

## Saving the Past for the Future— Tales of International Search and Cooperation

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We knew beforehand that this undertaking would be a difficult one, for the registers we desired to copy were dispersed in parishes scattered in three narrow Alpine valleys and in little communities aloft on the steep sides of mountains or perched upon well-nigh inaccessible heights.<sup>1</sup>

SO BEGINS THE ACCOUNT by Archibald F. Bennett of the microfilming of parish records in the Swiss Canton of Vaud. Bennett tells of an “abrupt and rugged climb up the tortuous trail” in a car, and then that “Pastor Bert welcomed us into his manse, assigned us a room, and brought in 118 volumes of registers.” There was electricity up there on the mountainside; but it turned out to be insufficient for the camera lights, so the records had to be taken down the mountain to a town for filming, and then they had to be returned up the mountain. Bennett continues:

On this favorable basis the gathering and the copying of vital genealogical material went forward rapidly. Tribute must be paid to Mr. and Mrs. Barker for taking their car, even in pouring rainstorms . . . up and down narrow, winding mountain roads and hazardous trails, to gather up or return the books. At times the road had to be leveled off with shovels before the car could pass. Often on a narrow road we might meet a cart or a car and be compelled to back up until there was space for it to pass. Once in doing this the car wheels sank into a ditch and it took a crowd of willing men to lift the car up and back on the firm road . . . The rain fell in torrents as they delivered the records to Rora, high up on a hill side. The car road ended at Tournim . . . and a Vaudois elder came wending his way down the mountain trail leading a patient, surefooted donkey, with the ninety-eight volumes wrapped in gunny sacks and packed securely on its back. These had to be returned the self-same way.

Bennett's is only one of many accounts showing the difficult, sometimes nearly impossible, circumstances that have been overcome in gathering the world's largest genealogical collection. This mammoth undertaking started in 1894, when Franklin D. Richards donated three books to the then newly organized Genealogical Society of Utah, the society organized to assist members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, popularly known as the Mormon Church, in obtaining genealogies of their ancestors, and to secure genealogical records from all nations and peoples, so far as possible, and deposit them in suitable depositories where they could be preserved. The money to finance the widespread activities of the Genealogical Society comes in donations from members of the Mormon Church. The impetus for our interest and action in genealogical work is that this is one of our basic beliefs, based on a commandment received on September 6, 1842, through Joseph Smith, the first prophet in the latter-days: “And let us present in His holy temple

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<sup>1</sup> Archibald F. Bennett, “Vaudois Records Microfilmed,” *Improvement Era*, December 1948, p. 970.

MICROFILMS OF THE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
AS OF 31 DECEMBER 1975

1.	UNITED STATES	279,053 rolls (100 feet)
a.	EXTENSIVE COLLECTIONS FROM THE FOLLOWING STATES: Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia	
b.	MICROFILMING NOW BEING DONE IN THE FOLLOWING STATES: Arkansas, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas	
c.	U.S. MICROFILMS BY AREAS:	
(1)	New York	33,179 rolls
(2)	North Carolina	24,044 rolls
(3)	Massachusetts	21,375 rolls
(4)	Tennessee	15,740 rolls
(5)	Georgia	14,645 rolls
(6)	Kentucky	14,195 rolls
(7)	Ohio	14,149 rolls
(8)	Pennsylvania	12,529 rolls
(9)	New Jersey	10,812 rolls
(10)	West Virginia	10,525 rolls
(11)	Louisiana	8,319 rolls
(12)	Missouri	5,883 rolls
(13)	Utah	5,780 rolls
(14)	Virginia	5,294 rolls
(15)	Michigan	4,902 rolls
(16)	South Carolina	4,063 rolls
(17)	Connecticut	3,859 rolls
(18)	Mississippi	3,859 rolls
(19)	Maine	3,291 rolls
(20)	Illinois	3,229 rolls
(21)	Texas	2,993 rolls
(22)	Vermont	2,709 rolls
(23)	Florida	2,666 rolls
(24)	New Hampshire	2,460 rolls
(25)	Maryland	2,450 rolls
(26)	Rhode Island	2,039 rolls
(27)	Indiana	1,844 rolls
(28)	California	1,583 rolls
(29)	Iowa	1,581 rolls
(30)	District of Columbia	1,174 rolls
(31)	Arkansas	885 rolls
(32)	Idaho	880 rolls
(33)	Kansas	692 rolls
(34)	Washington	670 rolls
(35)	Delaware	660 rolls
(36)	New Mexico	562 rolls
(37)	Arizona	539 rolls
(38)	Wisconsin	504 rolls
(39)	Wyoming	337 rolls
(40)	Alabama	287 rolls
(41)	Colorado	192 rolls
(42)	Hawaii	166 rolls
(43)	Nebraska	117 rolls
(44)	Oregon	112 rolls
(45)	Minnesota	110 rolls

