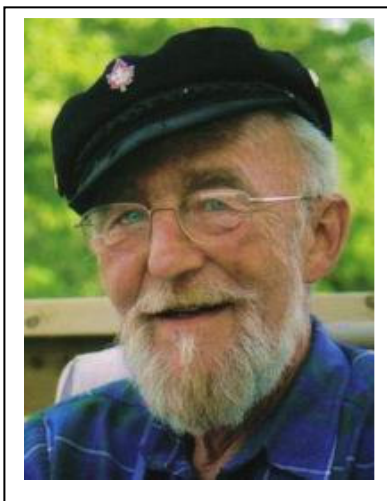


### The GEDCOM Story



In the 1980's, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) was wrestling with the problem of moving computerized genealogical data from one computer to another, especially from individual researchers to their central data bank. Their solution was the development of the GEDCOM.

The biggest initial problem was that only their own program, Personal Ancestral File (PAF), could use it. As new programs came on the market and older ones were upgraded, they started to include GEDCOM capacity. Today anyone who uses a genealogy computer program is likely to have encountered or even used GEDCOMs.

GEDCOM is not a computer program but a file format and its files end in ".ged". You can now create a GEDCOM file from your genealogy program and export it to a fellow researcher by e-mail. That researcher can import your GEDCOM file directly into his or her own program. It sounds simple enough.

It is something like a linking language. It translates your data into a conveyancing mode, then translates it in a way that the new computer program can read it. Anyone who has worked with languages will become cautious at this point.

If you translate a simple word like 'stop' to French and someone translates it back into English, there is a good chance that it will come out as 'stop'. Doing the same thing with a sophisticated line of prose or poetry, however, can have very different results.

GEDCOMS work well with the basic data but there can be problems with more complicated items. Sometimes the fault is in differences between the two genealogy programs where one does not have the same fields as the other. One may allow only one occupation and the other may accommodate several. Some programs allow a date range for an event while others accept only one date.

As computer programs have become more sophisticated, the LDS has made a number of upgrades to the GEDCOM but we are at a stage where a full reworking of it is called for. This has been under discussion for several years but little else has apparently been done, so it is unlikely that we will see anything significant for several years.

Another limitation of GEDCOMS is that they do not handle multimedia well. Since nothing else that I know of does either, this is not a criticism but simply a limitation that we should be aware of.

Even with its limitations, the GEDCOM is still the best way to move genealogical data between computers.

As a precaution, I normally open a GEDCOM in a separate genealogical file. In this way I can review it, made any corrections necessary (and the GEDCOM will warn you of apparent problems), and make sure that it is as I want it before merging it with another genealogical file.

If you would like more detailed explanations of the GEDCOM, check out Dick Eastman's article at: [www.eogen.com/GEDCOM](http://www.eogen.com/GEDCOM) or <http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~pmcbride/gedcom/55gctoc.htm>.

### Halifax Death Registers

We have had good news from Lois Yorke at the Nova Scotia Archives. In 1884, the government of Canada initiated a program to collect death statistics from the major Canadian cities and this continued in Halifax until 1908, when the province took over the responsibility. Two of those early registers have survived.

They cover the years 1890-1908 and have almost 18,000 entries. The registers for the previous years (1884-1889) cannot be found and may not have survived. The two surviving registers were transferred to the Nova Scotia Archives in 2004 and staff and volunteers have created an electronic database for them.

That database and digitized images of the registers are now available online. The entries in the database are hotlinked to their corresponding page in the register. The database is fully searchable and is available at: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/vitalstats/death/halifax/>. The Archives recommends using Viewpoint Media Player or Internet Explorer to examine the register pages.