Overcoming Your Fear of Genealogists
Maryland Library Association Pre-Conference
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Informal Deconstructed Agenda with Bullet Points
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1. Why care about genealogists?
   - Growth of genealogy as a hobby (especially over the last 50 years);
   - Role of LDS Church in advancing genealogy scholarship and access to materials;
   - Other influencing factors in the community: Civil War Centennial – The Bicentennial – Roots – Who Do You Think You Are - Civil War Sesquicentennial;
   - Intellectual exercise;
   - Use of genealogy in therapy, counseling, for family medical histories;
   - Technology has allowed people to do their genealogy earlier (pre-retirement) and, therefore, longer, no longer always dependent on traveling to faraway places to get to all record types, but they still do that and still need to do that, but can get started at 3am in the basement;
   - Romantization of the family;
   - Genealogy is the future of reference!

2. Why are they different?
   - Lifelong researchers;
   - They don’t go away;
   - Everywhere and everyone, let go of those stereotypes;
   - Talk a lot, know a lot, need a lot, and perhaps have heightened expectations, but don’t underestimate what YOU know about your community, your sources, and your research expertise; They got the family but you got the skills, Don’t forget you are a LIBARIAN!!
   - They can get very emotional;
   - They are a group of researchers perfectly happy with a referral, who come looking for a referral, and don’t think a referral is just our way of getting rid of them;
   - They really just want to share what they know, they don’t mean to be scary, they are excited to be there ;
   - Can stay for a long time – all day, day after day, for years;
   - They travel to come see you – are you a destination library? Do you wanna be?
   - They are donors, volunteers, supporters. You will find no group of researchers so ready to help. They will go to the mat for you. Because of all of that, it don’t hurt to make nice with your local genealogical society.
3. What to tell them when they are just starting out:

The Four Step Methodology

1) Write down everything you think you know (journal it, “write it out”, don’t type). Then chart it! For librarian self defense have a nice pedigree chart ready, like the one from FamilySearch; *** We often don’t know as much about our families as we think, even close and happy families. ***

2) Talk to any and all relatives, write down what they tell you, and don’t worry about whether or not it is true or false;

*** Often families with nothing to hide don’t want to talk, don’t understand, don’t care. ***

3) Go through family documents and artifacts to compare what you find with what you think you know and what people have been telling you.

4) Pursue public documents to validate what you think you know, start with Census and Vital Records.

*** Be ready to spend 30-40 years proving or disproving what you think you know, what people tell you. Very addictive, mental crack for many. ***

4. Record types to start with (keep in mind that while there is a trail we suggest they follow, but if can’t always follow it, that is ok, too.)

A. Population Census

- Why important: puts people in time and place, puts them together in groups, usually family groups, contains other clues, and it is national in scope. There are few national tools in the US.
- For beginning genealogists, it is also a way to usually give them quick access to something. Immediate gratification!
- If you don’t do your census work as early as you can you are doing sloppy genealogy!! And wasting your own time.
- Don’t forget there are still some very good published census indexes and transcriptions.
- And, yes, you may have to search several products, including books, to find the folks you seek.
- Don’t forget the “problem” of the intermediaries in census research.
- Remember why 1850 and 1890 are important census years.
- Most common electronic access tools for census

HeritageQuest
Ancestry.com or AncestryLibraryEdition
FamilySearch

*** Be aware of how HQ differs from Ancestry in regards to the Census and how ALE differs from Ancestry.com. ***

B. Vital records – birth, marriage, death

- The golden rules of location, location, location;
- Surrogates for those records not kept by a governmental entity:
  - Surrogates for birth certificates – infant baptism or christening.
  - Surrogates for death certificate – find them in the ground, obits, wills and other sources in the probate process. Records of church, funeral home, cemetery.
  - Family bible – few and far between, if you got one, compare date of publication to date of events recorded, and is the handwriting all the same. In other words, where these events recorded as they happened or all recorded 50 years later by people who think they know and thought they remembered.
- Social Security Death Index
  - Must be dead,
  - Must have had a SSNumber,
  - Applied and received a benefit,
    - In 2010 millions of people work legally outside the SS system,
  - Death has to have been reported.

5. Genealogy golden rules:

- Location, location, location.
- Whol what institution cared about this life event, who would have tracked it, documented it;
- Believe everything everyone tells you, don’t believe anything anyone tells you;
- Look for three sources with the same information, keep in mind you may never find three;
- Keep in mind that not all primary sources are correct.
- Understand “Information Retention Hierarchy” (Curt Witcher). Where to look, usually, for published materials, governmental records, and unpublished materials.

6. Genealogy Reference Interview:

- What exact piece of information are they looking for today.
- Librarian role: what is the most practical way to find it.
We help by assisting them in figuring out what records will yield the information they are looking for, where to find it, how to use it, how to analyze it, and how to preserve their findings.

7. Probing questions and answers:

- What is already known about the person, the event?
- What is needed?
- Select the record type to search.
- Track down where it might be.
- Obtain the record.
- Evaluate it
  - Primary source vs. second source;
  - Primary information or secondary information;
  - Original or derivative (index versus abstract versus transcription);
  - Direct or indirect proof.
- Start all over again, new person, new event.

