rootstech
by FamilySearch

Fixing Sticky Problems in FamilySearch Family Tree

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What Are Sticky Problems?

For purposes of this class, sticky problems are *not:*

- A date that's off by a year or two.
- A spelling error/variation.
- A non-standard date or placename.

While these errors should be addressed, they are typically simple to fix.

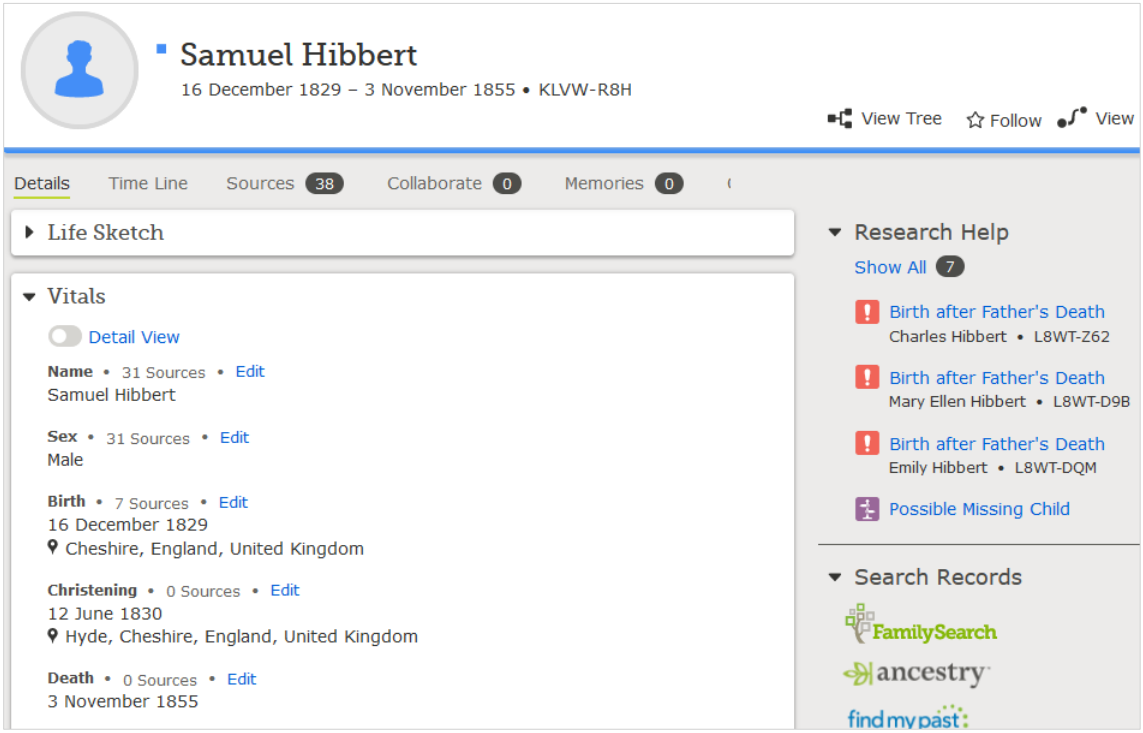
The kinds of sticky problems we talk about in this class are:

- Improbable, impossible, or conflicting dates and places.
- Incorrect relationships (wrong parents/spouses).
- Bad merges.

Before You Start to Fix a Sticky Problem

Diagnose the Problem Correctly

In order to fix a sticky problem, it's important to diagnose it correctly. Otherwise, it's easy to fix the wrong "problem" and inadvertently make things worse. Here's an example.



You can see on the screenshot above that Samuel Hibbert has errors in the **Research Help** section due to children being born after his death. One user concluded, rightly, that a man wouldn't have children after his death. However, this user then assumed that the death date must be wrong because of the children.

However, looking in the change log revealed that the children had been connected to Samuel through a series of bad merges, and they weren't his! So the solution was was not to remove the death date, but to repair the incorrect merges and put the children in the right families.

Understand Intended Identity

When a user creates a profile in Family Tree, they intend the profile to represent a specific human being. This is the "intended identity." In a personal tree, intended identity is usually stable and doesn't change. However, in a shared tree, the identity of a profile can change through bad merges, incorrect relationships, and wrong sources.

When we fix a sticky problem in Family Tree, our goal is to restore the profile to its original intended identity.

For more information on intended identity, see this webinar:
Understanding Intended Identity: The Key to Fixing and Avoiding Problems in Family Tree

The Fixing Process

The process of fixing a sticky problem in Family Tree consists of three steps:

1. Fix incorrect merges.
2. Fix incorrect relationships
3. Fix incorrect information and sources

The steps should be done in this order to avoid further mistakes and duplicate effort.

To see a demo of this process, please refer to the recording of this RootsTech class (available in the RootsTech Video Library).

Success Tips for Fixing Sticky Problems

1. **Prioritize**. You may not be able to fix every problem you find, and that's okay! Consider your situation and decide how best to spend your time.

2. **Be methodical**. Follow a process and write things down. You may find it helpful to use one of the merge analysis templates on this page. Be wary of going down "rabbit holes." Instead of allowing yourself to be distracted from the task at hand, make a note of things you need to address later.

3. **Be part of the solution**.
    a. Don't assume.

b. Use what you know to discover what you don't know.
c. Don't merge unless you're sure two profiles represent the same person.
d. Do your best to add accurate and complete information to Family Tree.
    i. Avoid adding fragments (little disconnected "twigs" with only a few people)—they lend themselves to bad merges and incorrect relationships.
    ii. Don't create a Family Tree person based only on one source unless there really is only one source for the person (which rarely happens). The chance of error is too high.

Untangling a sticky problem may seem daunting at first. But as you build your skills, it gets easier!

The slide deck used for this presentation is available here. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact the presenter at kathryngz@gmail.com.

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