



Heritage Newsletter

California African American Genealogical Society

Genealogy 101: The Librarians' View

by Alice Kane

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending this year's annual conference of the Massachusetts Library Association as a panelist for its Genealogy 101 discussion session. The goal of the session is to inform public librarians about how the staffs of genealogically-oriented libraries and organizations work with patrons to answer their reference questions. Assisting patrons with genealogical questions is increasingly frequent for public librarians, given the popularity of prime time shows such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Finding Your Roots*. My fellow panelists were Joy Hennig, Worcester Public Library; Susan Aprill, Kingston Public Library; Barbara Burg, Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston; and Marie Lamoureux, American Antiquarian Society in Worcester.

Overall, public libraries are terrific resources for local information and collections, and it was great to see so many librarians interested in meeting the needs of family historians! Our discussion touched briefly on typical questions ("I'm looking for the parents of..." or "I know where they were, but not where they died"), and then turned to patron interactions and directing patrons to resources. We had panel consensus that patron interactions require active listening to determine research experience and the problem to be solved, and sometimes resource education may be needed along with resource recommendations.

Investigations on behalf of and reporting research results to patrons may in some instances require compassion and sensitivity, such as when a family story is discovered via the library's records to be very different from the details passed down to the patron. Directing patrons to other repositories is an efficient way for

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California African American Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 8442
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General Membership Meetings

Third Saturday monthly at 11:45am (dark July and August)

Mayme Clayton Library and Museum (MCLM)

4130 Overland Ave., Culver City, CA 90230-3734
(Old Culver City Courthouse across from VA building)

2014 Board of Directors

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connecting them to resources unavailable at the given public library (and likely beyond its collecting scope). Finally, encouragement of the patron's research goals (at the most basic level, to discover and fully tell the story of his or her family) is as important as answering the reference question at hand.

Ultimately, it is the researcher who begins the genealogical journey, as pointed out by co-panelist Joy Hennig during our session. Most family history projects start at home with information compiled from personal knowledge, and later through interviews and review of available personal documents and family heirlooms. All library staff, knowledgeable about their collections and local resources, help and guide researchers to the details and full stories of their ancestors' lives potentially waiting on the library's shelves and through access to digital collections. Hurrah and thank you! to librarians everywhere!

Taken from Vita Brevis - A resource for family history from AmericanAncestors.org

2015 Calendar of Events

On going

CAAGS Writers Group, Fourth Friday monthly 10-12
Check our website for meeting details, www.caags.org

June 20

CAAGS Board meeting, 10 am - 11:30 am
Beginner/Intermediate Classes, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm
Intermediate Class - Planning a Research Trip
General membership meeting/Guest Speaker, 1-3pm,
Franklin Henderson, Buffalo Soldiers

June 30

Non-refundable deposits due for Salt Lake City, UT
research trip. Contact Colette DeVerge at 323 933 8381

July 18 and August 15

No CAAGS Monthly Meeting

** Calendar is subject to change without notice*

CAAGS 30th Anniversary Quilt

In commemoration of our 30th Anniversary, CAAGS members Norma Bates and Tommie Mallet are creating an Underground Railroad themed quilt. Donations are being accepted to help purchase the quilting supplies. If you would like to make a donation, give at the next monthly meeting or mail us your donation. You can also contact Norma Bates, teaptnorma@yahoo.com.

Save the Date

CAAGS 30th Anniversary Conference

March 18-19, 2016

Call for Papers Coming Soon

10 Don't-Miss Historical Map Collections Online

Whether you're looking for a historic map to overlay in Google Earth, or hoping to find your ancestor's town of origin, these online historical map collections offer don't miss resources for any genealogist. Find topographic, panoramic, survey and other historical maps, many available for free online viewing and downloading.

➤ David Rumsey Historical Map Collection

Browse through over 30,000 high-resolution digital maps and images from the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, one of the largest private collections of historic maps in the U.S. This free online historical map collection focuses primarily on cartography of the Americas from the 18th and 19th centuries, but also has maps of the world, Asia, Africa, Europe, and Oceania. They keep the maps fun too! Their LUNA map browser works on the iPad and iPhone, plus they have selected historical maps available as layers in Google Maps and Google Earth, plus a neat virtual world collection on Rumsey Map Islands in Second Life.

