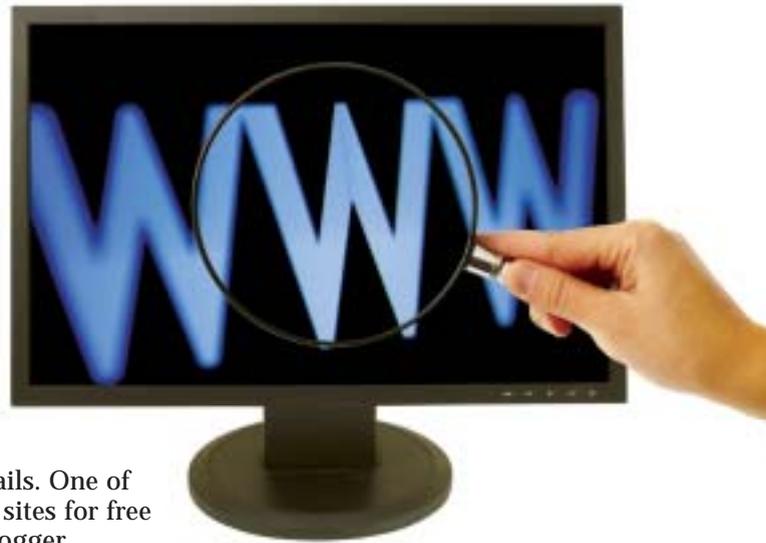


# In Search of the Web 2.0



THE TERM “WEB 2.0” has probably come your way recently as you move around the Internet. You may have wondered what it means, along with many thousands of others, as Google lists “Web 2.0” second in its list of most requested terms in the “define” category for 2006.

Web 2.0 is what many perceive to be the second generation of the web, or its next incarnation, characterized by dynamic content produced by the millions of web users themselves, such as you and me. You will have come across some of the web services defined as Web 2.0 in the form of blogs, podcasts, wikis, RSS and social networking and sharing sites, such as Flickr.

What does Web 2.0 mean for genealogists? I believe that it will become increasingly significant, as this “new” web is predicated on online community building, sharing and networking — surely what genealogists do best. Let’s look at three of the Web 2.0 tools and some of the many examples of family historians using these to see more clearly what I mean. I will begin with blogs as these have been around the longest and there are many genealogical examples to look at.

## BLOGS

Blogs, or web logs, are websites that are organized chronologically, with the most recent entry at the top. Links can be made to other websites and frequently there is the ability to post comments on what a blog has to say. The blog software takes care of all the web page building and the archiving of the information post-

ed on the site. There are websites that provide simple software allowing anyone to build a blog without needing to know any technical details. One of the most popular sites for free blog hosting is Blogger, [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com). Here, it is quite literally a matter of minutes to have the beginnings of a family blog online.

Blogs have been taken advantage of by the genealogy community in two distinct ways: for genealogical news and as an alternative to regular web pages to display and share family research. The best known example of a genealogy newsletter-type blog is Dick Eastman’s, <http://eogn.typepad.com>. The information he posts online can be read either in weekly newsletter format or in blog format — the advantage of the latter being that you can read the postings as he puts them online, rather than just once a week.

Another general informational genealogy blog that is very useful for alerting readers to news stories and new resources in genealogy is Genealogy Blog, which is written by a group of American professional genealogists, <http://genealogyblog.com>. Yet another is Genealogy Roots Blog <http://genrootsblog.blogspot.com/>, self described as being “for finding online genealogy databases, records and resources.”

Ancestry.com has discontinued its e-mail newsletters and instead produces the 24-7 Family History Circle blog, <http://blogs.ancestry.com/circle/>. Here you will find help-

ful genealogy tips (from readers and from Ancestry’s regular columnists), how-to articles, research stories and, of course, what is new on the Ancestry website.

My personal favorite of the news blogs is the Genealogue, <http://genealogue.blogspot.com/>. The subtitle of the Genealogue sums up its wonderful quirkiness: “Genealogy News You Can’t Possibly Use”. Its author collects zany genealogy stories and news reports from current and historical sources.

