

Brief Biography

Judy Rice majored in instructional psychology and cognition and has spent the past 11 years conducting research on user experience, designs for impaired populations, cultural needs, evaluations, and contextual inquiry. Clients have included Brigham Young University, Financial Fusion, Intermountain Health Care, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Dan Lawyer majored in business and information systems and has spent the last 14 years defining products, managing product lines, and helping bring software and services to market around the world. Clients and companies have included WordPerfect, Fibernet, Seranova, Novell, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Grant Skousen was trained as a software developer but has spent the last 15 years helping companies improve their customer experience using customer-centered design, contextual inquiry, low and high fidelity prototyping, user testing and expert evaluations. Clients have included Intel, Novell, WordPerfect, Perot Systems and PowerQuest (now part of Symantec) as well as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Interest in Collective Remembering

We currently work for the Family History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints conducting research exploring user needs, and applying our findings to product features and interfaces. Our recent research identified the desire for people to share, discuss and easily access family artifacts and stories—to engage in collective remembering to produce collective memories. People told us of situations where they had photographs with unknown people in them, but after connecting with a distant relative, that person was able to provide the missing names. We heard similar accounts where different members of a family each had a part of a story, but when they got together they were able to arrive at a richer shared understanding. Family history abounds with such experiences. Our interest in collective remembering stems from the recognition that people do need this type of activity to further their family history research. We believe the Internet provides an ideal environment for the generation of collaborative, collective memories—a way to facilitate capturing an artifact or memory with its source, metadata and data, and any associated stories. It allows people to participate in discussions reaching consensus, or accommodating conflicting views. We propose these interactions reconnect families and produce a superior user experience and a more valuable data collection.

Description of Relevant Research

The Family History Department is about to release Family Tree, a web-based application. As part of the design process we conducted extensive contextual inquiry sending teams to Asia, the Pacific Islands, Europe, Canada, Central and South America, as well as various regions in the United States. From this research we identified major user goals and needs, barriers to participating in family history activities, and technology limitations; we defined segments, and generated personas to guide us in its design.

Our team is now involved in the design of the second phase where the focus will be on family history research and collaboration. Our user research is ongoing as we explore evolving enhancements and needs. Our latest focus has been on capturing and sharing the memories surrounding artifacts and stories. We have identified several types of items people wish to preserve: personal memories; stories or oral histories that have been handed down; souvenirs or memorabilia; photographs; letters and journals; government or church certificates or documents; published books or articles; official records. They have varying degrees of reliability. We have concluded we need to provide a way of preserving not only living memory and artifacts, but also family legends and stories regardless of their verifiable authenticity. Our responsibility will be to design the technology that will provide the repository and the platform for discussion. We will rely on the online community to evaluate and respond to content.

Recapturing Memories and Reconnecting with the Past

Position Paper for CHI 2006 Workshop on Designing for Collective Remembering

Judy Cossel Rice (riceja@ldschurch.org)
Dan Lawyer (lawyerdc@ldschurch.org)
Grant Skousen (skousengn@ldschurch.org)
Family and Church History Department
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a strong commitment to the preservation of genealogical records and to making these records available for family history researchers. It stores 2.3 million rolls of microfilm, the equivalent of about 6 million 300-page volumes, and 180,000 sets of microfiche in a granite vault in the mountains above Salt Lake City, Utah. Its Family History Department is developing a product, Family Tree, to help people find their ancestors - to help people connect with their past. One aspect of Family Tree will utilize the power of collective remembering to stimulate interest and increase participation in family history activities. People in the United States lack a sense of roots and connection with the past as they have no culturally established tradition of passing on stories and heritage—social memories (Corbett, 1997). As people have become increasingly separated from extended families, dislocated from their birthplaces, they lose contact with the legacy keepers; the narratives are silenced and forgotten (Kearl, 2002). In *The Screwtape Letters*, the devil, Screwtape, advises his nephew to corrupt men by cultivating in them disdain for the past: "...it is most important thus to cut every generation off from all others for where learning makes a free commerce between the ages there is always the danger that the characteristic errors of one may be corrected by the characteristic truths of another." (Lewis, 1943). Today we have the technology that can facilitate collective remembering and the creation of collective or prosthetic memories to reconnect people (Landsberg, 2004).

