

# BEWARE! The Enchanted Forest: Perils & Pitfalls of Online Trees

Prepared and Presented by

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## QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED HERE

- What are online trees?
- Where are the trees found?
- Are all trees created equal?
- How can a tree be assessed for quality?
- Should we even look at online trees?
- Should you put YOUR tree online?



## WHAT ARE ONLINE TREES? THEY . . .

- Are posted online by a person or family
- Require Internet access to view
- Are not supposed to have any living people listed (with the possible exception of those who have given permission for that listing)
- Usually cannot be altered by anyone but those authorized (with the exception of wikis)
- Can be viewed by anyone (if made public)
- Can have data “lifted” and placed on others’ webpages or their genealogy software (if public)

## WHERE ARE THE TREES FOUND?

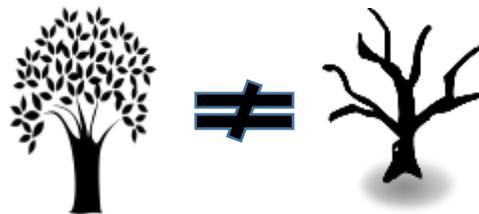
### MOST POPULAR SITES . . .

*Ancestry.com*  
*MyHeritage*  
*Geni*  
*RootsWeb WorldConnect*

### AND WIKI SITES . . .

*WikiTree*  
*FamilySearch*

ALL TREES ARE *NOT* CREATED EQUAL



Note: Information provided here was accurate as of January 2018

## AND PRIVATELY POSTED TREES

Public

Private, by registration (and sometimes fee) only

Some, though not all, created with genealogy software

## WHEN CAN ONLINE TREES BE USED AS SOURCES?

- When you have carefully assessed them
- When citations and other obvious indications (attached documents) are included
- When you can contact the tree's owner

## AVOID USING TREES THAT . . .

- Use only other trees as sources
- Have no credible sources
- Provide inconsistent, contradictory, or obviously incorrect information (e.g., birth occurring after the person's death, etc.)
- Are posted by someone you cannot contact
- Have non-verified citations or don't suggest references to be checked

## HOW CAN A TREE BE TESTED FOR QUALITY?

- Compare it to information you already know
- Carefully investigate the sources provided (sometimes people use incorrect sources)
- Make certain that the tree owner is someone who can be contacted

## WIKI TREES

- Can be added to or deleted from by anyone
- Can foster an interaction with a family member
- Should include clear source information to clarify your accuracy
- Might not even be recognizable when others are done grafting on branches to your family

### FamilySearch World Tree Wiki

- Open to the public as a Wiki (positive and negative)
- Permits open dialog with others working on same line
- Provides hints for records at FamilySearch and other locations
- FamilySearch adds information (positive and negative)
- Errors, when called to their attention, are fairly quickly fixed
- Option to monitor a family name or tree
- Optional opportunities to email contributors
- Only the people who put up the information can see themselves (privacy for the living)

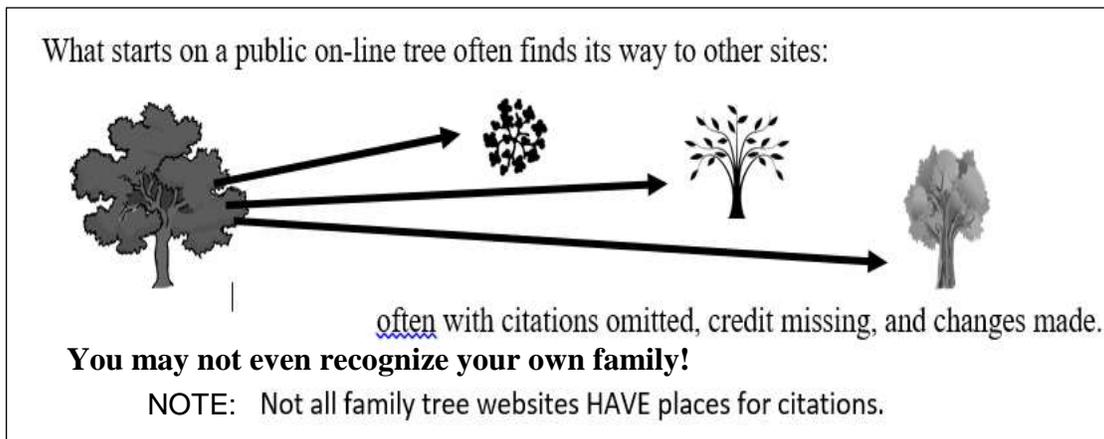


## HOW DO WE KNOW IF WE CAN TRUST AN ONLINE TREE?

1. Assess the sources that are provided
  - Check them for yourself! – Are they credible?
  - Cite the sources that YOU have viewed
2. Make certain that there is some way to contact the tree-owner
  - Understand that quoting someone else's tree is even more uncertain if you don't know who created it
  -

## THERE ARE LOTS OF ONLINE OPTIONS FOR PLACING YOUR TREE

- It is up to you to make certain all the data is included and accurate
- Check the online locations before choosing where to post your tree



## WHEN CITING AN ONLINE TREE, INCLUDE

- Title of the tree
- Author of the tree (include contact info)
- Date tree was created (if available)
- Where it is found online (Ancestry, FamilySearch, etc.)
- Date you accessed the tree
- Reason to use the tree ("Smith family")
- Clarify if the tree is "documented" or "undocumented" and, in the comments section, identify why you believe the tree is credible

## IF YOUR ONLY TREE IS ONLINE, WHAT IF

- The Internet is "down" or not available?
- The host company goes out of business?
- You want privacy to list all the children/grandchildren?
- Your WIKI tree is hijacked & your data is altered or gone?
- You need/want backup copies?

Don't let an online tree be your **ONLY** tree; be sure to use non-Internet-dependent genealogy software to secure your data & list living family members.

## A Few Online Resources for Additional Opinions and Thoughts

- Genealogy Computer Society of Georgia. "Put Your Family Tree on the Web (and Visit Sites Where Others Have Published Theirs)." Retrieved 27 November 2015 from [http://gencomputer.org/put\\_web.html](http://gencomputer.org/put_web.html) .
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- Searchforancestors.com. "Use Family Tree Databases to Find Your Family." *Ancestor Search . . . Find Your Family History: Getting Started in Family History*, 2015. Retrieved 27 November 2015 from <http://www.searchforancestors.com/gettingstarted/familytrees.html> .
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