website. New information has been volunteered, new contacts made, and enthusiasm for the project has expanded.

The site was actually designed by his brother, Alan Weekes, and it includes, not only all their research, but also photographs, and even audiotapes. A 'Guest Book' function and a 'Contact Us' link add more dimensions to this site. The site is very well designed and could serve as a model for others. You can visit it at: weekesfamily.org.

I visited their site and was really impressed. Desperately I looked for excuses to put off facing such a project. I explained that my computer guru (my son, Mike) lives in Halifax. "No problem" responded Alan, "I often work on the site while sitting in airports".

So now I have to learn about creating websites and that involves a very steep learning curve. The easiest way to do this is for me to decide what I want on the site (and I feel competent to do this) and then hire a specialist to do the rest. Regular readers will know that I would only do that as a last resort, if at all.

Once you have decided on the content, it must be translated into web language. I understand that there are programs such as *Front Page* or *Dreamweaver* that will do this for you but it is no big job to learn the language of the web, HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language). I learned it myself a few years ago to submit a web document, so you can too.

The site then has to be designed and I think that is a job for someone who knows something about it. Most high school students learn how to do this. You must have a friend or contact who can help or ask for the computer teacher at a local high school. Before you do this, however, visit as many Family Websites as you can, like the Weekes' one, to see what kind of things can be done. I would try to arrange that my designer will be available for subsequent updates and changes as more material becomes available and for troubleshooting if something goes awry.

Now comes the question of where are you going to put this site on the web. You can either rent space or go for a free one. I am sure you have seen a number of the big players offering free space to host your site. If you want to find more, just type 'free websites' into your internet search engine.

These free hosts usually will provide templates, add-ons (such as counters and graphics) and they provide plenty of space. Some will even provide a program to help you design the site. So why are they free? The host will then sell advertising like banners and pop-ups to go on your site and you have no control over what is advertised on your site.

If you opt to retain full control of your site, then you will need a domain name (the part of the URL between 'WWW' and '.net') and a host that rents you the space. Usually your Internet Service Provider (ISP) will provide both of these services.

Now, all you have to do is upload your material to the site and that alone scares the heck out of me, so whoever is helping me will do that too.

I will keep you posted as I work out my angst and try to make some progress on this project.

I welcome comments, queries, and suggestions at: p_wohler@hotmail.com

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