THE FUTURE OF GENEALOGY!

We asked the top experts to gaze into our crystal ball and predict the future for family history research.

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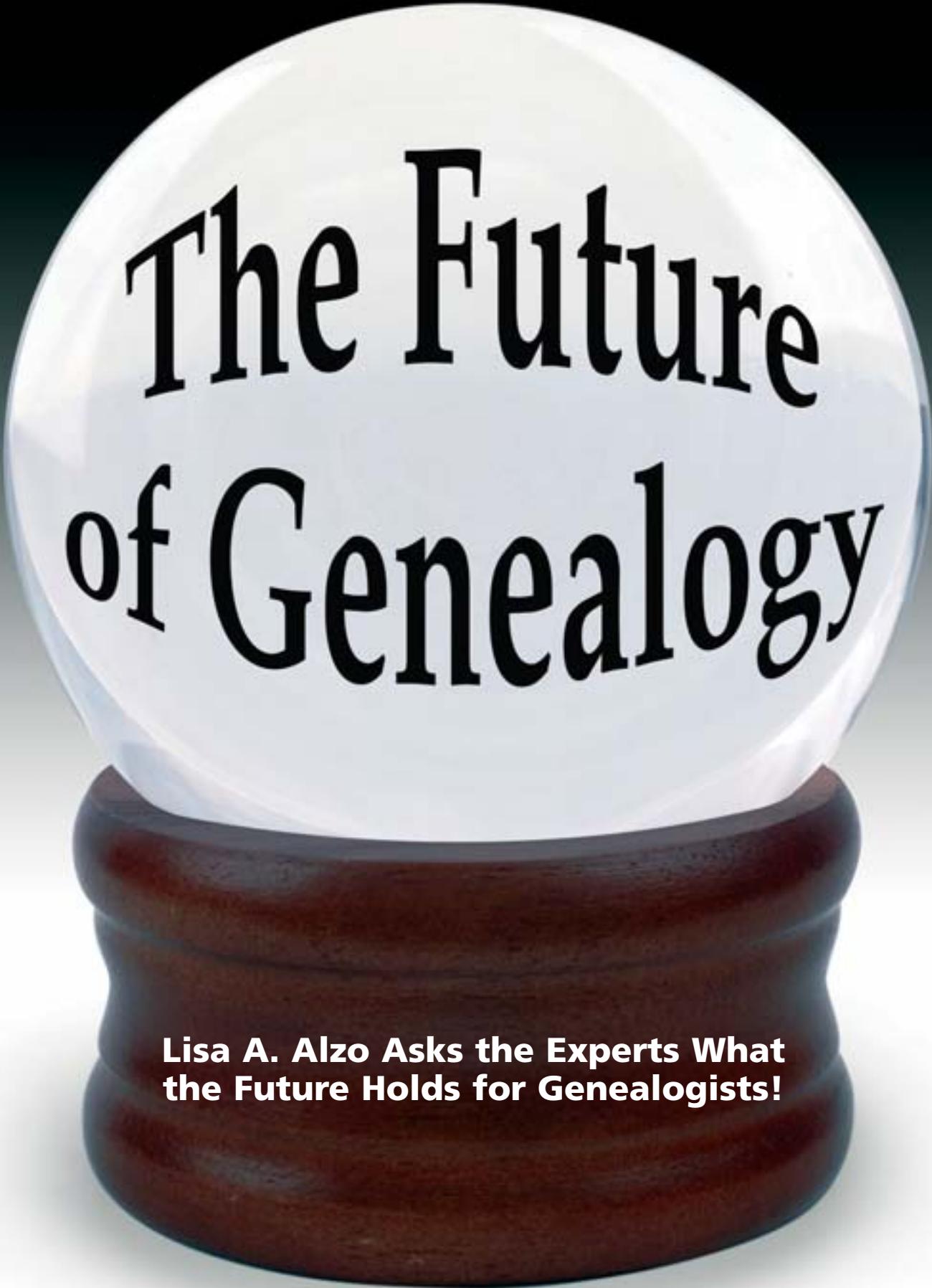
The Future of Genealogy

Lisa A. Alzo Asks the Experts What the Future Holds for Genealogists!

