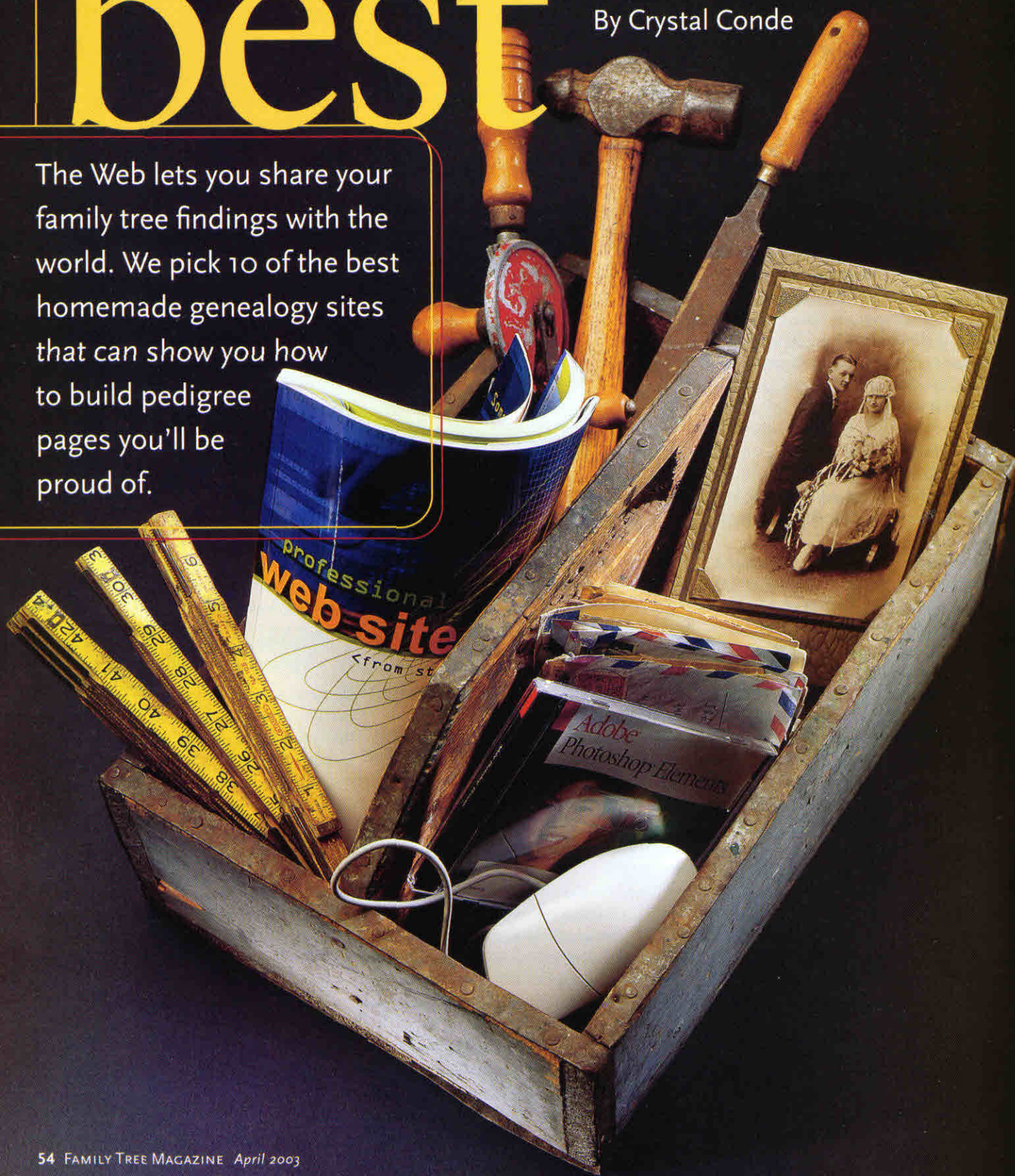# PERSONAL best

By Crystal Conde

The Web lets you share your family tree findings with the world. We pick 10 of the best homemade genealogy sites that can show you how to build pedigree pages you'll be proud of.

Before the Internet, sharing the fruits of all your hard genealogical work with relatives and fellow researchers meant lugging pedigree charts to family reunions, printing books, photocopying and even using something called a mimeograph. If you wanted to show your family tree to someone across the country, you needed plenty of postage stamps. Today, however, you can post pedigrees online for free, for others to access in the blink of a modem.

