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FAMILY HISTORY CENTERS

Family History Centers are extensions of the FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY in Salt Lake City, Utah. The first center opened in 1964. Originally, they were known as branch genealogical libraries. When the Genealogical Library became the Family History Library in 1987, the branches became Family History Centers. In 1990 there were over 1,500 such centers in 49 countries.

Located most often in LDS stake centers, Family History Centers are open to the public, generally twenty hours per week, staffed entirely by volunteers. There is no charge, but space is often limited. At a Family History Center, researchers have access to the Family History Library's microfilm copies of family history records, which can be lent to the center for a specified time. Many local centers also have significant collections of genealogical source material on microfiche, and some have their own collections of research materials specific to their area.

At a Family History Center, patrons find many of the same research tools that are available at the central Family History Library, including microfiche editions of the Family History Library Catalog, the INTERNATIONAL GENEALOGICAL INDEX™ (IGI), the FAMILY REGISTRY™, and a series of instructional handouts that describe how to do research in the United States and many other countries. Many centers also provide access to FAMILYSEARCH™, a computer system that organizes data and simplifies the task of family history research.

Addresses of worldwide Family History Centers are available from the Family History Library.

V. BEN BLOXHAM

FAMILY HISTORY, GENEALOGY

The terms "family history" and "genealogy" are synonymous for Latter-day Saints. Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, said, "The process by which we identify our place in our eternal family is called genealogy. Genealogy is family history" (Regional Representatives Seminar, April 3, 1987). To emphasize the family nature of genealogy, the First Presidency in 1987 changed the name of the Genealogical Department to the Family History Department and the name of the Genealogical Library to the FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY.

LDS interest in family history is based on the fundamental doctrines of SALVATION, AGENCY, and EXALTATION. It is the plan of God that all persons shall have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and receive the saving ordinances, regardless of when they lived on earth. If they do not hear the gospel preached through the Lord's authorized servants in this life, they will hear it in the SPIRIT WORLD after death. Latter-day Saints identify their ancestors and arrange for baptism and other ordinances to be performed by proxy—that is, with a living person standing in for the deceased person—in a temple. This is not an optional function of LDS belief; it is, rather, a commandment of God. As Elder Oaks further explained, "We are not hobbyists in genealogy work. We do family history work in order to provide the ordinances of salvation for the living and the dead" (1989, p. 6; *see also* SALVATION OF THE DEAD).

Members of the Church were instructed in the sacred role of family history work in 1894, when President Wilford WOODRUFF declared, "We want the Latter day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it. . . . This is the will of the Lord to this people" (p. 543; *see also* SEALING). The purpose of family history, President Woodruff explained, is to obtain names and statistical data so that TEMPLE ORDINANCES can be performed in

behalf of deceased ancestors who did not have the opportunity to hear the restored gospel during mortal life. He taught on another occasion that “we have got to enter into those temples and redeem our dead—not only the dead of our own family, but the dead of the whole spirit world” (*JD* 21:192).

Fundamental to the doctrine of the salvation of the dead is the exercise of agency. When persons die, their spirits continue living in the post-mortal spirit world and are capable of making choices. Latter-day Saints perform BAPTISMS FOR THE DEAD so that those who live as spirits may choose whether or not to accept baptism in the true Church of Jesus Christ in the spirit world. If they do not accept the baptism, it is of no effect. The same is true of the other saving ordinances that members perform in the temples in behalf of the dead.

Love is the central motivation for family history work. Identifying ancestors and performing saving ordinances for them are an expression of love. It is the spirit and power of Elijah, who gave the keys of this power to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple in 1836, to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers” (D&C 110:15; see also Mal. 4:5–6; JS—H 1:39; D&C 2:2). The desire to discover one’s ancestors and complete temple ordinances for them is sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Elijah (see ELIJAH, SPIRIT OF). President Joseph Fielding SMITH associated family history and temple work with love for mankind, declaring that laboring on behalf of the dead is “a work that enlarges the soul of man, broadens his views regarding the welfare of his fellowman, and plants in his heart a love for all the children of our Heavenly Father. There is no work equal to that in the temple for the dead in teaching a man to love his neighbor as himself” (p. 3).

In response to President Woodruff’s teaching regarding family history responsibilities, Latter-day Saints organized the GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF UTAH in Salt Lake City in 1894. Over the years, the society, through the Family History Library and its worldwide network of more than 1,500 family history centers, has become a major support of the Church’s efforts to provide instruction in family history through research information (first in book form and later in microfilm and then in compact disc) and through making available a

skilled staff to assist researchers to identify their ancestors.

