

Family history research ...

by Andrew Matheson

Online family trees

As you go further into family history research you'll need help to record, sort and present your findings. In the last issue we looked at choosing a genealogy program. There are also on-line options where you don't have a program on your computer but upload information and sort it and present it online.

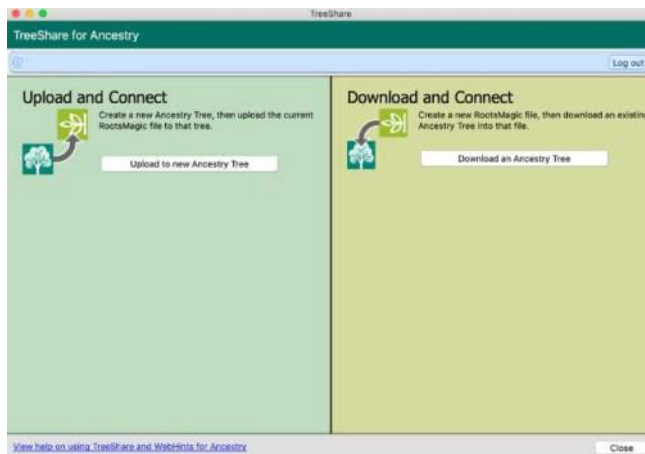
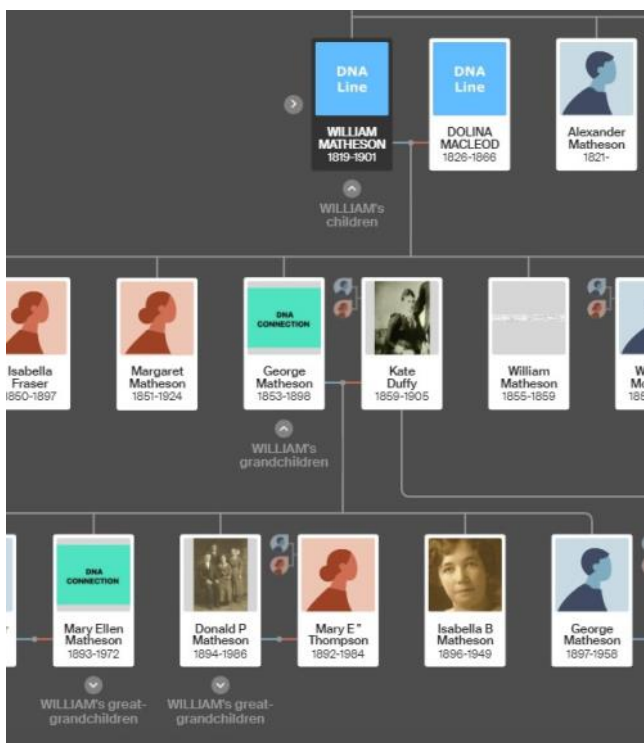
Some online trees are free to use, and others require a subscription. Even for the subscription version, you don't have to pay for upgrades as you might with a program you buy. You can access online trees from anywhere, and don't have to worry about backing up your data.

On the other hand, though, the fine print might mean that the hosting company owns or has access to the information you upload. And if your family tree is public, then other users might be able to copy your data, photos and records.

There are two broad categories of online family trees. One is where people have their own trees online, and the other is where different people collaborate on a common tree.

On sites such as Ancestry and MyHeritage each user has their own tree, so there might be a lot of duplication between trees operated by different people.

You can start an online tree by entering information directly, though if you have information in a genealogy program you can start an online tree with a GEDCOM file exported from your program.



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Other sites allow people to collaborate on a single tree and merge duplicates. Other users are able to make changes to profiles (people) you've added. FamilySearch, Geni, WeRelate and WikiTree are like this.

So you can see that it's not an either/or choice between using your own software and using an online tree. You might find both helpful — keeping your own data yourself but exporting to present it publicly and work on it collaboratively. Some programs allow you to sync the family file on your computer with trees online. Some online sites even link to DNA testing services.

How to decide whether to go online or use a program, or a mixture of both? The answer is similar to the advice in our last issue about choosing a program:

- Think about what you want to do with all your information: just keep records, what form of presentation, how much collaboration with others.
- Look at plenty of reviews.
- Talk to others about what they find works.
- Use demo versions or free trial periods to try different products.
- Decide how much you need or want to pay.
- Pick a mainstream product and stick with it.

If you have any experience with online family tree builders, please share it in the Clan Matheson [family history forum](#) or [Facebook group](#).