Research conducted by the Family History Department supports that people indeed are becoming increasingly interested in using technology for reestablishing connections with their past. Family history has become one of the most popular pastimes in America and one of the top activities on the Internet. As we surveyed existing websites, we found sites where individuals can contribute electronic versions of some types of artifacts and connect with distant relatives who may know additional information about them. These sites accommodate both elaboration and dissent as often people have, or have been given, very different recollections of events. This is especially true in family history where stories may be altered or embellished as they are handed down through generations, or where artifacts may be inherited totally without any history and one is made up or assumptions are made about their origins. Memories are not about fact, however, but are about interpretations, about meaning, about how individuals define who they are (Wertsch, 2002). So while the stories may not be factual, they help family history researchers understand the world of their ancestors, what was important to them, and the legacy they wanted to leave. Even if not entirely correct, the collective memories created by descendants discussing these stories also contain the elements of truth (Halbwach) which may provide clues for researchers.

Where no heirlooms or memories exist to tell the stories of families and the events that define their lives, people look in official records for any footprints their ancestors may have left. These records can then be examined by descendants to try to piece together narratives, assign meaning, and define motives—another type of collective remembering activity. Established entities such as government, churches, libraries, and museums have made part or all of their collections available to assist in these quests. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, too, is engaged in a massive digitizing and indexing project. Any new product needs to facilitate access to both user-contributed artifacts and stories, and the records being made available by these institutions.

A major issue we face is determining that the commitment of resources needed to develop a system of sharing and discussing artifacts and family memories is justified. Ultimately we, as an organization, measure success by *increased* participation in family history. While we know people want the feature, we are relying on anecdotal evidence to project increased participation due to its usage. Our research has shown that for some, family history is all about numbers: extending lines back; finding more ancestors. For some, it is all about the stories: putting flesh on bones, context and motives; getting to know their ancestors. For some it is all about leaving a legacy: passing on their knowledge of the family history to future generations; adding chapters to the ancestral book. For all of these segments, artifacts and collective memories help to satisfy their needs by providing clues for extending lines, supplying stories to tell, and materials to pass along. Another validation comes from the popularity of analogous activities: scrap booking, family reunions, collecting and publishing oral histories, and even such sites as flickr.com where people can contribute, share and discuss pictures. As we refine and test our interface, we are recording any expressed user enthusiasm for the feature. Further validation criteria will be developed as the project progresses.

Challenges

A major challenge we face is designing an interface that addresses the needs of an extremely broad audience. People who participate in family history activities vary widely in:

- Age
- Education
- Income
- Experience with and attitude about using technology
- Knowledge of family history methods
- Knowledge of their own family origins and stories
- Amount of family history already gathered by others
- Relatives who might be able to provide information or artifacts
- Resources and time to spend on family history activities
- Access to records
- Motivation
- Culture

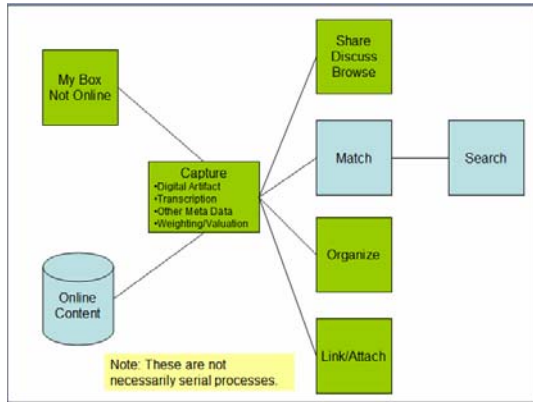
Our product has to satisfy the needs of both the novice and the enthusiast in order to stimulate the participation necessary to make it successful.

