

## My Favorite Genealogy Software Program

by Lorraine Frantz Edwards\*

No doubt about it, my software program is the best! You should be aware, though, at the outset that I love my genealogy software program and given some time (and space), I'll brag about it all day.

Let's talk about price first. I'm a "poor girl" and the price tag is the first thing I look at when shopping (for anything and everything)! My software, called **Family History System**, is free! Send two floppy diskettes and sufficient postage, and I'll make a copy of the basic program for you.

**Family History System (FHS)** is distributed as a "freeware" through public domain and "shareware" libraries. It was created by a programmer/genealogist who apparently did not want the hassle of marketing the program. For \$35 one can become a registered owner and receive extended features and periodic updates.

With my purchase of an IBM computer in 1986 came the desire for genealogy software. I wrote to a dozen or more companies for literature (having seen their ads in the computer section of *Genealogical Helper*). I studied their propaganda and in some cases tried their "demo" disk. Prices ranged from \$50-\$300. The \$50 program would not meet my long-range needs and the \$300 program was a financial impossibility!

The "librarian" at our local IBM club gave me two public domain programs. One was "too simple"; the other was **FHS**. It was love at first sight! (And, remember, the price was right).

Since this was a public domain/shareware program, the manual is on the diskette. The first thing to do is print the instructions (manual) with your printer (approx. 50 pages). Every step of the program is "menu driven" but the new user is often forced to study the manual for (well-written) instructions. After a while it becomes routine and you don't need the book.

From the outset, I was amazed at the thoroughness of **FHS**. The programmer had thought of everything. If you are a beginner

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or just want to organize your "tree", the basic program will meet your needs. I plan to publish my family history so I am interested in the extended options (available to registered owners).

The range of options are greater for printing ancestor, descendant, and relative reports with the extended program. Additionally, one can "search" for specific persons, dates, states, etc. There is also an "export/import" utility that allows you to do just that: export some of your family history to a separate diskette to share with another researcher or, conversely, import into your file information from another researcher who has **GEDCOM** capabilities. (They don't have to own the same software.)

With **FHS**, I can create indexes, birthday lists, address files, do soundex search and numerous other things. It's mind boggling how many features there are.

In one and one-half years, I "outgrew" the capacity on my floppy diskettes. (I had over 3000 names on two separate files.) I recently purchased a 31 meg hard drive, installed **FHS**, and merged all my records. I learned for the first time about export/import and began to utilize some features never attempted before.

Finally, there is a feature in **FHS** that is extremely valuable and may be unique in software programs. The "validation system" can be initiated when/if you run into some problems and weird little characters start appearing on your screen. Somehow, while this feature is operating, "bugs", etc. are exterminated and one can return to their normal use of the program. Who ever heard of a program that doctors itself? Honestly, I panicked when the first green "bugs" appeared (on my monochrome monitor) but I've learned to rely on the validation programs.

Further, I have access to the creator of **FHS**. Yes, when (in my novice) I ran into (or created) a problem, I wrote to the programmer and he answered by return mail. At least twice, he modified **FHS** to meet my specific printer needs. You, too, can have this genealogy program and this resource person. Write Phillip Brown, 834 Bahama Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

In closing, let me suggest that you try **FHS** (if you have an IBM or "compatible"). Later you can export your data into another program if you're not satisfied. A few months ago I bought one of those terribly expensive programs because I thought it had some features I needed (for my book).

After several days of aggravation, I returned the program and received a refund. That expensive program did not live up to the advertisement and was more difficult to



Lorraine Frantz Edwards at her computer

use than **FHS**. I now understand why some researchers have abandoned their genealogy software for simple word processing.

As I said in the first paragraph, I love my genealogy program! I really don't receive a penny for my endorsement! I just want to share **Family History System**.

### COMMENT...

How does one select the best genealogy software program? If you are currently asking this question, then you must read this.

There are two primary methods of purchasing software today. The most common method is commercially written software distributed through computer stores and/or mail order.

The second method which is unknown to most people, especially new computer users, is called "freeware" or "shareware". Most software distributed through this latter method is written by computer users who have developed a program for one of their specialized needs. They are then willing to share their software "non-copy-protected" usually free of charge with a small licensing fee which gives the user future updates.

The advantages of "shareware" are that it is low cost, and it is often a great way to learn about software applications and specific software requirements.

The disadvantages are that programs distributed through shareware are sometimes not thoroughly tested and documentation can be meager and difficult to understand.

However, here in this article, one *MFH* reader is convinced that she has found a fabulous software program distributed through "shareware". Great!

-Ronald Zook, Computer Consultant