FAMILYSEARCH INDEXING

What's it all about?

The Church began microfilming records in 1938, and by now has in the Granite Mountain Vault about two-and-one-half million rolls, enough to stretch nearly three times around the equator. We're now using *digital* cameras, and the data is transmitted electronically — much faster than with microfilms. An amount of information equivalent to the entire Library of Congress is being sent in every month. The Church is now moving rapidly to electronically *digitize* all the microfilms that are in the Granite Vault, and then to make all these images available on the Internet. With techniques and cameras that have recently been developed, they expect to be caught up in about 6 years. ***Do you believe in miracles? This whole story is full of them. Just three years ago, all of this was considered to be impossible!***

In order to make these digitized records searchable, it's necessary to *index* them. That's the object of the FamilySearch Indexing program. The Church is calling for volunteers to help in this process, at home on their own computers and other places such as Family History Centers and libraries. There are about 125,000 indexers so far, and more are needed. (They're especially anxious right now, for example, to get 10,000 new indexers who can read Spanish, and they'll later expand to other languages.) Many of the volunteers are non-LDS folks who belong to historical societies and other such organizations all over the world — they see the value of this and want to help.

This is the way it works:

You can do the work right in your own home, any time of the day or night, if you have a computer with access to the Internet. You download an image of a census page, a death certificate, or whatever's available, and type the key information into a table. When you finish, you submit your work over the Internet to a central "server".

You need to be careful, but not worry too much about making a mistake. If a single character is unreadable, you simply replace it with a question mark. If two or more adjacent characters are unreadable, you replace them with an asterisk, and if an entry or even a whole line is unreadable, there's a way to indicate that too. Besides, the whole image will also be sent to another indexer, so that it's done independently by two different people. Then both batches will be viewed by an arbitrator, who will examine any differences and make the final decisions.

Some images will be harder than others to read and to index, but you are expected to just do the best you can without spending undue amounts of time or worry. It can be frustrating at times, but it's actually kinda fun, and you get spiritual help and a very special feeling in this work.

How to begin? Go to www.familysearchindexing.org on the Internet. This is the home page for the indexing project.

a. Read the general information in the left hand column. Notice that under "Current and Upcoming Projects" you will see hyperlinks for what is indexed now, and what is coming in the future. By going to either of these pages, you will also find another hyperlink for Completed Projects.

b. ***To register as a volunteer***, click the "Volunteer" button on the home page. Choose a user name and a password. Note that the password has to have a minimum of 8 characters, including one number and one symbol or non-alphabetic character, and it is case sensitive. (If either of your choices is already being used by someone else, the computer will ask you to choose a different one.) Be sure and make a note of your username and password, in case you forget them later. Then fill in the requested information and click "Continue" to go on.

   Notice that you are asked to indicate whether you are LDS. If you are, they will notify your Stake Indexing Director, who will then check with you later to see if you need any help or training.

c. ***Install the indexing software program in your computer***. Notice that in the bottom paragraph on the home page, there is a hyperlink to see what computer specifications are recommended for indexing, so you can see whether your home computer is up to the task. If it is, then click on the "Install Now" button. On the pop-up screen that appears, click the "Save File" button, and indicate where you want the FSIndexing_Setup.exe file to be saved in your computer. This is a large file (about 28 megabytes), and it would take about 90 minutes to download it on a telephone dial-up modem. With a high-speed internet connection (DSL, cable, fiber-optics, etc.) it will take less than 10 minutes.

Once the "Setup" file is downloaded, you can double-click on its icon to install the program. In the process, it will install the Java program that it uses, and also place an icon for FamilySearch Indexing (which looks like a tree) on your desktop. Then whenever you wish to do some indexing you can open the program by either going to the FamilySearch Indexing home page and clicking the "Start Indexing" button, or by simply double-clicking the (tree) icon on your desktop.

Where can I find instructions, tutorials, and helps on learning how to index?

a. On the FamilySearch Indexing home page, click on the "Help" tab at the top of the page, just above the large blue bar. You will see a number of self-instructional tutorials that are available. Lessons 1, 3, and 4 are the ones that are most applicable here.

Lessons 3 and 4 have handouts that are particularly useful. To see these, click first on the Lesson 3 hyperlink. Click on the black arrow in the "Start" box in the lower right-hand corner of the title page. On the "Lesson Objectives" page that appears, click on the "Contents" button in the lower right-hand corner box. This brings up the "Lesson 3 Contents" page, which has a hyperlink for the Index a Batch handout. This handout has lots of beautifully organized images illustrating the various steps in indexing, and part or all of it can be printed. The handout in Lesson 4, entitled Indexing Guidelines, can be obtained the same way.

b. Some other instructions and tutorials that are particularly useful are found from the first working page that comes up when you are going to index a batch. To start from scratch, go to your computer desktop and double-click on the FamilySearch Indexing icon (the tree). When the "Login" pop-up screen appears, type in your username and password, and click "OK". You will then see the "My Work" screen, as described in Lessons 3 and 4 of the tutorials described in the preceding paragraph.

You can then download a batch (that is, an image to index) either by (1) clicking the "Download Indexing Batch" button to download the highest priority batch, or (2) clicking the "Download From..." button and choosing one of the projects that are listed. If you have previously downloaded a batch that you have not yet completed, its title will be listed in the "My Work" section. To continue working on this batch, click on its title if it isn't already highlighted in blue, and then click the "Work on Batch" button just below the list. (When you download a batch, you have a week to finish it — after that they transfer it to someone else.)

Once your batch is downloaded, examine the image and the table below it in which you type information, and notice that the title at the top of each column tells you what needs to be indexed. At some point, you should explore the icons on the toolbar just above the table. Let the mouse rest on each to see what it does.

Now click on the "Project Information" button just above the table, and then click on the Indexing Project Homepage hyperlink that appears. You will see several hyperlinks that take you to various kinds of instructions that apply particularly to the batch on which you are working — such things as project-specific indexing instructions, field-by-field helps, handwriting helps, historical background, and a suggestion to go to your Stake Indexing Director for additional help.

There are also several sources of help that are available while you're indexing. Whenever you click on a field to make an entry in the table, you will see specific helps and instructions for that particular field in the "Field Help" box at the right of the entry table. Also, for some of the entry fields (Given Name, Surname, and some of the others) you will notice that when you click on the field and then click on the small down-pointing arrow at the right of the field, a drop-down menu appears. When you click on "Lookup ..." in that menu, a number of suggestions appear. (These may be particularly helpful when you have difficulty reading the writing in the image.) Finally, if you have general questions while you're indexing, try pressing F1— the information that appears just might answer the questions you have.

A final word:

It will be helpful to explore and read all these resources described in the paragraphs above, especially when you're just beginning. You'll also find it very helpful to look at them again from time to time, just to remind yourself of the many details and suggestions they contain.

Don't feel like you have to know everything before you begin — much of it will come as you go. So, get registered, download an image, get started typing the information into the table, and enjoy!