Personal genealogy pages have sprouted faster than you can Google for *Poindexter family history*. Homegrown sites have helped make genealogy the second-most-popular topic on the Web, behind only pornography.

But just like porn sites (presumably), there are good homemade genealogy sites and there are bad ones. Since bad sites make it harder for the rest of us to share the results of the creators' research, we thought we'd see what could be learned from the good personal genealogy Web sites. From the best sites, in fact—10 of them, selected by scouring the Web until our eyes ached and our mouse-clicking fingers cramped.

DIY dos and don'ts

As we searched for stellar family tree sites, we were reminded of some Web-design dos and don'ts. Whether you're planning your first site or remodeling an existing home on the Web, keep these tips in mind:

■ **Do include a title** for your Web site, a **mission statement** or paragraph outlining the site's content, **links** to your main categories and **contact information**. If visitors know a little background about your research and what information you've made available from your family history findings, it piques their interest in browsing your site and gives them some direction in their search. They might discover you share a common ancestor! You also want visitors to be

able to contact you in case they too have research information about your family line. Including a link to your e-mail address on the home page and the subsequent pages seems to be the most common approach used by successful Webmasters.

■ **Do organize your site** in an easy-to-navigate manner that will guide visitors rather than confuse them. **Clean, uncluttered page design** always works best. Provide a **link to the home page** on each page of your Web site, too. Remember that not every visitor will enter your site via the home page.

■ **Do make sure your links work.** Personal Web sites are works in progress. Every link may not be active, but the ones that are should connect to the proper pages. Nothing frustrates Web surfers more than being unable to access the information they click on.

■ **Don't design a circus.** Putting together a personal Web site allows you to be creative. The computer screen is your canvas. But refrain from posting **animated icons** and **musical sound bites** that play continuously. Sure, you want your genealogy Web site to stand out. You want visitors to recognize the hard work and creative thought you've put into each page. But sometimes less is more. A Scottish roots site can show ethnic pride without a plaid background that makes it impossible to read the text on top. If your home page has a Southern theme, a repeating rendition of "Dueling Banjos" will likely repel more visitors than it entertains. Dancing trees aren't a requirement for a visually appealing family site—they'll only detract from the family history data you're trying to showcase.

■ **Do keep it simple.** Use **easy-to-read fonts** that stand out from your background. Cursive or blocky typefaces are often hard to read, and italics should be used sparingly.

■ **Do keep photographs small** to minimize download times; you can use thumbnails, linked to larger versions of the images, to efficiently present a gallery of pictures.

■ **Don't overload your home page**, but make it a welcoming gateway to the rest of the information your site holds.

Finally, before your Web site goes "live," look at it on other computers. Appearance varies by browser (Netscape, Internet Explorer or AOL), operating system (Mac or PC) and monitor size. Just because you have the latest and greatest computer on the market and a cable modem doesn't mean your fellow family historians do. Keep those older computers and pokey dial-up connections in mind when designing your site.

The 10 personal genealogy Web sites featured here are the cream of the crop. Take some time to visit them. They might inspire you to clean up your existing family history site, or to put your own fascinating family story online.

AN AMERICAN ADVENTURE
<www.phillipsplace.net/genealogy>
An American Adventure is a good example of a themed Web site. It earns creativity points for its unusual title, as well. The Webmaster explains the theme up front on the home page:

"This is the story of ordinary people—farmers, grocers, coopers, tavern keepers, mail carriers, cabinetmakers—who loved their families and their country. You will find Revolutionary patriots, Gold Rush forty-niners and Civil War volunteers alongside mayors and school board members. Above all, the spirit of family shines through as these hardy souls sailed across the ocean to an unknown land and then moved steadily westward. Join me in celebrating their story."

The site displays good organization by dividing information into surname and location categories. Clicking on a place name in the Primary Locations category opens a page listing the people who lived there. Visitors can click on each person in the Primary Surnames category to learn the ancestor's spouse, children and birth and death dates. Primary Surnames offers details about the most well-researched ancestors; to access information on every surname featured on the Web site (not just the primary names), click the Everyname Index. If you've discovered a

AN AMERICAN ADVENTURE

BUTLER FAMILY OF CROMWELL, CONNECTICUT

DIANE'S DEN

common ancestor, the Webmaster makes contacting her easy—e-mail links are at the top and bottom of the home page.