Interest in family history is not limited to Latter-day Saints. There has been remarkable growth of interest in genealogy and family history dating from about 1836, when Elijah committed the keys to the Prophet Joseph Smith. In many countries, thousands of people have joined genealogical and historical societies, and more than half of the patrons of the Family History Library and its associated Family History Centers are members of other faiths. The Church has joined in cooperative efforts with hundreds of genealogical and family history societies, archives, and libraries in identifying family history records and preserving the information found in them (see WORLD CONFERENCES ON RECORDS).

Modern technology has played a significant role in the advance of family history in the second half of the twentieth century. The Church has developed an extensive worldwide microfilming program. Since 1938, it has done microfilming in more than a hundred countries, and has accumulated more than 1.3 billion exposures with approximately 8 billion names. Microfilm records have provided the basis for dramatic expansion of family history research. They have enabled rapid growth of the collections of the Family History Library and has made possible both the distribution of family history information to the Church’s Family History Centers and the NAME EXTRACTION PROGRAMS that have allowed the extensive automation of family history information contained in the FAMILYSEARCH® computer system.

As a result, doing family history research has never been easier than it now is. Through FamilySearch, patrons of the Family History Library and Family History Centers have access to the 147 million names in the INTERNATIONAL GENEALOGICAL INDEX™ and the growing 9.67-million-name lineage-linked Ancestral File™. As name extraction programs convert information from paper records (such as the 1880 U.S. Federal Census and the 1881 British Census) and as people from around the world contribute information to the Ancestral File, the computer resources associated with FamilySearch will make identifying one’s ancestors a much simpler task.

The Church teaches that members’ family history duties are threefold. First, they must develop a desire to help redeem the dead. As members

gain a testimony of the principle of salvation of the dead, they feel a personal responsibility to help. They also care about those in the spirit world who are waiting for temple ordinances to be performed.

Second, they must determine what to do. Every Latter-day Saint can do something to further the family history work. Dallin H. Oaks counseled, "Our effort is not to compel everyone to do everything, but to encourage everyone to do something" (1989, p. 6). Accordingly, Latter-day Saints are encouraged to participate in activities relating to the salvation of the dead. What and how much a member does depend on personal circumstances and abilities, what one's family may have already accomplished, individual guidance from the Spirit, and direction from Church leaders. Activities include identifying one's ancestors and performing temple ordinances for them, participating in family organizations, serving in the Name Extraction Program, keeping a personal journal, preparing personal and family histories, and accepting Church callings in temple and family history service. Identifying ancestors of the first few generations usually does not require extensive library research or sophisticated research tools. The beginning of family history research usually involves checking known family records (*see* JOURNALS), consulting family members either orally or by letter, and looking at readily available public records, such as birth certificates. Identifying ancestors beyond the first few generations usually requires the resources of libraries, computer tools available with systems like FamilySearch, and expert help. Family organizations enable members to pool information and resources to further the family history work. The Name Extraction Program enables persons to convert information found on microfilm copies of paper records—parish registers, census rolls, and so forth—to a computer format to become part of FamilySearch files or to supply needed names to the temples.

Third, members must continue to serve. The work of the Family History Department will not be complete until every name is recorded and every ordinance performed.

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FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY

The Family History Library in Salt Lake City, supports the LDS practice of family history research that identifies forebears and makes possible the temple work leading to SALVATION OF THE DEAD. It provides services and resources that enable Latter-day Saints and others to identify and learn more about their ancestors. It is also a developmental center where new resources and programs are perfected and made available to Church members worldwide through FAMILY HISTORY CENTERS.

On November 13, 1894, the GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF UTAH was organized. One of its purposes was the "establishing and maintaining [of] a genealogical library for the use and benefit of its members and others" (Minutes of the Genealogical Society of Utah, Nov. 13, 1894). From its modest beginnings in an upstairs room of the Church Historian's Office with about 300 books, the collection has grown and its facilities have changed commensurately, so that in 1990 the library occupied a modern five-story building which housed 200,000 books, 300,000 microfiches, and more than 1.6 million rolls of microfilm, making it the largest library of its kind in the world.

During its first fifty years, the library was open only to dues-paying members. In 1944 it was incorporated under the administration of the Church, and its resources were made available to the public. In 1989, the library had 813,000 visitors. Genealogists, historians, demographers, geneticists, and other researchers from many countries travel to Salt Lake City to utilize the wealth of information available in the library. They are attracted by its collections, the expertise of the staff, and the nearly 700 classes offered annually in research sources and methodology.

The biggest attraction is the microfilm collection. Since 1938, the Genealogical Society of Utah and its successor organization, the LDS Church