8. Dave Dowell’s “10 Rules for Successful Genealogical Research” as interpreted by Mary. (Check accompanying bibliography for name of Dave’s book).
   1. Start with what you know, go backwards, step by step.
   2. Interview.
   3. Record where you found something and who told you.
   4. Believe everything, believe nothing. (Didn’t I tell you that, now do you believe me?) Look for primary sources. Collect multiple sources. Evaluate those sources.
   5. Organize your data as you go, chart it out.
   6. Focus on one ancestor and go back as far as possible.
   7. Plan your search strategies and plan your research trips.
   8. Look for records where they could have been recorded when created.
   9. Don’t forget the women.
   10. When stuck widen the net.

*** Mary says – Sometimes you gotta sometimes go sideways to get backwards. ***

9. Again what we librarians do:

- We don’t have to know about their family, we have to know:
  - Where they should look for particular information and sources,
  - Advise them on how to access the stuff,
  - Help them to analyze what they find.

10. Any library can be a genealogy library; what you need to know:

- Tell them how to get started
- Advise them on where they should look, even if you don’t have the records
Help them with genealogy products you might have or that are available to all – like FamilySearch
Guide them in interlibrary loan.

11. Secrets of Interlibrary Loan for Genealogy Materials

Help them to get sources, keeping in mind that most collections that have genealogy don’t circulate them, we are destination libraries!! and, therefore, need are materials close to us, or no one will come visit, and also our stuff is “rare”.

A. Electronic First:
   a. HeritageQuest Full Text books;
   b. Googlebooks;
   c. Family History Books http://books.familysearch.org/

B. Places that will circulate:
   a. National Genealogical Society Collection, St. Louis County Public,
   b. From the Heartland Books -- Midwest Genealogy Center’s Circulating Collection,
   c. Academic libraries.

12. Other databases in HeritageQuest

13. Adoption researchers: See Key points from: “Adoption Searcher’s Information Seeking in Libraries” attached.

14. A couple of websites to be aware of:

    Cyndislist.com: Metasite! Have no idea where to turn, start here.
    FamilySearch.org: LDS

15. Other subscription databases to be aware of:

    Fold3
    GenealogyBank

16. Handout explanations:

    Davis, Janet. *House Research Basic Tips*. Handout. [Frederick, MD: Maryland Room, CBA, FCPL, 2011?]. House researchers need to use genealogy; many genealogists search for dwelling information. This sample handout explains the methodology for doing such research in Frederick County. Use this as a base for researching in your own county. Websites for Maryland folks to be aware of: *Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation, Real Property Data Search*

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FamilySearch. How Do I Start My Family History? Leaflet. Intellectual Reserve, Inc.: [Salt Lake City, UT], 2011. Sample pedigree chart. Remind about date format -- day month year (all four numbers!!), name format -- women’s maiden name, place format – name at time of event, county at time of event, county at time of event. Always start with self (or person being researched) and go backwards. Charts ancestors of that one particular person. Mary’s contact at FamilySearch for her fix of charts: Michael Provard ProvardMR@familysearch.org

House, Gil. Genealogical Points of Interest – Frederick Co. MD. Handout. Frederick, MD:s.p., 2013. Sample of very useful publication used for many years in Frederick.


Overcoming Your Fear of Genealogists Bibliography


http://www.genealogyguys.com/


Key points from: “Adoption Searcher’s Information Seeking in Libraries”

ALA/CLA Annual Conference, 2003, Toronto

Edited for MLA 2013 Meeting

1. The movies Finding Nemo and The Hulk both have parent themes. Professionals in the field believe that these movies will result in an increase in adoption seekers. “Those adults crying through Nemo will be coming into your libraries.” (Relevant at the time of ALA conference, point being…national events and popular culture can influence seekers to begin their search, be aware.)

2. Many adoption searchers do not reveal their query, not ever!

3. Many adoption searchers are fearful that librarians/archivists will be judgmental.

4. When assisting adoption researchers also refer them to a general work, as well as to a search and support group. AmericanCongress.org is useful for locating support groups. Adoption searchers need to prepare themselves emotionally, not just intellectually, for their quest.

5. The relationship between the birth family, the adoption family, and the adoptee is called the triad.

6. In 1972 the laws relating to birth fathers changed, therefore, it is far from unusual for birth fathers on pre-1972 birth certificates to be purposely wrong. (Unsure about details of this??)

7. November is adoption month.

Recommended reading:


Chelton, Mary K. “Making the Most of Libraries When Searching,” American Adoption Congress Decree. 19 (Summer 2002): 1, 7-8.


Also of interest:

The work of Elizabeth J. Samuels, Associate Professor of Law, University of Baltimore. Samuels has written on the history of the closing of birth records. Her web page, which lists her publications and in some cases links directly to them, is http://law.ubalt.edu/faculty/profiles/samuels.cfm. See also How Adoption in America Grew Secret - birth records weren't closed for the reasons you might think at http://www.exiledmothers.com/adoption_facts/how_adoption_grew_secret.html. Samuels presented at the 2004 Maryland Library Association Conference in the session entitled “Locating Lost People, Past and Present”. Samuels is very friendly and open to inquiries, she begin her research because her sister is a birth mother.