Figure 1.

(46)	Oklahoma . . . . .	55 rolls
(47)	South Dakota . . . . .	25 rolls
(48)	Nevada . . . . .	24 rolls
(49)	Montana . . . . .	21 rolls
(50)	North Dakota . . . . .	17 rolls
(51)	Alaska . . . . .	8 rolls
UNITED STATES GENERAL . . . . .		31,513 rolls
2.	MEXICO . . . . .	105,584 rolls
3.	GREAT BRITAIN (England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man) . . . . .	68,644 rolls
4.	DENMARK . . . . .	67,348 rolls
5.	SWEDEN . . . . .	60,983 rolls
6.	THE NETHERLANDS . . . . .	59,867 rolls
7.	FRANCE . . . . .	54,367 rolls
8.	GERMANY . . . . .	50,929 rolls
9.	BELGIUM . . . . .	38,352 rolls
10.	FINLAND . . . . .	13,320 rolls
11.	CANADA . . . . .	10,901 rolls
12.	POLAND . . . . .	10,273 rolls
13.	HUNGARY . . . . .	7,165 rolls
14.	NORWAY . . . . .	6,994 rolls
15.	AUSTRIA . . . . .	5,979 rolls
16.	GUATEMALA . . . . .	5,572 rolls
17.	ARGENTINA . . . . .	5,326 rolls
18.	SWITZERLAND . . . . .	5,080 rolls
19.	AUSTRALIA . . . . .	3,671 rolls
20.	POLYNESIA (Cook Island, Fiji, Maori, Samoa, French Polynesia, etc.) . . . . .	2,310 rolls
21.	ITALY . . . . .	2,088 rolls
22.	NEW ZEALAND . . . . .	1,737 rolls
23.	JAPAN . . . . .	1,633 rolls
24.	CHILE . . . . .	1,565 rolls
25.	KOREA . . . . .	1,235 rolls
26.	RUSSIA . . . . .	854 rolls
27.	ICELAND . . . . .	765 rolls
28.	CARIBBEAN (Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, Martinique, Haiti, etc.) . . . . .	621 rolls
29.	BAHAMAS . . . . .	608 rolls
30.	COSTA RICA . . . . .	
31.	PHILIPPINES . . . . .	534 rolls
32.	PANAMA . . . . .	350 rolls
33.	LUXEMBOURG . . . . .	276 rolls
34.	SPAIN . . . . .	225 rolls
35.	CHINA . . . . .	206 rolls
36.	PORTUGAL . . . . .	160 rolls
37.	PERU . . . . .	113 rolls
38.	BRAZIL . . . . .	95 rolls
39.	TAIWAN . . . . .	45 rolls
40.	SOUTH AFRICA . . . . .	30 rolls
41.	SINGAPORE . . . . .	14 rolls
42.	CZECHOSLOVAKIA . . . . .	11 rolls
43.	MISCELLANEOUS FOREIGN COUNTRIES . . . . .	483 rolls
TOTAL MICROFILMS . . . . .		875,914 rolls (100 feet)

NOTE: The number of cataloged rolls will exceed these figures because of divisions made in 100-foot rolls during cataloging.

