

Announcing New LONG PLACE NAME Feature in FHS

Recent changes to the Family History System now make it possible to begin using "Long Place Names" for Birth/Marriage/Divorce/Death and Event place names. Previously these data items have been limited to 22 characters. Now, when "Long Place Name Support" has been established for a family file, these items can be up to 41 characters long. This has been accomplished by a simple extension to the existing FHS Family File definition so you don't have to perform a major conversion to begin using the new feature. However, family files which include Long Place Names may produce undesirable results when used with versions of FHS prior to August 1998.

Place Names "Before"

Before describing how the new feature has been implemented, recall how place names were represented in an FHS family file before these changes were made. For Birth/Death (or Marriage/Divorce) place names, a single 50 character record was used to store *both* place names if *either* of the names in the pair of names was not blank. If both names were blank, no space was required in the file for storing the blank names. For Event records, the 22 character place name was part of the Event record itself (actually, there was room in the Event record for a 23 character name, but it was kept to 22 characters to conform to the previous limit).

Place Names "Now"

Now a new "Long Place Name" record has been added to the FHS family file definition. These records are stored in the .OTH dataset (the same dataset in which the older place name record was stored, as well as marriage records, comments, etc.) Each "Long Place Name" record contains a single place name field. System maintained information takes up 9 characters in the record leaving 41 characters for the place name. If *either* place name in a pair of names (Birth/Death or Marriage/Divorce) is more than 22 characters long, then a Long Place Name record will be used to store *each* of the (non blank) place names in the pair. If both place names are less than 23 characters (and at least one is non-blank) then the place name(s) will be stored in the older format place name record as before.

For Event records, if the place name exceeds 22 characters, the truncated name will be stored in the Event record, but a new Long Place Name record will also be created for the full (up to 41 character) name.

Incompatibilities with Earlier versions of FHS

Unfortunately, there was not room in the Name record to allow separate "pointers" for the old and new format place name records, so the former place name pointer field can now point to *either* an *old* or a *new* format place name record. That is what causes problems for versions of FHS prior to August 1998, when support for the Long Place Names was introduced. As a result, if you intend to use a family file with earlier versions of FHS, then you should not introduce "Long Place Names" into the file.

New Family File Version Number

To allow for the selective introduction of Long Place Name support into family files, those which are to permit the use of Long Place Names are given a "Version Number" of "1" in the header record for the Name Dataset. Previously, this version number was "0" and family files which have a version number of "0" will continue to be treated just as before. You can now request to have Long Place Name support included at the time you INITIALize a new family file. To include Long Place Name support in an existing family file, I've added a new "conversion" option to the GEDCOM program, Main Menu selection F3-D-1. Previously the F7 option of that program was used to perform a conversion of the Address file from Short to Long format address records. Now when you select the F7 option in the GEDCOM program, you are given a choice of either converting the Address file, or of "converting" the Name file for Long Place Names. In the latter case, this just amounts to changing the version number in the header record of the .NAM dataset.

The file update program shows the "version number" for each of the family file datasets so you can determine whether a family file that you are working with supports Long Place Names (or if it supports Long format address records) just by viewing the family file description in that program.

Changes to Reports and Charts

As you might expect, the longer place names will affect the appearance of some reports and charts. There is no problem with the "free format" styles of reports because they will just "wrap" the long names to a new line. However the "fixed format" reports present a problem. For the columnar style of report, I've added a new report option: "Place Name Column Width", which allows you to choose the size column that is appropriate for your information. Wider columns will of course require a wider "forms width".....The "Fixed Format" Group report had room for longer Birth/Marriage/Death place names than the previous 22 character limit, but not enough for the 41 character names that are now possible. I've changed the program to use the maximum amount of space that is available within the existing report format. For Children, the limit on place name fields remains 22 characters. The lines for Events allow the full 41 character place name field....Among the charts, the Ancestor Map can handle the full long place name, the standard 4/5 generation charts are limited to the space that is available within the chart lines; the box charts are limited by the box width which you establish by a chart option.

I hope that you find the new Long Place Name support a welcome addition to the Family History System. Please let me know if you have any problems or suggestions concerning it.