Genealogy With Computers

TMG, BK, FO and Other Computer Related Adventures
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When I first decided to put my "root's" into a computer file, I selected a genealogy program that had been installed on my computer several years earlier, Family Origins from Parson's Technology. Family Origins is (like most of the products sold by Parsons) fairly simple to learn and use. While it has adequate features it is not the leading genealogy program available. I bought the program in one of my "ancestor" moods primarily because I was a big fan of Parsons software. I installed it and promptly did not use it. In December of 1998 that all changed. It was at that time that a cousin, Jerry McMenis AAFA #0598 sent me information on the heritage of my grandmother, Catherine Isabel McMenis. In the list of names I now had was that of Nancy Ann "Polly" Orrick and David Alford. I ha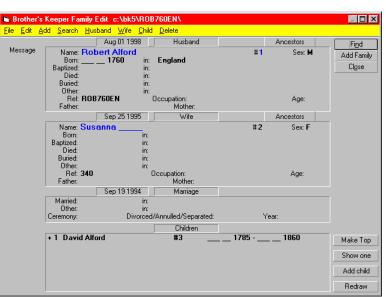d never heard these names before but in my search for answers was soon directed to AAFA. Gil and Don sent me information about my Robert (ROB760EN), I joined AAFA and was quickly immersed in the research of my Alford kinfolk.

During that journey I was offered the opportunity to maintain the Robert database for AAFA. Along with that privilege came a few requirements. One of those was that the original number assigned to each person as they were entered into the database (the so-called BK numbers) had to remain

the same. I had no idea what BK stood for but there was that requirement. It was a condition that could not be met by Family Origins. In communications with Gil I soon learned what BK meant. Another condition was that the Robert file officially went back only one generation for spouses of Robert descendants. So for my grandfather, George Newton Myers, the Robert file would only have information of his father and mother. Clearly I wanted information on his ancestors as far back as I could find them. This requirement turned out to be easily met but at the time it was a problem.

BK is the initials of another genealogy program named Brother's Keeper (BK). I found out that BK was shareware (a type of software where the author allows you to use the program without cost for a period of time after which you are expected to pay a fee if you continue to use it). I learned how to acquire BK, obtained it and installed it on my computer. I immediately didn't like it but figured I'd better get used to using it since that was the "official" program for the Robert database. The screens used to enter the data resembled MS DOS (a pre-windows operating system some of you may know about) screens, and the program in general just didn't "feel" like a Windows program. Remember I was used to Family Origins which was very much a Windows

Edit Screen for Brother s Keeper v. 5.2

program allowing mouse selection of information, pull down menus, copy and paste and most of the other functions expected of a Windows program. After working with BK for a few weeks and finding it inadequate to handle the large amounts of supporting documentation (bounty land grants, marriage license information, biographies, etc.) I had entered into the Family Origins version of the file I voiced my concern to Gil. He immediately replied that he was exploring the use of yet another genealogy program, The Master Genealogist (TMG). I did some research and found out this program was one of the highest rated genealogy programs on the market. It was a bit expensive but I decided it was worth the investment to check it out. TMG is not shareware. After some confusion with the supplier I received my copy of the program, installed it and began to learn how to use it. True to the advertising it was a powerful program. I now had control of those sacred "BK numbers". I could easily import the BK files into TMG. I could also import the Family Origins files into TMG. So now I had two files the official Robert file and my own which contained all the information from the Robert file.

After many weeks of working with TMG and adding new information and correcting the old in my file, I realized that to bring the official Robert file up to the same level as my file was a monumental task. So after some more communication with Gil I decided to make my file the official Robert file. Not an easy task since clearly everything in my file that was also in the BK file had to match. There were exceptions since some of the information in the BK file was no longer valid. But one thing that had to be the same was those pesky BK numbers. My file had always had different identification numbers (ID) for people than did the official file. There is a function in TMG that will allow you to change the ID for a person. Unfortunately, it will only allow you to change one person at a time. While the Robert file is fairly small it contained about 1200 names at that time the conversion of ID number to BK number for 1200 people would take more effort than updating the BK file to match my file. Neither solution was desirable.
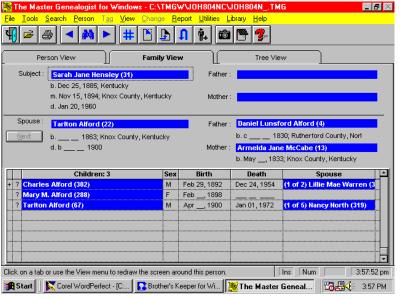
With some help from the technical support folks at TMG and more research into the functions of the product and the realization that much of the change I had made to the Robert file was to add new people, I undertook the conversion. The first thing I did was to instruct TMG to reassign ID numbers to everyone in my file starting at number 2000. The next

thing I did was to create a new TMG file and import the original Robert file into it. This action assigned the same ID number to people as their BK number. One major hurdle passed! Next I instructed TMG to take my file and add it to the end of the new TMG Robert file. Since my file started at ID number 2000 that left a few hundred unused numbers for growth of the Robert file. Now I had one file that contained all my family information and the complete Robert file. Unfortunately, I also had two copies of information on many people. The next step in the conversion was very tedious. I had to identify each set of duplicate names and perform a merge (combine selected parts from each duplicate to create one complete and updated record for the person). I no longer remember how many duplicates there were but there were many.

The conversion is now complete, and I have one file to maintain. Some may be asking the question Why would anyone want to undertake such a task as this? Why not just maintain two files? Both of those questions have merit, and I asked them of myself more than once. But the reality of the Robert line is that many of the people in the Robert file interconnect with my ancestors. I am not just referring to Alford but to Henderson, McMenis, Self, Davis and other family lines. The Robert file and my file both were being dramatically changed as I obtained new information about ancestors and corrections of other

The Master Genealogist - Family Edit Screen

information in the files. It would have been nearly impossible to keep the Robert file and my file equal in content. There is an adage in the computer industry if you have two copies of something they are both wrong. That would surely have been the case for these two files. Another motivation for this task was the desire by Gil to convert other BK files to TMG. My experience with the conversion and the program would be of help in deciding to make the switch or not. While I continue to use The Master Genealogist in favor of Family Origins or Brother's Keeper I have found many idiosyncrasies with TMG that make it less attractive than I first thought. But that is another story.

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