TOTAL CATALOGED ROLLS STORED IN GRANITE MOUNTAIN VAULT . . . . .	1,029,475 rolls
TOTAL VOLUMES OF BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS IN THE LIBRARY . . . . .	144,208 volumes

Figure 1, continued

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... a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance." (Doctrine and Covenants, 128–24.)

Church members are not alone in using the records, however. Attendance figures show that about 50 percent of the researchers using our branch libraries are not members of the Mormon Church. Many scholars use our facilities for their research.

At present the society's collections are being used for a study sponsored jointly by the American Cancer Society, the University of Utah, and the LDS Hospital endeavoring to determine whether cancer is hereditary and, if so, how we can predict it and warn living family members of the danger. The Yale University Medical School has spent many years in proving that twinning is based on heredity.

The list of master's and doctor's degree candidates using our records for thesis preparation is too long to report. Their disciplines include anthropology, economic history, demography, population movement, and medieval family reconstitution. One scholar, who was trying to determine the economic status of typical English families during Shakespeare's time, was able to accomplish his task in less than a month in Salt Lake City, whereas it would have taken a year and a half to two years in England. The probates and wills are cataloged and readily available, without his having to wait or travel from shire to shire in order to gather information and records on his own.

Toward the end of 1938 a Graflex photo-record camera, nesting tanks, and drying racks were purchased by the Genealogical Society to enable a camera team to capture information on film, leaving the original documents with the owners. In early 1939 it was learned that in Tennessee the Works Progress Administration had spent nearly \$500,000 in transcribing marriage bonds, deeds, and wills in each courthouse in the state. In cooperation with the Tennessee State Library and Archives, this entire collection of about three quarters of a million pages was copied.

World War II slowed (and in many cases stopped) the society's projects, but by the end of 1945 the society's microfilm collection totaled 2,076 rolls. The expansion has been steady since 1946, so that by the end of 1975 the collection totaled 875,914 rolls (Figure 1). If spliced end to end, this film would extend about 17,000 miles, or from Salt Lake City to New York—by way of San Francisco, Tokyo, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Teheran, Cairo, and Rome.

In 1952 an extensive program was started in Mexico. That country provided special challenges because of the remote areas in which some parish registers were located. At times equipment, power generators, books, and other supplies had to be transported by mule.

An organized program of microfilming projects is going forward in most European countries, including England, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, West Germany, Italy, and Spain. In Spain during the summer of 1975 our operator finished filming for the week and was sitting on the bus waiting to be taken back to Madrid for the weekend. He looked out the bus window and saw a mule leaving the post office. Out of the mule's pack was sticking the box containing the film he had exposed that week. The film would travel via mule, train, and finally jet to Salt Lake City, Utah, where it would be developed, thoroughly inspected, and added to the society's collections.

The Genealogical Society recognized in 1967 that any complete genealogical records program could not be completed by microfilm procedures alone. Many cultures do not have written records. The people memorized their lineage and can recite them for long periods of time.

In the Polynesian cultures few written records are kept. We, therefore, use a tape recorder to preserve genealogical information. Some Polynesians (such as those in Tahiti, Vate, Hawaii, Wake, New Zealand, and Rangi) can recite their pedigree back to the earliest inhabitants of the islands, and even to Adam. (They have various names for Adam.) An ancient Maori chant talks about the creation:

Turn once again your face to the shadowy land from which we came, to the homes of our ancestors far away, to Great Hawaiki, to Long Hawaiki, to the Great-Distant Hawaiki, to the Hono-i-wairua, the land where man was formed from the red earth by Great-Tane-of-the-sky, and had life first breathed into him. So begin our genealogies.<sup>2</sup>

The Polynesian people believe their records of the dead to be especially sacred. It is the custom of a Maori, for example, to wash his hands before he handles his *whakapapa* (a written genealogy manuscript).

In Africa the society has a cooperative project under way with the government of South Africa; they film the desired records at our request and expense. In Asia and the Pacific area cameras are clicking in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Filming projects are in progress in Australia and New Zealand. In the United States we currently have thirteen camera teams working in twelve different states.

