

Pennington Research Association



Pennington Research Association Research Committee Annual Report July 1999

Submitted by

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Introduction

"As genealogists we work in the present, studying the past to share in the future. How we do it today will be tested by our descendants tomorrow."¹

I want to start this report by expressing my respect, admiration and gratitude for our President, Ayvonne Roach. Without her encouragement, vision, concern, support, understanding and compassion, I would not have made it through this last year. She is truly a uniquely gifted person and one who has made tremendous contributions to the Pennington Research Association.

The Research Committee has been very busy. We reorganized with a new mission and with specific goals and objectives. We identified several major projects to work on this year and we have been almost 100 % successful in completing them.

We continued to work on perhaps the most significant project ever started by the PRA, the John French Master File (JFMF). This project was started by Ayvonne Roach and John French three or four years ago. Its stated purpose is to collect genealogical data from our members and other researchers to further the study of the Pennington surname.

Bobby Pennington has continued to work on a second major project which will have a significant impact on the ability of the PRA to find submitted genealogical data, reports and articles to help with our research. This project is the scanning and indexing of the Pennington Pedigrees and the Cousins' Courier.

While devoting major efforts to those two projects, the Research Committee has also established a presence on the Internet, established new standards for submitting queries, data and genealogical reports, identified several new Family Group Leaders, and established communication links with our members, the Board and Family Groups. We have distributed parts of the John French Master File (JFMF) to those Family Group Leaders who have Internet access and have identified a process by which information can be collected, approved and entered into the JFMF to ensure it is updated.

¹ Quote from John Vincent Wylie, Professional Genealogist in an article written in *Everton's Genealogical Helper*, July/August 1998, page 223.

This report reflects the abilities and qualities of the members of the Research Committee. Without their skills, tireless efforts, dedication and concern for the PRA, none of our successes would have been achieved.

I especially want to recognize the outstanding contributions made by the Assistant Research Directors this year. The PRA is indeed fortunate to have such an outstanding Team.

- Bobby Pennington -- Eastern Region and responsible for the Pennington Pedigrees and Courier indexing project.
- Jim Pennington -- Central Region and responsible for the John French Master File (JFMF) and publishing our books.
- Steve Privett -- Western Region and our web master and list master for the Pennington Surname mail list.
- Katherine Cochrane -- At Large and responsible for printed and electronic publishing.
- John Alan Pennington -- At Large and responsible for our Family Groups.

Projects

1. Web site -- (Includes Mailing Lists for Pennington Surname, PRA, PRA members only and for PRA new members.)
2. Groups -- (Recruitment of group leaders and assignment of specific tasks)
3. Books -- (Completion and publication of those books started by John French)
4. Indexing -- (Completion of indexing in Pennington Pedigrees and Cousin's Courier)
5. John French Master Database -- (How to use it and how to make it accessible to researchers in the Pennington Research Association)

These projects are listed by their priority. They were assigned these priorities based on my discussions with the Board, the Research Committee and what I thought must be completed in order to accomplish our primary goals and objectives.

Goals and Objectives

I am happy to report that we have been very successful in meeting our goals and objectives. Some will always be "open" because they are always in progress. A few are still being worked on at this time and we expect to soon complete them.

To collect, preserve, maintain and disseminate materials relating to the genealogical structure of the Pennington Family. To accomplish this goal, we will:

Objective No.	Description	Person Assigned	Due Date
1.1	Strive to be the most comprehensive source of accurate genealogical information, material and events concerning the Pennington Family.	Team	Open

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Objective No.	Description	Person Assigned	Due Date
1.2	Strive to become a clearinghouse of current genealogical material on Pennington family descendants, including, but not limited to births, deaths, marriages, achievements, and biographical materials.	Team	Open
1.3	Establish a set of standards for genealogical material submitted, retained and disseminated.	Gene	Done
1.4	Establish and maintain the highest possible ethics and sense of propriety while accomplishing our stated goals and objectives.	Team	Done
1.5	Establish and maintain a presence on the Internet using those technologies available to the Pennington Research Association.	Team	Done
1.6	Establish mailing lists for use by the Pennington Research Association for sharing genealogical information, membership information, help with genealogical research and general communications.	Gene	Done
1.7	Encourage and assist Pennington Research Association members in their research and promote the submission of research by members.	Team	Done
1.8	Establish a new member process to ensure they are greeted, informed of our services and help them identify, if possible, which Family Group they may belong with and to encourage them to submit their genealogical data.	Gene	Done
1.9	Establish methods to collect, process and disseminate Pennington genealogical data by utilizing the Family Groups, Research Committee and the Executive Board.	Gene	Done

