

Future Technology and Genealogy

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The Genealogy Gems Podcast and Elevenses with Lisa YouTube show

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Envision your genealogy as technology speeds ahead into the future. In this session we'll look at how to capitalize on how technology is changing the flow of information. We're going to explore key areas that are poised to thrust ahead in the future.

Information Extraction and Retrieval

Currently text (searching with words) is the primary way that information is retrieved. Transcription and indexing is conducted in the genealogy space through genealogy companies as well as volunteers. It has revolutionized our ability to retrieve digitized genealogical records.

We are now seeing movement into the extraction of information from a variety of other types of media beyond documents. Here are a few examples:

Audio

The Apple Podcasts app and the Cast Box App have introduced the ability to search the audio (spoken word) for things you want to hear.

Genealogical application: Family audio interviews.

Still Images and Photos

Google Photos is finding faces, objects and text. Genealogical application example: Your old family photos.

Google Lens is looking at items and taking you to more information online about those items (business card, QR codes at restaurants, online shopping.) The future could include tours of ancestral and historic locations.

Genealogical application example: Use QR codes (or simply a photograph) to provide access to additional content associated with items in your home.

Video

The introduction of better captioning options at Google has accelerated the ability to search 'inside' a video. Combined with advances in image and audio search, expect to see big leaps in the area of video search.

Genealogical application: Start today by searching for your ancestors' names, locations where they lived, businesses they owned, organizations they belonged to and anything else associated with their lives. Then, look forward to finding more in the future!

Genealogical application example: The possibility of finding your ancestor appearing in an old newsreel video on YouTube that does not name him or her in the video title, description or captions.

Another note about Video

Now more than ever the general public has the impression that the work is pretty much done due to online family trees. The reality is that in order for large genealogy companies to survive, future products must include capitalizing on the “finished” work and doing more with it.

We will see more genealogy companies wanting to help you tell your story using the content you’ve already assembled on their website. Expect to see technology used to help bring your ancestors and their stories to life through video and other multimedia content.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

Example: Newspaper Navigator

<https://news-navigator.labs.loc.gov/search>

The *Newspaper Navigator* is an experimental web application. The dataset currently consists over 1.5 million pieces of extracted visual content from over 16 million historic newspaper pages in *Chronicling America*.

It searches the newspapers for images, and then allows the user to “train” the app to search by visual similarity.

The visual content was initially identified using an object detection model trained on annotations of World War 1-era *Chronicling America* pages, made by staff & volunteers. The app also uses text corresponding to the imagery, identified by Optical Character Recognition (OCR).

Learn More about Newspaper Navigator

Watch *Eleveses with Lisa* episode 26 (video and step-by-step article)

<https://lialouisecooke.com/2020/09/26/newspaper-navigator/>

Learn more about Compounded Mediation: A Data Archaeology of the Newspaper Navigator Dataset at <https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:32415/>.

Search Bias

Newspaper Navigator offered a look at the potential for bias in search results to occur for a variety of reasons (as detailed in the Data Archaeology document referenced above.)

Search bias can occur a variety of forms in all of the various places we conduct searches for genealogy. As search technology develops in the future we must keep a diligent eye out for bias.

Analyzing Search Results

We need to make our own decisions about the results we receive. For example, in analyzing Google search results, ask questions such as:

- Why are the results being presented in this format?
- Is the results page giving you the impression that this is the one definitive answer, and that there is no need to click through to the website?
- Why are these related searches being suggested to me?
- What's missing? Could there be more websites and perspectives that are not obvious on this first page of results?
- Do these related searches have the potential to get me off the track of my research plan?

Not Everything is Rosy

Technology can be used positively and negatively. The future may include rewriting of history, removal of history, suppression of history, and much more bias injected into the sharing of history. Take control and keep control of your history!

Technology can be used positively and negatively. The future of digitized information may include:

- rewriting of history
- suppression of history,
- and much more bias injected into the sharing of history.

5 Ways to Protect Your Family History:

1. Keep your family history on your own computer.
2. Set up automatic cloud back up on your computer.
3. Question and verify results and sources.
4. Cite your sources.
5. Print your family history and distribute to multiple people in your family.

There's Always Room for Low Tech!

Technology is exciting but in the end its our families that matter. Stay open to the discoveries awaiting you.

Learn More

The Genealogist's Google Toolbox (2020) by Lisa Louise Cooke

Available at <https://www.shopgenealogygems.com>

Premium Membership to Lisa Louise Cooke's website for 1 year

Includes 50+ video classes and handouts, exclusive premium podcast and more! Available at <https://lialouisecooke.com/premium-membership/>

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