The importance of safeguarding these irreplaceable genealogical records has been recognized, and construction of an underground vault was begun in 1961 and completed in 1965. The vault, consisting of six huge vault rooms with over 65,000 square feet of floor space in all, is situated under 700 feet of solid granite rock. The natural temperature of the mountain is ideal for the archival storage of film. Complete film processing, printing, and quality inspection are accomplished in the Granite Mountain Records Vault, so that the camera negative, once it has reached Salt Lake City, need not be taken from the security and controlled climate of the vault.

Not unexpectedly, an apparently unlimited variety of information is included with the records that have been filmed. Some of the records depict what hard, even cruel, times people have endured:

Kenneth Leal was executed and hung in chains betwixt Elgin and Tochatens for robbing the mail. He did no harm except knocking the boy off the horse. An immense concourse of spectators attended and it being during the summer and autumn that he hung no one would pick the fruit that grew within several miles around which therefore was lost though there never was a more abundant crop.<sup>3</sup>

Paid David Harry, ratcatcher, his year's salary—one guinea.<sup>4</sup> [Less than one cent per day, probably for sixteen hours a day, six days a week.]

Tom Owen, found guilty of stealing a handkerchief and three items of clothing, valued at six pence. Sentenced to death, which was commuted to transportation to the colonies for life.<sup>5</sup>

Some can be humorous. I can happily imagine the parish priest as he recorded the following:

<sup>1</sup> Archibald F. Bennett, "Vaudois Records Microfilmed," *Improvement Era*, December 1948, p. 970.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from a chant presented by Maoris of Ngati-kahungunu, in honor of Sir James Carroll. Translation by James Cowan, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> English parish register.

<sup>4</sup> Gogerddan estate agent's records, 1748.

<sup>5</sup> The Gaernarvonshire quarter session records.

1823—Married at Marown after a tedious courtship of nine days, Thomas Collister, a sporting widower of 60, to Mrs. Ann Lewin, a bouncing widow of 50. Five weeks have scarcely escaped since the bridegroom buried his former *rib*.<sup>6</sup>

Even in 1709 women were exercising the freedom to change their minds:

Elshet appearing before the session declared she was not willing to be married to Robert Berry and proclaimed she would pay her penalty at harvest time.<sup>7</sup>

Temperance warnings are included:

1673—April 23 Mr. Thomas Shanow was buried; clothworker, late churchwarden of this parish killed by an accidental fall in a vault, in London Wall, Amen Corner, by Paternoster Row, and was supposed to have lain there eleven days and nights before anyone could tell where he was. Let all that read this take heed of drink.<sup>8</sup>

And tales of the aristocracy:

The Duke carried off Miss Gunning from a ball notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, sent for the rector of St. George Hanover Square, to marry them. However, Dr. Trebeck refused to perform the ceremony without licence and ring. The Duke swore he would send for the Archbishop; at last, they were married with a ring of a bed curtain at half an hour past 12 at night at Mayfair Chapel.<sup>9</sup>

We can even learn about the names of animals. One of the Puritans named his dog "Moreover," after Luke 16:21: "Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores."

The text of an interesting deed found in the General Archives of Central America, in Guatemala, links the Americas to Biblical lands. The translation reads as follows:

In the City of Santiago, Guatemala, this 16th day of August, 1659, before me, a Notary Public of the Registry, appeared Pedro de Cordoba, a Spaniard, and Vincente Rodriguez, a native Indian from the District of Merced, and in compliance with decrees prescribed by the Superior Government of which I have given notice, made a transcript of titles and tax records filed with the Superior Government on August 12 of this present year with Captain Dionisio Descovar, Secretary of the Treasury.