Some genealogical societies are using blogs to spread the word about resources in their region. A good example is the Oxford County [Maine] Genealogy Notebook, <http://oxfordcounty.blogspot.com>, where you can find all kinds of information on local county records, including transcripts.

There are still other blogs on specific topics of interest to family historians. History of Leith, Edinburgh, [www.leithhistory.co.uk](http://www.leithhistory.co.uk), is a good example of a specialized blog, as are Mississippi History and Genealogy Notes, <http://msgenealogy.blogspot.com> and Family Oral History Using Digital Tools, <http://familyoralhistory.us/news>. Roots Television, a genealogy “television channel” that can be watched on your computer, has three blogs of genealogical interest at [www.rootstelevision.com/blogs/index.html](http://www.rootstelevision.com/blogs/index.html).

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The negative aspect of blogs is that many are not kept up-to-date and fade away after a few postings. This, sadly, is often the case with personal genealogy blogs. However, it is by taking advantage of the simplicity of building personal blogs that genealogists could make the best use of this simple new technology. The most important point in their favor is that they can be built by those with no knowledge of any web languages, such as HTML. Blogs allow visitors to leave comments, corrections and/or additions. Information can be added to the blog as it becomes available, allowing a blog to be started at any time in the research process, rather than after a critical mass of data is available.

To view blogs that demonstrate the potential of blogging for personal family history, try The Ainscough Family History blog, <http://ainscough-familyhistory.blogspot.com>, All My Ancestors, [www.allmyancestors.com/blog/](http://www.allmyancestors.com/blog/), Breese Genealogy, <http://breese.genealogy.blogspot.com> or Goldfoot Genealogy, [http://goldfoot\\_genealogy.blogspot.com](http://goldfoot_genealogy.blogspot.com).

To find other genealogy blogs that might be of interest, the best place to visit is Genealogy Blog Finder, <http://blogfinder.genealogue.com>, where there are more than 200 blogs in 25 categories, ranging from obituaries to genetic genealogy. Cyndi's List now has a category, Blogs for Genealogy, [www.cyndislist.com/blogs.htm](http://www.cyndislist.com/blogs.htm), which is somewhat smaller.

Google Blog Search, <http://blogsearch.google.com>, operates somewhat differently. This is a general blog search engine that can hunt down any blog that includes a word like "genealogy" in a posting. In Advanced Search, the search can be limited to specified words in the title of a blog or the title of a post. Technorati, [www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com), also allows you to search blog postings, but here a watchlist of words and

phrases that you are interested in tracking as they appear in blog postings can be created.

### Rss

Once you have a collection of blogs you want to read on a regular basis, you can begin to make use of RSS feeds and blog aggregators. Rather than going to every blog's website on a regular basis to see if there is anything new, use an Internet tool known as an aggregator, which collects updated blog content using RSS feeds. RSS stands for "Rich Site Summary", "RDF Site Summary" or "Really Simple Syndication", but it isn't necessary to understand RSS itself to make use of its capabilities. Instead, visit a popular aggregator like Bloglines, [www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com), and set up a (free) account.

Bloglines will step you through the easy process of adding feeds from blogs you want to keep track of. You then have just this one website to visit at your leisure, knowing that any new postings to your favorite blogs are being saved there for you to read.

Google also offers a blog aggregator, [www.google.com/reader/view/](http://www.google.com/reader/view/).

### WIKIS

Wikis, another important part of Web 2.0, have been taken up on a much smaller scale by the genealogy world, but they have great potential for spreading genealogical information online. A wiki, meaning "quick" in Hawaiian, is a website enabling individuals connected to a computer on the Internet to collaboratively build content. As a result, the content

may continue to change and is always a work in progress.

The flagship of wikis is Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>. This multilingual, encyclopedia project is written collaboratively by volunteers from all interest fields. Genealogists can take part in this mammoth project by editing and adding content of their own.