BUTLER FAMILY OF CROMWELL, CONNECTICUT

<www.cromwellbutlers.com>

The Butler Family Web site is one of the most visually stimulating and attractive examples presented here. On the home page, the arrangement and size of the photos are just right. When linking to the family tree, visitors are in for a treat—a pictorial version of this common chart. A photo, rather than a name and date, denotes an ancestor's position on the tree. Click on a picture and access a page with family information. More family pictures abound when you enter the Photo Gallery. Images of generations of the Butler family, gatherings and activities lend a scrapbook feel to this part of the site.

The content excels as much as the design: It adds a human element to the genealogical nuts and bolts with links to biographies, letters, family birthdays and artwork. The Family Letters section contains 19th- and early

20th-century missives penned by Butler ancestors. In the What's New section, visitors and family members can track the changes and additions made to the site. The page also serves as a sort of archive documenting the progress the Butlers have made in expanding the Web site.

The elements of the Butler Family Web site highlighted here only begin to touch the surface. Browse its contents for a sense of the scope and type of available information, and for a wealth of ideas for your own site.

DIANE'S DEN

<members.tripod.com/dianewhittaker>

This Web site subscribes to the "less is more" philosophy, and it works. The home page is well-organized and easy to navigate. Visitors know right away that they'll be able to access family history and genealogy information for Clyde Fechser, Faye Boyden, Cleveland Brown, Willmirth Brown and their descendants.

The family history pages open a visual family tree for each primary ancestor. This section humanizes the ancestors repre-

sented—you can click on a surname or photograph to view details about each one, and read a brief story that describes the person's occupation, family life and migration.

The genealogy pages have more of a database quality and aren't as visually appealing. Search this section for the facts, without all the pictures. Each genealogy page for a primary ancestor has an Ancestors link that lists basic facts about each generation. If you find info you want, the Genealogy Downloads option lets you grab GEDCOM files and view surname lists or *ahnentafel* charts.

The next stop on the site is the Photo Album. Clicking on one of five surnames opens a virtual scrapbook of old photographs. Visitors can page through the collection and read captions describing the people and activities in each image.

DOYLE GENEALOGICAL DATABASE MASTER INDEX

<www.gentree.com/databases/Doyle>

The almighty index is an excellent method for organizing and presenting genealogical data. Although the Doyle Genealogical Database

DOYLE GENEALOGICAL DATABASE MASTER INDEX

GENEALOGY IN ENGLAND

Master Index isn't the most aesthetically pleasing, it makes up for looks with useful content and a navigable setup. Visitors have five options for finding ancestors:

1. Search for a string of keywords. This option lets you try case-sensitive Boolean searches. The results yield up to 500 links.

2. Show an index of all surnames on the site. The database contains more than 10,000 names, so this page takes longer to load.

3. Generate an index of all the people whose photos are in the database.

4. View the database-access log, a record of the date and time a visitor conducted a database search, plus the surname queried.

5. Browse one of the subindexes listed on the home page. These consist of a group of individuals organized in alphabetical order. This option helps narrow a search.

Each individual record may include the person's nickname, birth date, spouse, children, marriage date, parents and death date. Footnotes link to source information for marriage, birth and other records.

GENEALOGY IN ENGLAND
<www.genealogyinengland.com>

This Web site differs from all the other sites here: It has broad appeal, covering more than a surname or particular family. The site provides visitors with helpful guidelines for English genealogy. The home page clearly outlines what resources you'll find on the site, which is divided into three main sections: Links, Information and Surnames.

Links are grouped into county, national, international and miscellaneous topics. Clicking on the county link takes you to a page that features 41 English counties. Information varies by county. The London link, for example, directs visitors to a page that gives a brief history of the area, geographical information, a list of heritage sites located there, a little about London's Anglo-Saxon and Danish history, and facts about the monarchy. Every county page features links to record offices, family history societies and pages on the GENUKI site for UK research <www.genuki.org.uk>. The national page has resources relating to conservation, genealogical organizations, government and libraries in England. The international section covers the rest of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada and the rest of the world. You'll find links to museums, organizations, libraries and other use-

HOME sweet HOME PAGE

Ready to break ground on a genealogy site? Follow these nine simple steps to build your own home on the Web.

1. RESEARCH.

Spend some time online looking for ideas for your own site. Check out others' family tree pages to see what kind of information they've posted. Pay attention to how information is organized and whether it's easy to navigate. Look at page design and consider color schemes, graphics and type.

