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Genealogy on Facebook: Do I want it?

Guest Column by Stu Murray



Unless you have had your head in the technology sand, you know Facebook has become the juggernaut of social media. Just wait a minute—Facebook, social media—what is this stuff? If you were like me back in the 1970s just out of the US Air Force, technology meant a handheld calculator that cost \$50. Fast forward to the present, and talk about changes in technology; cell phones that weigh only ounces, computers on your wrist that tell you how healthy or unhealthy you might be (remember Dick Tracy?), and virtual reality (I haven't played with that yet). Today we have social media that includes Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and about 15 other pieces of social media I haven't even begun to understand. Let's explore Facebook and we'll look at the others another time.

Facebook was launched by Mark Zuckerberg back in 2004. So what is the big deal! Only because it has over **2 Billion monthly active users** and has a revenue stream of over **\$40 Billion** (yes, with a capital “B”). Facebook sells ads shown on your computer screen and it is a big deal to the advertisers. It also makes Mr. Zuckerberg a very rich man. So what does Facebook have to do with Genealogy? Answer: Quite a lot. We will get to that shortly.

Do you want Facebook or need it? That is a personal choice but it does offer some excellent interactions with people you might never meet or have a conversation with. Albuquerque Genealogical Society maintains a couple of Facebook entries. The AGS Board decided to get the AGS brand out there like other organizations. Why? It is a form of advertising to inform those Facebook users that we have a vibrant genealogy group.

You might say, I don't want to be on Facebook and have my personal information out there for everyone to see on the internet. I understand and it is your choice. However, in reality, your personal information is probably already out there via credit card companies, telephone records, utility bills, and the good ole Federal Government. Facebook has features to protect your identity (ask your grandson or granddaughter for help). When you create an account, Facebook will show a toolbar, like the one pictured below.



Left to right, the Facebook toolbar offers an “updated home” icon, a search text entry, your account icon, the home icon, Find Friends icon, plus others. These other icons are two people silhouetted, a bubble with a lightning bolt, earth with a number superimposed, a circle with a question mark and a downward arrow.

- **The Updated Home button (extreme left) icon** – Clicking on this icon will refresh your Facebook page and take you to the latest Facebook entries your friends or you might have entered.
- **The Search Text Entry icon** – Allows you to search for people (friends) whom you might know on Facebook or topics of interest. It’s like Google, just specific to searching Facebook.
- **Your Account icon** – Like any online presence, this button will take you to where your account information is stored. It also provides additional features you can select to customize your Facebook account. It also provides “Security” features of who can or cannot see what is posted on your Facebook page.
- **The Home Button icon** – Similar to the Updated Home Button (the block with an “f”); it will take you to your home page.
- **Two Silhouetted Persons icon** – This icon will bring up a dialog box for finding friends you might know. It will also notify you if someone asks to be your friend! It will bring up a list of potential friends. This list might contain people who you know or who have mutual acquaintances.
- **The Balloon with a lightning bolt icon** – Facebook has a messenger function that allows you to privately communicate (like email) with friends and family who are also online at the same time as you. Sometimes you might have personal questions or private communication with a person or group you don’t want the rest of the world to see. Nice thing is if you have multiple devices like computer, cell phone, or a tablet, you can get these messages across all these devices at the same time. So you don’t have to be tied down to just your computer. It’s a blessing and a curse all at the same time.
- **The Earth with a superimposed number icon** – This tells you someone has recently posted to your Facebook page and Facebook will take you to the post directly without having to scroll around the Facebook page. This is a handy shortcut to new posts.
- **The Question Mark icon** – All good applications have a help page in case you don’t understand how the app (like Facebook) works. It usually will have questions asked by other members you might find helpful, because they had the same problem as you. You can type your own question and someone will usually give you a tip or tell you how something works.
- Finally, **the “Downward Arrow” icon** – This brings up a dialog box with a list of options for you to choose. The dialog box will show Facebook pages you might have created (you can have more than one), you can choose to create or manage a page, create or manage a group (remember this one), create a fundraiser, create ads or advertise on Facebook. The next four are more important to you: The Activity Log will show your most recent posts. News Feed Preferences allow you to control who sees your news feed (posts). Settings will bring up your General Account Settings to control such things as Privacy, Apps, Ads, Public Posts, etc. This is where you can really tighten up your account options and restrict who sees your posts. And “Log Out”, as it implies, will log you out of your Facebook account.

I could probably write a book on nothing but Facebook, but I want to get back to why you might want to have an account, “Genealogy!”

Genealogy

There are a lot of Genealogy Facebook pages dedicated to finding ancestors. Every state has at least one genealogy Facebook page or group. We in New Mexico have the New Mexico Genealogy Network, NM Genealogical Society, Sierra County Genealogical Society as starters.

