

Tools & Trends in Genealogy: Something for Everyone— Genealogical Reference Service in the 21st Century

Curt B. Witcher, MLS, FUGA, IGSF

Senior Manager of Special Collections & The Genealogy Center, Allen County Public Library
900 Library Plaza, Ft. Wayne, IN 46802 | Genealogy@ACPL.info | 260-421-1226 | www.GenealogyCenter.org

The Very Best of Times...

<https://www.slideshare.net/ancestry/global-family-history-report>

- Environmental scans...
- More people are engaged...
- More technology is being deployed in more diverse ways...
- More sites on the Internet...
- More images...of all kinds of *stuff*...
- More collaborative initiatives...
- More people can play...

Who ARE these people?!

- Everyone from every walk of life...
- Everyone has a story...
- Commit to servicing these patrons...
- Understand that this pursuit is important to them...

We can serve them—all of them!

- Simply applying good reference techniques will turn any library—every library—into an outstanding genealogical resource center.
- Change of roles...
- Successfully engaging genealogists means changing our roles—teach vs. provide.
- When our approach to the reference interview is different, our comfort level is greater, and we will provide better answers.

Dealing with the person...

- Genealogists typically communicate best through stories.
- This can be antithetical to a standard reference transaction.
- All kinds of good ways to gently communicate to them, "*Just the facts!*"

Building Our Collections--Alexandria in Our Midst

- **FamilySearch**
- FamilySearch Wiki
- WeRelate.org
- FamilySearch Books
- Internet Archive
- Other...
- Google Books

Information Retention Hierarchy/Scheme

Libraries

- Local Public Libraries
 - Collect & preserve published local & family history of the specific area.
 - Can serve as repository for primary source, non-published materials.
 - Collect & make accessible very detailed data about the people, businesses & organizations in the particular community.
 - Increasingly robust web sites and increasing number of digital assets and “Memory” projects
- State Libraries
 - The state’s “public” library
 - Focus on published materials
 - Searchable genealogy and local history files
 - May contain meaningful Mss. collections
 - Growing number of online indices, guides, & digital collections

- National Libraries
 - Special interests focused on geography, ethnicity, subject of interest, & trade/occupation

Archives

- Local Archives
 - Collect manuscripts and artifacts
 - Business and organizational records
 - Photographs
- State Archives Websites
 - Collect unpublished, manuscript materials—typically state governmental records, but not necessarily exclusively
 - Online guides, calendars, & other research guides
 - Growing digital collections
 - Repositories for county archival materials
- National Archives
 - Online Catalog
 - Digital Collections & links to such collections
 - Chronicling America
 - Veterans History Project

Historical Societies

- Local Societies
 - Unique manuscripts, company records, & daybooks, etc.
 - Unique artifacts from local people and interests
 - Photographs
- State Historical Societies
 - Keepers of manuscripts & photos.
 - Often have research libraries, online catalogs, & online digital collections including “Memory” projects.
 - Offer preservation & conservation expertise.
 - Coordinate special programs, e.g. centennial farms, pioneer homesteads, veteran’s histories, etc.
- National Historical Societies
 - Like national libraries, have special interests focused on geography, ethnicity, occupation, etc.

Extraordinary Extras

- USGenWeb/WorldGenWeb
 - Network indexing, abstracting, transcribing, and digitizing local records & documents.
 - Consistency and comprehensiveness continue to be minor issues, though improving over time.
- Cyndi’s List
- Linkpendium

Wrap-Up

- Recall how historical data is archived.
- Focus the reference interview & conversation.
- Collect near; link widely.
- Nothing we can’t answer.
- Instruction is good.
- Collect local—link global.
- Index & digitize items of special local interest.
- Link to area, regional, & national data.