2 PICK YOUR METHOD.

Next, you need to decide how you're going to create your site. HTML ("HyperText Markup Language"), the code that makes Web pages happen, isn't as scary as it might seem. But if you want to see what the pages look like as you're creating them, you'll need WYSIWYG software (pronounced "wizzywig," short for "What You See Is What You Get"). You also can get the tools you need on the Web for free. Download Netscape Composer at <channels.netscape.com/ns/browsers/download.jsp> or try the site-building wizards from free hosts such as the ones on the next page.

3. FIND A HOME FOR YOUR SITE.

It's also helpful to know where you're going to post your pages before you create them. The "host" you choose can affect your entire site, from the address (URL) to the appearance (advertisements). Shop around (see next page) to find out the requirements for various hosts—and make sure you can live with them.

4. PLAN YOUR CONTENT.

Decide what you're going to publish on your site and how to organize it. Your site is similar to a pedigree chart: You start with one branch—that's your home page. Under your home page is a branch for each main category, and under each category are more branches for each subcategory. Pick up ideas from the top 10 sites featured in this story, then look for more site-organization tips at <www.yourfamily.com/making_hp.shtml>.

5. CREATE YOUR PAGES.

The exact steps you'll follow depend on the method or particular software you're using, but don't forget to proofread your pages before your site goes "live."

6. PUBLISH.

Web pages make their way from your computer to the Internet via File Transfer Protocol (FTP). Get exact procedures from your Web host.

7. CHECK EVERYTHING.

Once your files are up, try out your new site. Check all your links and verify that all your elements look as they should—and be thorough. After all, if you don't find mistakes yourself, you're sure to get e-mails if any visitors do.

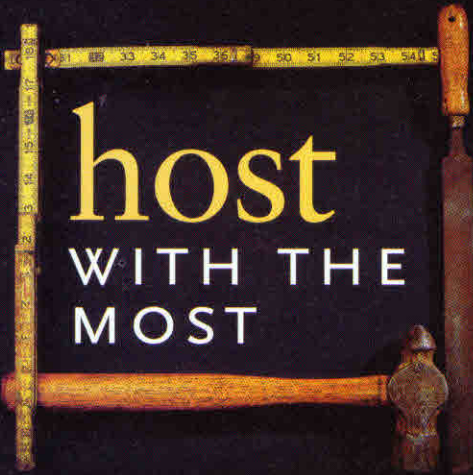## 8. PROMOTE.

You've worked hard on your site, so show it off. Tell family. Post it on message boards. Submit it to Cyndi's List <www.cyndislist.com>, the popular genealogy Web-site directory. The more promotion you do, the more people you can attract to your site and the better chance you'll find people who have information you want.

9. ENJOY.

A Web site is a work in progress; you'll continually be updating your data and adding new features as you learn them. But this is when the typing, testing and tweaking start to pay off—whether you get 20 visitors or 2,000.

For a complete guide to building your own home on the Web, see the October 2000 *Family Tree Magazine*; highlights are online at <www.familytreemagazine.com/articles/oct00/site.html>.

—ALLISON STACY

host
WITH THE MOST

Creating a personal genealogy Web site doesn't have to be expensive or scary. Tons of Web sites provide free space for your site. Some even give you templates to help design the basic pages. Be warned, though, that advertising supports most of these free plans. If banner and pop-up ads bother you, opt for an advertising-free, paid hosting plan. Besides these hosts, RootsWeb <www.rootsweb.com> offers free space for genealogy sites. And check with your Internet Service Provider (ISP)—you might get several megabytes of Web space as part of your subscription.

▪ Angel Cities
<angelcities.com>: Just type in the name you've chosen for your Web site and hit Sign Up. You'll receive FTP support for transferring files, free site tools, promotions and more.

▪ Angelfire
<angelfire.lycos.com>: Check out the Cool Pages archive to see examples of what other Angelfire members have done with their Web space.

▪ FamilyBuzz.com
<www.familybuzz.com>: FamilyBuzz Web sites feature group calendars, family phone books, e-mail, message boards, family photo albums and chat rooms.

▪ FreeServers
<www.freeservers.com>: FreeServers plays host to more than 2.4 million Web sites and offers affordable fee-based plans.

▪ MyFamily.com
<www.myfamily.com>: View the sample site for an idea of how your site might look. The free offer includes 5MB of space for sharing photos and other family files.

▪ TopCities
<www.topcities.com>: With Top Cities as your host, your Web site includes a message board, guest book and 150MB of space.

▪ Tripod
<www.tripod.lycos.com>: The Web-building tools provided by Tripod are easy to use and let you create your page with or without HTML coding.