IF WE LOOK BACK on the past 25 years and remember all those developments and innovations which have significantly impacted the field of genealogy, it's quite astounding to think how we were previously able to do any timely research with the resources available and how long it took to obtain them. And yet, still we persisted, following each clue as it appeared, patiently building our family trees.

Consider the major impact that the Internet has had on every aspect of our lives, including the way we approach our family history research. If, in just two decades, genealogists have witnessed a revolution in computing and technology applications, what will the next five, 10 or 20 years hold?

If I let my own imagination take flight, I'd like to think of a time in which I could immerse myself in a realistic interpretation of scenes from my ancestors' lives. The experience of working in the fields of a tiny remote village in Slovakia with a view of the splendid Tatra Mountains, breaking bread around the table with my great-grandparents or or worshipping alongside my grandmother in the church where she was baptized.

Fans of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* will remember how the crew would spend their leisure time on what the creators called a "holodeck". The "holodeck" was able to recreate scenes and characters from different eras, or even from novels. Whether we'll get to experience a virtual reality that matches the sophistication of the fictional holodeck is something I'll leave to the scientists in the research labs! What, then, are some of the more realistic projections about what will happen with genealogy in the next year? In five years? Ten years? We dusted off our crystal ball, and asked some leading family history experts to gaze into it and provide their best

guesses as to what may be in store.
We asked two questions:
1. What sources (databases, technologies, etc.) or trends do you think will be "hot" in the coming year?
2. What do you foresee happening in the field in the next five to 10 years?

OBSERVATIONS FOR THE COMING YEAR

Joe Bott: "The online interactive communities, such as Facebook, and blogs will continue to grow

and challenge established genealogy information providers, i.e, newsletters. Look for increased Hispanic involvement. I'm seeing much more activity in this demographic than a couple of years ago."

Halvor Moorshead: "What excites me is the competition that is being developed with Ancestry.com, *www.ancestry.com*, — I think this is good for everyone. I have nothing against Ancestry, they have pro-

vided access to a wonderful collection of records and they remain well ahead of anyone else. Now, other companies have entered the field and are offering us additional resources. This is good for the genealogist and, we hope, will prevent Ancestry resting on its laurels. The progress at FamilySearch, *www.familysearch.org*, is also very encouraging. Their plan to digitize the billions of records in their vaults is now well under way.

Historical records are also coming online that are not targeted at the genealogist, but are still immensely useful to us. Newspapers, patents and old books are those that I have found particularly useful. And like genealogical records, more and more appear each week."

Noah Tutak: "Although technology continues to improve our access to some source material and historical data, requiring less time and less travel in some cases, the basics of research will not change significantly in the next year. Genealogical research will continue to be a time and labor intensive pursuit that is, at times, highly rewarding. The collection, organization and dissemination of one's family history will, however, continue to benefit from the general Internet-enabled trend toward collaboration. Genealogists will become increasingly familiar with wikis, social networking and crowd sourcing, as these ideas are increasingly applied to genealogy tools. Instead of spending time independently coming to the same conclusions as other genealogists, we'll spend more time sharing, verifying, and discussing each other's research. As a result, ever increasing numbers of people will delve into researching their family's history."

Thomas Shawker, M.D.: "DNA testing: it is now an integral part of genealogy and will not go away. Y chromosome testing will move to more markers as the price drops so

that 60 some markers will become standard for surname projects. Even nine years after its introduction to genealogists back in 2000, there are still many genealogists who are uncomfortable with the technology and don't understand it; this will change with time."

Thomas Kemp: "Genealogy is booming. It has been trending upwards since the first Centennial in 1876, only slowing for the World Wars and the Depression. By the Bicentennial in 1976 and the release of the TV mini-series *Roots*, it exploded again. Now, with wide acceptance and use of the Internet, we are seeing a third phase unfolding. Now the Internet is global and brings with it the rising expectation that data will be basically free, accurate and without borders.

Genealogists have moved from a mistrust of the Internet to the expectation that the family history will be readily available online and that digital copies of the documents and sources used in building the family tree will be attached and visible at the click of a mouse."