Said record was ordered to be transcribed by reason of its being in the language of the Indians. It consists of 15 pages, three half-sheets and twelve quarter-sheets. The transcript was made by the said Vincente Rodriguez taking the original records to read and by comparing and explaining the words written in the mother tongue to the said Pedro de Cordoba in the following manner: It begins with an original title inscription dated 1524. "We these principles declare that we claim title to this land because our parents and grandparents come here . . . that we are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as they were called; we are of Israel; that our parents and grandparents stayed in Canaan in this land where we are; that Abraham our lord as a God to this people; that we likewise were in Babylon where all of the Indians with great effort made a large edifice, which remained in that condition, and the work did not progress. That all of us then spoke one language, and the building remained in the state because of their having changed to several languages. The people went to their homes to try to sleep because they did not understand one another and our Lord was pleased that they should remain in that condition, as we sons of Adam are sinners. And thus different manners of tongues were ordained among us, and our Lord God told us how the language was changed and why they spoke different tongues when they met one another.

Upon greeting each other at daybreak, they did not understand one another. Because of this they were stupified and scattered themselves over all the world. They looked for a place to settle. Then came our parents and grandparents in the middle of the sea, and they were on an island in the middle of the sea, and there was a sound of trumpets, and oboes and flutes, and thus it occurred in that place where the sound was heard, and then they came, in the middle of

<sup>6</sup> English parish record.

<sup>7</sup> English parish record.

<sup>8</sup> English parish record.

<sup>9</sup> English parish record.

the sea, in seven valleys and seven caves, near a seaport called Tulan, and as they were leaving the caves, they called one to another and entered seven ships and came from the other part of the sea to these parts and rested there.<sup>10</sup>

The deed then describes how the people divided and settled the land, and it gives the boundaries of their land.

Few records are ever created for strictly genealogical purposes. We must, therefore, take records made for other purposes and glean genealogical information from them. In order to economize and still preserve the greatest amount of information about the largest number of people, our experts study all record types existing in a country. They then determine which record provides information about the most people for given time periods, and this becomes our primary record source. Only when the primary source is not available do we film secondary records.

The primary records are often church records and, failing those, then civil registration. Often only one or two categories from land records, wills and probates, census records, court records, immigration and shipping lists, or tax lists have been preserved for searchers.

Each state, region, or country is studied individually because of the many catastrophes, wars, and other occurrences because of which records either have not been kept or have been destroyed.

Our greatest problems result from inadequate shipping schedules, customs duties and regulations, restrictive laws, disinterested government officials, uncooperative and uninformed records custodians, and distances and rising expenses.

Photographic products present problems when the developing of exposed film is delayed. A customs official may be suspicious because he cannot inspect the undeveloped images. Almost all governments cooperate and allow duty-free import and export when they can see how the heritage, culture, and records of their country are being preserved. In some countries, laws have been changed to permit microfilming of their records.

Inflation and overhead costs are continually rising. In some countries in which we have programs, inflation is soaring at more than 1 percent per week now. It is also very difficult to keep track of such concerns as rates of exchange, currency denomination, business practices, and local labor laws in the thirty-two countries in which we are presently gathering records.

Too often we find records destroyed either by design or by sheer neglect. In one newspaper account we read:

The new vicar wasted little time in deciding what to do with a van load of old documents which were delivered to his door. He arranged for a corporation truck to pick them up and dump them at the bottom of a watery gravel pit—explaining why this weekend 300 years of detailed and treasured history of Lymington, Hampshire, lies among tons of garbage and under eight feet of soil. And angry local historians, led by schoolteacher Mr. Arthur Lloyd, have dug late into the night in an effort to save whatever they could.<sup>11</sup>

The different languages pose very little problem. Usually the work is done on site by local people. The processing and quality control is done in Salt Lake City, where 40 percent of our employees speak at least one language other than English.

We hope to continue to help archivists, government officials, and record custodians preserve the irreplaceable records. By filming records covering years to about 1900 only, we avoid problems of the privacy of individuals. By placing the informa-

<sup>10</sup> Guatemalan deed translation.

<sup>11</sup> Brendan Mulholland, in London *Sunday Express*, 27 April 1975.

tion on film, necessary storage space is only 2 percent of the original space needed. By having the negative film stored in the Granite Mountain Record Vault, the same information is stored in at least two different sites and the information can be preserved during disasters or war. In addition, the cooperating record custodian usually receives a copy of the film. Many archivists have their researchers use that film rather than wear out the original documents.

Through cooperation we can save the past for the future.

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