▪ Yahoo! Geocities
<geocities.yahoo.com>: When you sign up for a free Web site, you can pick how you want to create it. Choose PageBuilder or step-by-step PageWizards for easy-to-build Web pages.

▪ Zero Catch
<www.0catch.com>: With four hosting packages to choose from, you'll find a plan that fits your needs.

---

ful resources within those countries. The miscellaneous page adds links to genealogical courses, magazines, maps, military records and more.

Turn to the Information section for how-to help with researching and interpreting all kinds of materials. You'll find tips and advice for various genealogical documents, descriptions of the data in specific English censuses, a monarchy reference guide and a list of military titles.

The site does get personal in the Surnames section, which is still a work in progress. You can click on a surname and view that family's ancestor chart. Not all of the Surnames links are active, however.

HACKLEY'S X ROADS
<members.cyberrealm.net/rockfish>
Again, bravo for creativity in naming the Web site! The title suggests a theme in which family history research is a journey of discovery. And the subtitle—"a virtual crossroads for Hackley family history and genealogy"—reinforces the idea that visitors have come to the one-stop Web site for Hackley research. The home page adds a brief history of the Hackley family and provides links to other surnames being researched by the Webmaster. Links are well-organized into five main categories.

A title page with a handsome family photograph greets visitors to the Family History page. It's similar to a book cover, which is a clever idea. Clicking on Preface under the Table of Contents on that page reveals the mission statement, acknowledgements, a list of the Webmaster's sources and an explanation of the site's organization. The Hackleys in Early Virginia page gives you a family history, complete with footnotes. Links for the first through sixth generations of Hackleys connect to information about each generation.

The Online Database is a comprehensive collection of family, pedigree, source and descendant pages. You can search each page by clicking on the first letter of the surname. Or view an entire list of alphabetized names for each page category. This kind of organization helps visitors conduct a thorough search.

The Family Connections page features famous Hackley ancestors, including relations such as Stonewall Jackson, Thomas Jefferson and Pocahontas. You can either scroll through and read each profile or click on the menu in the left frame to choose a specific relative.

McColloch Family Heritage & Genealogical Research Site
<www.mccolloch.com>
McColloch Family Heritage & Genealogical Research Site earns bonus points for being interactive, functional and instructional. The home page has a welcome message, mission statement and explanation of the site's scope and purpose. First-time visitors are steered to a What's New page, which outlines new features and has a brief overview of the site's latest updates. Here, visitors find out how to participate and contribute to family research.

Interactivity abounds. Family members and other friendly family historians can leave brief notes and their e-mail addresses in an online guest book. Forums create a wired community where researchers can discuss genealogy, family heritage, news and events.

Fellow Web-site developers will want to check out DCLinks. This page features reference, genealogy, business and technology sites that provide excellent resources for crafting your own personal Web site.

Scottish researchers of all sorts will find lessons on name origins, coats of arms, tartans and heraldry on the Family Heritage page. Throughout, some of the pages have motivational slogans and "useless" facts that give the site a lighthearted tone and make browsing fun.

HACKLEY'S X ROADS

McCOLLOCH FAMILY HERITAGE & GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH SITE

MINERD-MINER-MINOR FAMILY WEB SITE
<www.minerd.com>

This site's mission is to reach out to the thousands of long-lost cousins who are part of the Miner-Minor-Minerd family tree. The family's history goes back about 270 years to Pennsylvania German pioneer ancestors. Today's Minerd-Miner-Minor kin will find an astonishing amount of their history here: At last count, the site contained 98,000 documents and 2,700 photographs representing 1,500 branches of the family.

Content goes far beyond pedigree charts. A Biographies section serves up more than 850 ancestors' profiles. Honor Roll pays tribute to ancestors who lost their lives in the workplace and during military service. Guests who discover a family connection can consult the Family Archives page, with details about the documents and photographs that cover thousands of branches of the family. The materials aren't accessible on the Web site; visitors must contact the Webmaster to request copies.

It's not all text and documents, either. A Photo of the Month, captioned with historical information, highlights a picture that a cousin has submitted.

THE WAINWRIGHTS OF PENISTONE PARISH YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND
<freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~wewain/Wainwright/Wainwright.htm>

Two tables organize this site's content, which keeps it from looking cluttered or confusing. The first table is a gateway to information about the Wainwright family. In this section, you'll find links to pedigree charts for two branches. The first branch includes an ancestor chart for John Wainwright and wife Dorothy. The second branch's ancestor chart features ancestors of Jeremiah Wainwright and wife Helen. By clicking on Where are they from? you can view detailed maps, as well as photos of Penistone Church, a grammar school and the ancestral village.