Pat Richley (a.k.a. DearMyrtle): "As Web2 technology emerges for all Internet users, genealogists can look forward to the debut of the comprehensive Family History Catalog, a joint effort between FamilySearch.org and WorldVitalRecords.org, rumored to debut in May 2009. The catalog will list all known locations of genealogy databases, indexes, scanned images, microfilm, books, etc., at places not limited to the Family History Library and FamilySearch.org, by incorporating information from genealogy websites, library catalogs and online books. Users will be able to annotate a catalog entry, pointing followers to the better version of scanned census images, etc. Also, the FamilySearchWIKI is a growing entity, which will benefit researchers who aren't sure how to proceed with records research in a newly discovered ancestral place. I may know a

lot about Maryland research, but I find that the FSWiki provides ideas and insights for other areas where I am just venturing out in research.

With the advent of the Family History Catalog, Aaron Underwood will be quite busy redesigning GenSmarts, *www.gensmarts.com*, to compare your current genealogy database (and its missing data fields) with what's listed in the new catalog. The resulting to-do list will provide shortcuts for those of us who are simply overwhelmed when considering where to go and what to do next by pointing to indexes, scanned images, books, microfilm and fiche that might provide additional information about our ancestors."

Schelly Talalay Dardashti: "As a Jewish genealogist, my wish list for this question devolves onto ancient Jewish record groups not yet deemed to have a wide audience base, and thus not at the forefront of research projects.

If the US version of *Who Do You Think You Are?* takes off, we will see a large pool of newcomers, which happened in the UK, along with ancillary websites, getting started guides, magazines, more show-related products and services, and classes. Genealogy societies, blogs, websites, and resources (cyber and other) need to be prepared to deal with what will hopefully be a large influx of newcomers. This will also impact online genealogy classes, which offer a convenient, practical experience for individuals. As a Gen-

Class.com, *www.genclass.com*, founder, I'm hoping that more people realize the advantages of this education format.

Increases in social media networking as a tool to collaborate and share information and make connections. I would never have believed that in my first week on Facebook — which I resisted strongly — three people found ME! These included two Russian cousins now living in Germany with whom contact had been lost and I would have had no way to find them. That experience sold me on social media. It took me much less time to get up and running on Twitter, even though I am still trying to learn how to use it more efficiently."

WHAT DO YOU FORESEE HAPPENING IN THE FIELD IN THE NEXT FIVE TO 10 YEARS?

Halvor Moorshead: "The Ellis Island database came online in 2001; this was the first major database where the information and the original images were available together. This was only eight years ago. The World Wide Web itself is only 18 years old. I would expect the progress during the next 10 years to be faster than we've seen in the past 10 years. We now have the infrastructure, several proven commercial models to follow, almost everyone in the industrialized world is on the Internet and — most important — there seems to be the customers. The progress has been amazing and I expect it will become even faster."

Noah Tutak: "Longer term, the trend toward collaboration will increasingly bleed into research. Already there are some initiatives that have applied crowd sourcing techniques to the organization and tagging of original source documents, such as census records, and then providing the data and metadata to a wide audience in a format built for collaboration. There is a well-known expression, "Information wants to be free", that will increasingly apply to genealogical sources. In five to 10 years, there will be enormous collections of data accessible to huge groups of genealogists who will work together to build a massive, shared global tree that will show us how connected we all really are."

Joe Bott: "I feel, or hope, rather, that there will always be a strong base of good, knowledgeable professional genealogists to help us find those elusive ancestors. However, with the advent of online genealogy, with all its good points (and some not so good points), I am concerned that professional genealogy resources will be diluted and possibly displaced by online, weekend not-so-professional genealogists. What I don't see now, and would very much like too see in the future, is larger online presence of these professionals. There's plenty of individual genealogist sites, but where's the interactive Facebook version of professional genealogists (or am I missing something and its already online?). I hope to see someone or some group begin to build a workable model if they haven't yet."