For example, my Anglo-Irish Parker family was instrumental in the development of Passage West, County Cork, Ireland. Wikipedia has an article on Passage West, but with no mention of the Parkers' contribution to the growth of the town. The article is also tagged by readers as needing a "cleanup", so there is obviously an opportunity here for me to add some relevant family information and help shape up Wikipedia at the same time. An entirely new article can also be contributed to the site. Many family researchers will have found family members

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who contributed in a significant way to the world they lived in — whether in the establishment of new communities, in government, military service, in their professions or a myriad of other ways. These ancestors can be honored and remembered with an entry in Wikipedia.

There are, however, specific guidelines on how to write and edit articles, so make sure you visit the relevant introductory pages before launching into writing, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article_development). There is a small learning curve involved in learning how to use

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wiki software, but the process is not difficult.

In addition, of course, Wikipedia can be searched to see if there is relevant information already there that can help you with your research. With an estimated 1.46 million English-language articles, the site can be expected to have an entry on historical events that affected your family, the locations they came from and perhaps some of the members of your family themselves. Remember, though, that as a collaboratively written encyclopedia, Wikipedia is the product of individuals, rather than “experts”, so information found there should be evaluated accordingly.

If you would like to contribute to a more specifically genealogical wiki, then there are opportunities at Dick Eastman's Encyclopedia of Genealogy, [www.eogen.com](http://www.eogen.com). This wiki is designed as a compendium of information on genealogy itself, rather than on individual people. Here you will find information on many aspects of genealogical research and you are invited to add content about areas where you have specialized knowledge. If you have a local genealogical society, for example, think of adding information about it and its activities for others to find.

Another genealogical wiki is one to which you can contribute your family data. WikiTree, [www.wikitree.org](http://www.wikitree.org), has the far-reaching aim of providing “a central place on the Internet for kin information about all people we know ever lived.”

It is more difficult to build a wiki of one's own. There is free software available, and free wiki hosting services. See How To Start a Wiki, [http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wiki\\_Science:How\\_to\\_start\\_a\\_Wiki](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wiki_Science:How_to_start_a_Wiki)

for help. But the software is not particularly easy to use and, of course, you need a group of like-minded people to work with you. There are one or two examples of individuals building a wiki for genealogical purposes, but joining in the bigger wiki projects is a better use of the technology for most people.

### PODCASTS

Podcasts are another way that individuals can contribute to the community of the Internet. Podcasting is simply a method used to distribute audio

casts as a category. Currently there are 16 available.

Alternatively, if you know of a podcast, you can usually visit the website and listen to it without the need for additional software. Some examples are the Genealogy Tech Podcast, whose name says it all, [www.genealogytechpodcast.com](http://www.genealogytechpodcast.com), The Genealogy



**While Wikipedia entries can be informative, it is important to remember that they are written by individuals, not experts, so information should always be double checked.**

files across the Internet. The word podcast is a combination of the words “iPod” and “broadcast”. Although the use of part of the word “iPod” suggests it is necessary to own an Apple iPod to listen to these broadcasts, in fact, all that is necessary is a computer with speakers attached. What podcasting allows individuals to do is to broadcast what amounts to their own radio shows on topics that interest them.

Once again, genealogists have taken advantage of this opportunity to reach others online. The simplest way to find genealogy podcasts is to visit the iTunes Store, [www.apple.com/itunes/store/](http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/) — the iTunes software and the podcasts themselves are free to download — and search for the word genealogy limited by pod-

Guys Podcast, with George Morgan and Drew Smith, <http://genealogyguys.com>, Irish Roots Café, a weekly podcast from Mike O’Laughlin, [www.irishroots.com/podcast.php](http://www.irishroots.com/podcast.php) and Genealogy on Demand, exploring topics of use to family history researchers and family reunion planners, <http://genealogyondemand.wordpress.com>.

In a future issue, I will look at some of the parts of Web 2.0 that have been overwhelmingly embraced by young people on the Internet, such as social bookmarking and collaborative tagging. But these sites are not just for the young. Genealogists are already exploring their possibilities for community building and collaboration.