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Objective No.	Description	Person Assigned	Due Date
1.10	Publish 3 books from JFMF	Jim	7/99
1.11	Complete scanning and indexing project for Pedigrees.	Bobby	2000
1.12	Complete scanning and indexing project for Courier.	Bobby	5/99

To maintain a program of genealogical research of the Pennington Family. To accomplish this goal, we will:

Objective No.	Description	Person Assigned	Due Date
2.1	Identify and prioritize research projects for the Pennington Research Association.	Gene	Done
2.2	Provide supervision and direction for Pennington Research Association family groups and their leaders.	Gene & John	Done
2.3	Establish job descriptions and duties for Family Group Leaders and Assistant Research Director responsible for Family Groups	Gene & John	Done

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Objective No.	Description	Person Assigned	Due Date
2.4	<p>Answer queries from Pennington Research Association members and other researchers about genealogical information. To meet this objective we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a set of standards for the submission of queries by researchers. b. Establish an organized method of handling queries regarding the genealogy of the Pennington Family. c. Establish a method of handling any genealogical misinformation about the Pennington Family, whether it is in printed or electronic form. d. Provide to the Editors of the Pennington Pedigrees and the Pennington Cousins' Courier all queries and accompanying answers to be published in the respective publications. 	<p>Gene</p> <p>Gene</p> <p>Gene</p> <p>Team</p>	<p>Done</p> <p>Done</p> <p>Done</p> <p>Done</p>

Process

With the support and approval of the Executive Board, a new Mission Statement, Goals & Objectives were adopted this year. Using them as our map, the Research Committee was reorganized early in the year to successfully accomplish its' mission and meet its' goals and objectives. We formed a Team with each member assigned specific responsibilities and tasks based on their own desires, skills and willingness to work. Each member is encouraged to share with each other their thoughts, plans and comments in order to maximize the team's efforts.

We established some basic work guidelines and then built our communications links. We learned very early that using Internet e-mail to share information was a very valuable tool. Not only were we able to quickly share information with each other, we were also able to distribute files and data making it possible for all of us to have access to the same material.

Next we set about to identify what we believed needed to be accomplished by the PRA and what the major issues were facing the Research Committee. Once this was completed, we started to work on our Plan. The Research Committee's Plan ended up being four parts with Part IV published on May 12, 1999.

Each part of the plan was reviewed by members of the Research Committee, Staff and Board members. Then the final version was published. These parts helped guide us through the many complicated issues as well as helped to establish policy and procedures.

Web Site

Perhaps the most noticeable project for the Research Committee this year has been the new web site. Thanks largely to Steve Privett, the new web site has proved to be a great success. This was a cooperative effort by the Board and the Assistant Research Directors. With the Mission Statement, Goals & Objectives established by the Board, a clear path was laid out for us. We want to be the standard for Family Association web sites. We want people to return time and again because the site meets their needs.

The web site is designed to be easy to use and to be informative. In addition, the Board determined early that the site must be of value to our members. The stated intent was to ensure our members received more value from the site than did a regular visitor. But at the same time, it was important to provide information to everybody about the PRA, our Mission, and our research work.

It was important to have the site organized in such a way that valuable and helpful information was easy to find and that a minimum number of links were needed to find the information. Likewise, we wanted to try a little "e-commerce" and offer our research materials and other items for sale.

The future of the web site is limited only by our imagination. We plan to open several other sections of the site including the members only area which will provide more value for our members.

We will explore new ways to provide on-line access to the information the PRA has such as the Family Groups, the Pedigree and Courier indexes and perhaps even the JFMF. Each of these data sources has tremendous value to our members and other researchers. We need to find a method to make the data available on-line so it can not only be read, but that it can be updated by authorized members of the PRA.

You will hear more about these possibilities in other parts of this report.

Mail Lists

From the beginning, I have always thought there were some advantages to have mail list/s working in conjunction with our new web site. I saw the list/s serving these functions:

1. Provide information for new members
2. General information distribution for announcements, etc.
3. An easy method for PRA members to communicate with each other (this list would be accessible ONLY to PRA members)
4. A discussion list for research

We knew the advantages and services provided by the Pennington Surname list. We also knew that we can't have one list do everything. However, we determined that we can have several, depending on how we wanted to structure them. So to take advantage of these capabilities and to help meet our goals, we started two new mail lists.