Thomas Shawker, M.D.: "The accrediting organizations, the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG), *www.bcgcertification. org*, and The International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGEN), *www.icapgen.org*, will need to address DNA. Should every accredited/certified genealogist know the minimal/basics of this technology? Should there be separate accreditation/certification in DNA testing? mtDNA will be used more often; probably new tests will be introduced. There is the danger that genetic genealogists will be separate from the genealogy field in general; already they have separate journals, discussion groups and meetings. I suspect very few genetic genealogists participate/attend the national genealogy meetings, such as the National Genealogical Society (NGS), *www.ngsgenealogy. org,* and Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), *www.fgs.org*. Somehow this must be addressed. NGS and FGS have separate meeting days for librarians. Is it time for a separate day for genetic genealogy?"

Schelly Talalay Dardashti: "My wish list is topped by a time machine. The ability to go back in time — and not land ON my ancestors, but near them — and determine the truth about family stories, who was X's third wife and who was Y's real mother of the father's four wives, or more contemporary questions, like my great-grandmother's mother's name and why she was never ever mentioned by her children. I'd love to see a working prototype exhibited at a major genealogy conference. Can you imagine the lines of people willing to spend money to go back in time to find the answers to family mysteries? A Russian cousin, a scientist recently arrived in the US, is actually working on this technology. I became quite excited and sort of did a happy dance when he mentioned it casually. He didn't understand why a genealogist would be so excited about the concept, until I explained the reasons.

Genetic DNA samples taken at birth. Yes, I know, more than controversial! It would make it easier to connect without forcing unwilling relatives to provide samples or encouraging researchers to use sleuthing skills to grab cups, toothbrushes and cigarette stubs (if anyone is still smoking then!) to extract DNA.

More electronic devices, smaller, faster, larger capacity, with more features that I can't even begin to imagine. Dick Tracy's wristwatch radio, but in a Web 10.0 format."

Stephen P. Morse, Ph.D.: "In the coming years, we will see a shift from physical archives to online resources. Already researchers are spending less time on microfilm readers than they did in past years, and more time on the web. The National Archives has announced that it will not be creating microfilm for the 1940 census (scheduled to be released in 2012), but rather will go directly to online digital images. The LDS is in the process of converting all of its microfilms to digital images. There's a lot of work to be done in this area, and the switch will not happen overnight. But it is happening, and will continue to do so at an accelerated pace. This migration to online data-

bases will require better technologies for searching this data. Faster search engines, better and more uniform user interfaces, and fewer false hits are all areas that will be worked on and improved in the not-too-distant future."
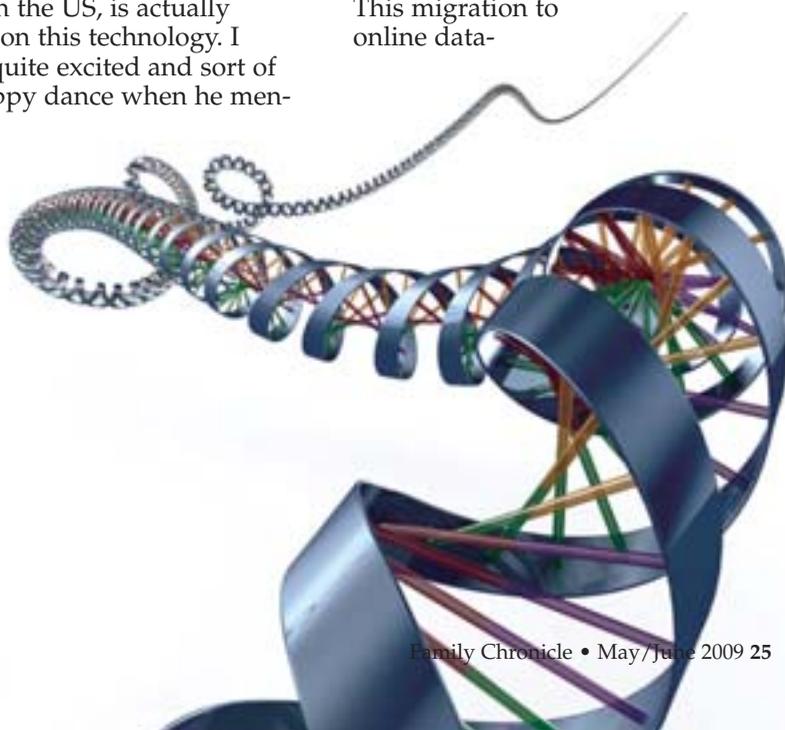
Pat Richley: "iPhone act-alikes will crop up with versions of genealogy programs to manage our family history databases while away from our more cumbersome laptops, eventually accessing our private online storage areas to open and edit document and database files. Currently, GPS coordinates are available, along with mapping technology — both useful for listing locations of ancestral homes and gravesites. VOIP services, such as Skype, will revolutionize the world of telecommunications, bringing the cost of calls down to practically nothing, even on mobile phones.