An alphabetical index links to a small pedigree chart for specific ancestors. You can view the chart by clicking on the tree, or learn about the Wainwrights' genealogical records by choosing Documentation. Other handy resources are a timeline of historical facts about England, a glossary of abbreviations and a guide to foreign currency.

The second table on the home page covers related sites. This section would appeal to a broader audience, not just to those with Wainwright relatives. History buffs can read up on Penistone's railroads or the United Kingdom's workhouses, for example.

The Wainwrights of Penistone Parish Yorkshire, England, Web site is hosted by RootsWeb, which offers free Web sites for genealogists everywhere. You can find out how to put your Web site on RootsWeb at <www.rootsweb.com/~websites>. (Other sites offer free hosting plans, as well. See the box on the opposite page for details.) If you have an interest in researching the Wainwright surname, join the Wainwright mailing list by following the directions at the bottom of the home page.

MINERD-MINER-MINOR FAMILY WEB SITE

THE WAINWRIGHTS OF PENISTONE PARISH YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

WAYNE COFFEY GENEALOGY

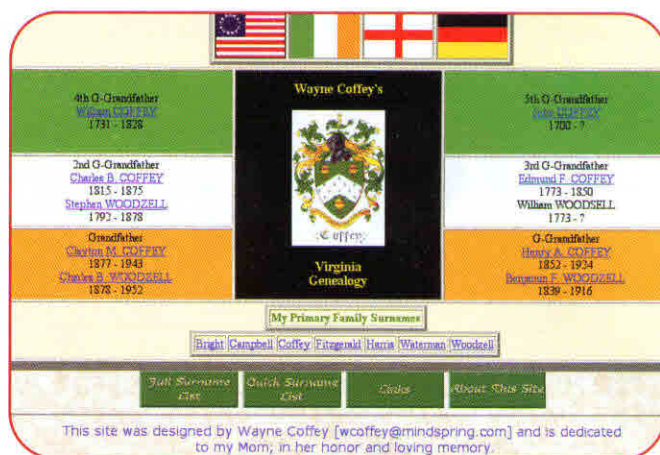<www.mindspring.com/~wcoffey/coffey/coffey.html>

Can you say color scheme? Coordinated colors, pleasing page design and quality content make Wayne Coffey Genealogy a winner. The home page's centered layout makes it easy to assess the resources. Links aren't scattered haphazardly, and there's a distinct personal touch. The first stop for visitors should be About This Site. Wayne Coffey, Webmaster, explains the purpose of his online home, outlines the content and provides an e-mail link for those with research-related information.

The attractive table on the home page highlights research compiled on Coffey's grandfathers and several generations of great-grandfathers. Information on each birth, death, burial, father, mother, spouse, children and marriage is available with just a click of the mouse.

Links take you to pages for seven featured surnames, each with an index to specific ancestors with the selected last name. The Full Surname List page gives a complete index to every surname on the site. Or you can choose the Quick Surname List, which offers the same information, but divides surnames into alphabetical sections.

How does your personal genealogy site compare with the ones featured here? Is it among the best of the best, or does it need a little fine-tuning? If you've got great content but are lacking on the design side, send a link to your Web site to ftmnews-editor@fwpubs.com by April 1. Write "Web site makeover" in the subject line, and in the body of the message, tell us why your site needs a facelift. Be creative! The *Family Tree Magazine* staff will review the sites, then pick one for a design makeover. The selected Webmaster will receive a free Web-design consultation and three free books: *Professional Web Site Design from Start to Finish* by Anne-Marie Concepción (HOW Design Books, $35), *Self-Promotion Online* by Ilise Benun (HOW

This site was designed by Wayne Coffey [wcoffey@mindspring.com] and is dedicated to my Mom; in her honor and loving memory.

WAYNE COFFEY GENEALOGY

Design Books, $29.99) and the new book *Designing Web Sites for Every Audience* by Ilise Benun (HOW Design Books, $34.99). Two runners-up will receive a copy of *Designing Web Sites for Every Audience* (HOW Design Books, $34.99). All winners will be featured in our December issue. 🔖

CRYSTAL CONDE is assistant editor of *Family Tree Magazine* and editor of our weekly e-mail update. Sign up for this free newsletter on our Web site at <www.familytreemagazine.com/newsletter.asp>.