We continue to encourage researchers to use the Pennington Surname mail list. This list is used extensively and we continue to support it.

However, to avoid the copyright problems and to take advantage of the features and volume of specialized visitors at RootsWeb, we have created a new mailing list on RootsWeb called PRA-L@RootsWeb.Com.

This new list is used exclusively for the exchange of genealogical information and discussions on the Pennington Family and is operated by the Pennington Research Association. It is made very clear to the subscribers to this list that anything posted will be copied and used by the Pennington Research Association. The list will be set up to send copies of the messages to the Editors of the Pedigrees and the Courier as well as to the Research Director. We will also link this list to our web site.

In May 1999, we started the Pennington Research Association members only mail list through our web presence provider on the Internet, SOHOWeb Technologies. This list is managed by the Pennington Research Association (PRA) and is for use by PRA members only. This list is used exclusively for the benefit of members of the Pennington Research Association to exchange information and for discussions on the Pennington Family.

Members are told that as a subscriber to this list anything posted may/will be used and/or published by the PRA with credit given to the author. They are also told that the PRA will share any material they submit to this list with other researchers in our publications and on our web site. Also, that by posting on this list they agree to allow PRA to use and/or publish their information.

The members can use this mail list to exchange information with each other when they want to send/post something to ALL the PRA members currently subscribed to this list (please note that some members may not be subscribed).

If you think about it, members can post all sorts of information here. Things like general membership announcements, dues notices, minutes of meetings, treasurer reports, membership questions, family group questions, etc. The uses are only limited by our imagination and whatever policy and guidelines the Board wants to set.

I am hoping that as members become more comfortable with the technology and the mail list format they will use it more and more. This is especially true for the Executive Board. The lists provide an easy and instant method to communicate with our members.

We are exploring the possibility of starting another mail list for new members of the Pennington Research Association. This list will be moderated by Research Committee members and will be used to provide assistance and answer questions for new members. We can also use it to post information designed primarily for new members. There is no date set yet to open this new list. We are monitoring the members only list to help assess the need for the new members list.

Family Groups

We started work on our Family Groups late last year and have made great strides thanks to an outstanding group of volunteer Family Group Leaders and to our newest Assistant Research Director, John Alan Pennington. John is responsible for the supervision and direction for Pennington Research Association family groups and their leaders.

John could not be here for our Executive Board meeting but we have prepared some material for the Board to approve. It is attached to this report.

Family Group Methodology & Call for Papers

One of the biggest challenges the Research Committee has faced is how to collect, store and disseminate genealogical information and to ensure the information is as comprehensive and accurate as possible (the use of the word accurate is disputed by some of our members - we are searching for a better word).

To address this challenge, we have developed three different strategies.

1. We have published standards for queries and contributing articles and data to the Pennington Research Association.
2. We have issued a Call for Papers to encourage researchers to present their research to the Pennington Research Association at our annual meeting and to be published by the Pennington Research Association. Unfortunately, our first year's attempt has not met with any success. While several members told me they intended to present papers, none have materialized. I believe this is still a good idea and we will try it again next year, modified as needed to help make it successful.
3. We have proposed a process utilizing the Family Groups which will help the Pennington Research Association publish "official" genealogical data to be used by our members and other researchers. This proposal will be presented to the Board as a separate agenda item. The process is described below as well. While awaiting the Board's approval, we have been using the process as guidelines.

How do these strategies work together? Good question. First, we needed to develop some standards for the many queries submitted to

us each year and for the genealogical data sent to us each year. This will help with the collection, dissemination and the research work by the Family Groups.

Second, now we have two documented and valid methods to bring research and recommendation/s to the attention of the membership. One method may cause a change to one or more of the "official" Family Groups. A person may use either method or both. The methods are:

1. Call for Papers. This method adds some formality to the research, gives recognition for the author and will result in the paper being published in our publications and the data entered into the John French Master File. A person who wishes to submit a paper may or may not appear in person at the annual meeting to make a personal presentation. They may ask someone else to make their presentation for them.
2. Family Group Annual Review. This process can result in changes to the Family Groups. The group reviews any available research as part of their group review report (each group is asked to submit a yearly report). Part of this review process can include a review of any research paper submitted to the PRA for presentation to the membership. The group (via the Family Group Leader) then makes their recommendation for any updates, changes, etc. to the Assistant Research Director. He then sends it along with any other Family Group reports to the Research Committee with a recommendation. The Research Committee then reviews the reports and approves the recommendation/s. The approved report is then sent to be entered into the JFMF or to the Board (if required) for their review prior to the annual meeting. This gives some lead time for the Board members to study the report and recommendations and to clarify anything they believe needs to be clarified. The hope here is to minimize discussion time at the Board meeting and get right to the question. If questions and/or issues come up at this time, a decision can be made as how best to proceed. There could be several options such as return the report to the Family Group for more work or invite the Family Group leader and/or members of the group to the meeting to make their own presentation. At the annual meeting, the report is presented to the Board in the Executive Board meeting by the Assistant Research Director or the Research Director. This will/could result in a change in the formal structure of the Family Groups, publication of the Family Group report with the research and recommendation as well as the new data entered into the John

French Master File. Upon approval, the Family Group will now receive the "official" approval of the Board and be recognized as such. The report and documentation will be retained and stored according to Board policy (published in the Pennington Pedigrees, the Courier, the web and perhaps on CDs and the originals eventually placed in an official PRA library).

JFMF

The John French Master File (JFMF) continues to pose a number of major hurdles for the Research Committee. Of all the projects undertaken by our Research Committee, this one has the potential to be of the most value to our members and researchers.

Jim Pennington will present his material to you at this time. His report will be included as part of this report.

Once the information has been approved by the Executive Board, it will receive the official seal of approval and carry that prestige with it forever. This will establish a standard of excellence which will help genealogy researchers in their search for the most reliable source of information about the Pennington family.

Electronic Publication

Once the data in the JFMF has been updated following the annual meeting, it is now ready for publication. In order to make this valuable information available in a searchable format, as well as easily distributed, we propose to publish it electronically on CDs. These small plastic disks are inexpensive to purchase and to process but yet they can hold millions and millions of pieces of information and images.

The Research Committee proposes that we publish each Family Group AND the Pedigree Indexes AND the Courier Indexes on a single CD. We believe this can be done for a very reasonable cost and will generate some income to offset the expense incurred the first year. These publications will occur initially once a year following the Board meeting but as we become more experienced in the process, we may increase the publication frequency.

The initial expenses are estimated to be between \$1,500 and \$3,000. This includes the software needed to convert the data into a format readable by any computer, the purchase of a device to write the data to a CD and the production cost for 200 to 500 CDs.

We will ask Jim Pennington to handle the publication of the data. We will purchase software and hardware which will be connected and installed on his personal computer.

We can distribute several of the CDs at no cost to the Family Group Leaders, the Board and to other Staff as authorized by the President. The rest of the CDs can be sold at a reasonable price ranging from \$10 to \$15 depending on how much income the Board wants to generate. For example, selling 100 CDs at \$10 each will generate \$1,000. Selling 200 CDs at \$15 each will generate \$3,000.

Katherine Cochrane could not make the Executive Board meeting but will be here later to make a presentation to all our members about electronic publication. She has agreed to assist as needed with this project and to lend her skills and knowledge in electronic publication to this effort.

It is my recommendation the Board approves the publication of the JFMF, the Pedigree and Courier Indexes on CDs with an initial budget set at a maximum of \$3,000.

It is my recommendation the Board approves the release of the new CDs (at no cost) to the Family Group Leaders, the Board, and authorized Staff approved by the President.

Future

The future of the Pennington Research Association is certainly very bright and full of challenges. Would we really want it any other way? Of course not. What makes this exciting is our new found use of the Internet by so many of our members and how we are constantly finding new ways to use the technology.

We cannot forget that while many of our members can use the Internet, many do not have this capability. We have a responsibility to continue to publish our material in printed format so that libraries, research facilities and all of us can continue to enjoy the information and fellowship offered by the Pennington Research Association. Using the new technologies should enhance and improve our service, not detract from it.

If approved by the Board, we will publish much of our data on CD-ROM for the first time. We will furnish this to members of the Research Committee and other members approved by the Board to help them with their jobs as a volunteer for the PRA. If approved by the Board, the CDs will be sold to help offset the cost of producing the product and to raise funds to assist with work.

If approved by the Board, we will explore new ways of making our information available on-line through the Internet. This poses a number of significant challenges. Security of the data, the ability to make it available to members only, the cost to provide this service and how to make it available for updating by Family Group Leaders. All of these challenges, and others yet to be identified, need to be carefully examined.

Most of our work next year will be determined by the new 5 year strategic plan the Board will review and approve this year. It will be our new map to the future.

All in all, things are looking great! Let's do it!