Another challenge is making the system simple enough to not overwhelm a novice who simply wants to perform elementary tasks, but robust enough for the power user to perform sophisticated or complex functions. Many of our targeted users have low computer skills and/or minimal family history experience. Our research has found that these populations quickly abandon sites where they are confused. One way to ensure ease of use is to correctly identify discreet user goals and the tasks to attain them. Sequencing these tasks become key.

Current Solutions

The steps and goals we have identified with providing a forum for creating collective memories involves an interface that allows users to:

- *Contribute* materials: either what the user has, or has found on other online sites
- *Capture* information about the materials
- *Link* the materials with relevant individuals, families, places, time periods, or events
- *Organize* the contributions so that one can easily access them when needed
- *Share*, comment, and join in conversation with others about artifacts
- *Search*, *match* and *merge* artifacts to reduce duplications



It is essential that we make the contribute process easy enough that people will *want* to add their materials. Previous discussion board research found that success depends on high levels of activity: if we only receive a few artifacts, there will be little discussion and the feature will wither. Thus our current focus is on making sure we have this contribute process correct. We have made a first iteration design and prototype that we are testing. The screens are based on a four step process:

- Upload
- Describe
- Annotate
- Link

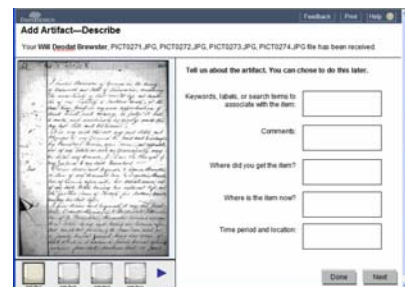
Upload involves 3 tasks:

1. Indicating if they want to contribute a single artifact or mass upload a group of items
2. Specifying where the item is located and if the item consists of more than a single file
3. Designating the privacy options



Describe asks the contributor to provide information about the artifact itself:

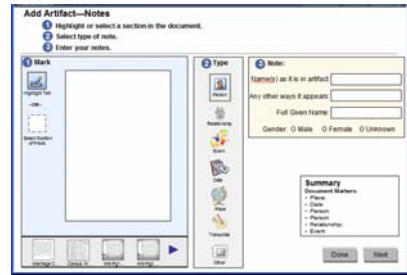
- Keywords, labels or search terms
- Freeform comments
- Where they got the item
- Where it is currently located
- Time period and place



Annotate has the contributor highlight sections of the artifact and add notes identifying:

- People
- Relationships
- Events
- Dates
- Places

Or provides a space to transcribe the entire documents



Link allows the user to have copies of the artifact accessible from records of individuals, families or defined groups.



Future Directions

Once our testing of the contribute process is complete, our next iteration will include defining how users can comment or join in on discussions about the artifacts. Once we define the experience, we will then design and test the actual screens. This will provide forums where collective remembering will take place.

An ongoing process we are involved in is refining research on:

- Types of artifacts and stories people have
- Their relative importance
- How people want to use these items
- Encouraging family collective remembering

References

Kearl, Michael C. 2001. "An Investigation into Collective Historical Knowledge and Implications of Its Ignorance" In *Texas Journal of Ideas, History, and Culture*. Austin: Texas Council for the Humanities.

Corbett, J. Martin. 1997. "Towards a Sociological Model of Organizational Memory" in *Proceedings of the 13th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Washington, D.C.: IEEE.

Landsberg, Alison. 2004. *Prosthetic Memory: the transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lewis, C.S. 1943. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: Macmillan.

Middleton, David and Derek Edwards (eds). 1990. *Collective Remembering*. London: Sage.

Nielsen Media Research. 2002. *2000 Report on Television: The First Fifty Years*. New York: Nielsen Media Research.

Wertsch, James. 2002. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.