

Digital/Electronic Family Trees: Personal vs. Public vs. Collaborative

I. Family trees are always a work in progress – never a finished product. They serve two main purposes:

- A. **Research** – Large trees for holding data, test theories, and see how individuals in certain populations are related.
- B. **Preservation, Presentation, and Sharing** of Family History – Smaller trees adhering to strict proof standards. It may be beneficial to keep different trees, according to their intended purpose.

II. Family Tree Versions:

- A. **Oral History:** Not the most reliable, but a good first step is to collect basic information from your older family members.
- B. **Paper:** Next best thing from the era before computers. May be after all, the most durable, if not the most shareable way of preserving family trees. These are good for family reunions and to share with relatives. May also be published in book form.
- C. **Electronic:**
 - 1. **Self-Standing personal computer versions** – All data is stored **only** in your personal computer. No one else has access to it.
 - 2. **Internet versions** – Data is stored in the clouds. Some programs support both modalities, allowing for synchronization between the personal computer version and the internet version.
 - a. **Internet Personal Trees** – The creator enters and controls all data. In terms of who can access the data, these can be:
 - 1) **Private** – Visible only to the author **or** to those the author invites to participate.
 - 2) **Public** – Anyone can see, but not change any data unless someone else has been granted administrative rights. A person not tagged as deceased is seen by others only as a “place-holder” with no name or other information.
 - b. **Internet Collaborative Trees** – These are based on a “One World Tree” concept, where anyone can add to or change any information. However, specific projects may be under a moderator who may lock the profile of certain individuals, and must be contacted for any major changes. Examples: Geni.com, Family Search, Wiki Tree, and others

Note: Having a tree on line may be quite beneficial for those seeking to get in touch with distant cousins and other family members who may be in possession of precisely the information you are seeking to break through your most obstinate brick walls.

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