Type Albuquerque Genealogy in the search bar and you will find us, The Albuquerque Genealogical Society!

I mentioned Facebook Pages and Groups. How do you distinguished between the two? Facebook Pages are what you create when you establish an account. Everyone has one. You can let the whole Facebook world look at it or just your friends or family. Facebook Groups are like private clubs. Some groups you can see without joining. Some groups do not let you see what is posted unless you join. Here's how Facebook defines Pages and Groups.

Facebook says:

“When someone **likes** a **Page**, they're showing support for the Page and that they want to see content from it. The Page will show up as being liked in the **About** section of that person's profile. When someone follows a Page, it means they may receive updates about the Page in their News Feed. Keep in mind that:

- People who like a Page will automatically follow it.
- Even if people like a Page, they can still choose to unfollow it, which means they'll stop receiving updates about the Page.
- People can follow a Page, even if they haven't liked it.
- The name or the profile picture of the person who likes the Page may be shown on the Page or in ads about the Page.
- While Pages were designed to be the official profiles for entities, such as celebrities, brands or businesses, [Facebook Groups](#) are the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. Groups allow people to come together around a common cause, issue or activity to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content.

When you [create a group](#), you can decide whether to make it publicly available for anyone to join, require administrator approval for members to join or keep it private and by invitation only. As with Pages, new posts by a group are included in the News Feeds of its members and members can interact and share with one another from the group.”

AGS Facebook Presence

Why is this important to AGS?

1) We have a public Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/ABQGenSociety/>. The public AGS Facebook page is available for anyone on Facebook to see. We post meeting events, items of genealogical interest, and stream video of our meetings to our public page. Anyone on Facebook can see and respond to our posts.

2) We maintain a closed Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/abqgensociety/>. Our closed Facebook Group asks you join or be invited by someone in the group. It is set up so only group members can see what is posted or post to the AGS Facebook Group. No one outside the group who is not a member can see what is posted. The group has established Administrators/Moderators so suspicious or offensive posts can be taken down if necessary.

Think of it as our own AGS country club with private membership. We can also do the same things our public page does, just privately.

Other Facebook groups may or may not be as restrictive, but they do ask you join if you wish to post or ask a question. The benefit of joining is finding someone's help to a brick wall you just cannot get around. I will list the big four genealogy groups and some individual ones I belong to.



Major Genealogy Facebook Groups

The U.S. South Genealogy Research Community (over 6700 members)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/804695219582639/>

The U.S. Northeast Genealogy Research Community (over 4900 members)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/965066490187186/>

The U.S. Midwest Genealogy Research Community (over 5500 members)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MidwestGenealogyResearchCommunity/>

The U.S. West Genealogy Research Community (over 1600 members)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/277105002497049/>

These four represent what I think are some of the major genealogy groups. If you join, typically you are asked to tell a little about yourself and who you are researching. For the most part, if you need help, ask to join and post to one of these groups. Someone will take up your question and possibly find the information you desire. That person may reside in the community where your ancestor lived and be a local resource.

Another group I belong to is the Oklahoma Genealogy group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/163805605231/>. Similar to those four mentioned above, you will find interesting posts for people researching families who moved into the Oklahoma Indian Territory before and after statehood. Just about every state has a Facebook genealogy group of one kind or the other. With Facebook groups, you are offered research without ever having to

take a road trip or pay someone. There are specialty groups like the Military Genealogy Research and History: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/352245301547623/> if you have ancestors who served.

Ever hear of Dead Fred Photos? This genealogy photo archive site is on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/deadfredphotos/>. Scottish Genealogy has a page: <https://www.facebook.com/scottishgenealogypage/>. Cyndi's List is here: <https://www.facebook.com/CyndisList/>. Facebook can be a rich resource for you. If a genealogy web site exists, they probably have a Facebook presence because they know the value of social media.

Our Albuquerque Genealogical Society presence on Facebook is relatively new and we consider it still a work in progress. If you have something to contribute or a comment, come join us and let us know how we can improve. If you have a question for the Board, post it to our Facebook group. We'll get you an answer. If you have a brick wall specific to the New Mexico or Albuquerque area, post it on our group. We will find you the help or answer to your question. Social Media like Facebook can extend your genealogy research. Give it a chance. It's up to you.

Disclaimer

Given all the recent media attention on Facebook, it is still your choice if you think Facebook is a valuable tool for genealogy. Facebook is not going to disappear any time soon, it's just too big a company. I think there are ways to mitigate who sees your data and you should be aware of them if you use Facebook. If you have concerns, let us at AGS know so we can address them. SM