Casting aside the old-fashioned CDs and VHS tapes, producers of genealogy training videos will switch to online presentation on a pay-to-view basis. Since most genealogists will have high-speed Internet access, the quality of the videos will improve over current YouTube offerings. To save travel expenses and time, local and regional genealogy societies will host meetings where professional genealogists will appear virtually using such interfaces as *www.GoToMeeting.com*."

Thomas Kemp: "The most dramatic change in the next five to 10 years will be that genealogists will shift from gathering and recording their information on home computers and file cabinets and will begin using what I call a "genealogy cloud". Genealogists will work individually, but collectively, on the genealogy cloud of data which will basically be records from 1930 and back — from all countries — available simultaneously in multiple languages online. It will become the archives of record for genealogy.

Genealogy is accelerating. You can feel it. And the critical new "genealogy cloud" is coming online now at precisely the time

that the largest and finest group of genealogists that have ever lived is beginning to age out. Genealogists are intent on preserving their work for the rising generation. This will be the tool they will use

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PANELISTS:

Joe Bott is the founder of Dead Fred's Genealogy Photo Archive, *www.deadfred.com*.

Thomas Jay Kemp is the Director, Genealogy Products for GenealogyBank.com, *www.genealogybank.com*.

Halvor Moorshead was the founding Editor of *Family Chronicle* magazine in 1996 and he subsequenty launched *Internet Genealogy* and *Discovering Family History*. He retired in February 2008, but continues to pursue his own genealogy.

Stephen P. Morse, Ph.D. is the creator of the One-Step Website at *http://stevemorse.org*.

Pat Richley (a.k.a "DearMyrtle") is a podcaster and author of DearMYRTLE's Genealogy Blog, *www.DearMYRTLE.com*.

Thomas H. Shawker, M.D. is the Chair of the National Genealogical Society's committee on Genetic Genealogy.

Schelly Talalay Dardashti is a journalist, genealogist, speaker and online genealogy instructor for GenClass, *www.genclass.com*. She is the author of the Tracing-TheTribe Blog, *http://tracingthe tribe.blogspot.com*.

Noah Tutak is Vice-President, Community for Geni.com, *www.geni.com*.

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to preserve that information and make it widely available.

Family historians, enthusiastic as ever, will make every effort to see that their lines are accurately documented in this online family tree. There will be a growing sense of wanting to "complete" the family tree for every person that ever lived — like the race to complete the "human genome project".

Time travel? DNA tests at birth? Cell phones that connect us with our current network of family and friends, but even allow us to "dial-up" or "touch screen" our pasts? May sound a little hard to comprehend right now. But then, who could have anticipated the explosion of the Internet, and the idea of archives posting collections online? It seemed that just 10 years ago that the only way to obtain records was to hire agents, write snail mail or visit the archive in person. Of course, in some instances, this is still true, but if

you think about all of the excellent observations of our panelists, the time when we no longer have to rely on those methods for research is not too far off on the horizon. When I began researching my

roots 19 years ago, I never would have imagined the day when I could pull up my grandfather's passenger arrival record or his petition for naturalization on my laptop with just a few simple clicks, or being able to instantly connect with a newly found Slovak cousin, who lives thousand of miles away, to share data, photographs and family stories.

Tom Kemp summarized it perfectly: "It's a great day for genealogy and tomorrow is going to be even better." I don't know about you, but I can't wait!

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Author, instructor and lecturer Lisa A. Alzo has been an avid genealogist for over 19 years and enthusiastically looks forward to what the next 20 will bring.