➤ American Memory - Map Collections

This outstanding free collection from the U.S. Library of Congress contains more than 10,000 online digitized maps from 1500 to the present, depicting areas all over the world. Interesting highlights of the historical map collection include birds-eye, panoramic views of cities and towns, as well as military campaign maps from the American Revolution and Civil War. The map collections are searchable by keyword, subject and location. Since maps are often assigned to only one particular collection, you'll achieve the most complete results by searching at the top level.

➤ Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection

Over 11,000 digitized historical maps from countries around the world are available for online viewing in the historical section of the Perry-Castandeda Map Collection of the University of Texas at Austin. The Americas, Australia and the Pacific, Asia, Europe and The Middle East are all represented on this extensive site, including individual collections such as pre-1945 Topographic Maps of the United States. Most maps are in the public domain, with those under copyright clearly marked as such.

➤ Old Maps Online

This mapping site is really neat, serving as an easy-to-use searchable gateway to historical maps hosted online by repositories around the world. Search by place-name or by

clicking in the map window to bring up a list of available historical maps for that area, and then narrow further by date if needed. The search results take you directly to the map image on the website of the host institution. Participating institutions include the David Rumsey Map Collection, the British Library, the Moravian Library, and the National Library of Scotland.

➤ **Historic Map Works**

This subscription-based historical digital map database of North America and the world includes over 1.5 million individual map images, including a large collection of American property atlases, along with antiquarian maps, nautical charts, birds-eye views, and other historical images. Each historical map is geocoded to allow address search on a modern map, as well as overlay into Google Earth. This site offers individual subscriptions; alternatively you may be able to use the site for free through a subscribing library

➤ **old-maps.co.uk**

Part of a joint venture with Ordnance Survey, this digital Historical Map Archive for mainland Britain contains historical mapping from Ordnance Survey's Pre and Post WWII County Series mapping at various scales dating from c.1843 to c.1996, as well as Ordnance Survey Town Plans, and interesting Russian Maps of UK locations mapped by the KGB during the Cold War era. To locate maps, just search by address, place or coordinates based on modern geography, and the available historical maps will be displayed. All map scales are free to view online, and can be purchased as electronic images or prints.

➤ **Maps of Australia**

The National Library of Australia has a large collection of historical maps. Learn more here, or search the NLA Catalogue for records to over 100,000 maps of Australia held in Australia's libraries, from the earliest mapping to the present. Over 4,000 map images have been digitized and can be viewed and downloaded online.

➤ **A Vision of Britain Through Time**

Featuring primarily British maps, A Vision of Britain Through Time includes a great collection of topographic, boundary, and land use maps, to complement statistical trends and historical descriptions drawn from census records, historical gazetteers, and other records to present a vision of Britain between 1801 and 2001. Don't miss the link to the separate website, Land of Britain, with a much higher level of detail limited to a small area around Brighton.

➤ **University of Virginia: Geospatial and Statistical Data**

Provided by the University of Virginia, the Geospatial and Statistical Data Center provides an easy to use Historical Census Browser with nation-wide census data, and a Virginia Gazetteer Database with geographic data and

maps documenting over 51,000 Virginia features and places.

➤ **Atlas of Historical U.S. County Boundaries**

Explore both maps and text covering the creation, historical boundaries, and all subsequent changes in the size, shape, and location of every county in the 50 United States and the District of Columbia. The database also includes non-county areas, unsuccessful authorizations for new counties, changes in county names and organization, and the temporary attachments of non-county areas and unorganized counties to fully functioning counties. To lend to the site's historical authority, the data is drawn primarily from the session laws that created and changed the counties.

**Tips for Planning your Genealogy Research
Visit to the Courthouse**

The process of researching your family tree will eventually lead you to a courthouse, library, archives or other repository of original documents and published sources. The day-to-day joys and hardships of your ancestors lives can often be found documented among the numerous original records of the local court, while the library may contain a wealth of information on their community, neighbors and friends.

Marriage certificates, family histories, land grants, military rosters and a wealth of other genealogical clues are tucked away in folders, boxes, and books just waiting to be discovered. Before heading for the courthouse or library, however, it helps to prepare. Try these tips for planning your visit and maximizing your results.

• **Scout the Location**

The first, and most important, step in onsite genealogy research is learning which government most likely had jurisdiction over the area in which your ancestors lived during the time they lived there. In many places, especially in the United States, this is the county or county equivalent (e.g. parish, shire). In other areas, the records may be found housed in town halls, probate districts or other jurisdictional authorities. You'll also have to bone up on changing political and geographical boundaries to know who actually had jurisdiction over the area where your ancestor lived for the time period you're researching, and who has current possession of those records.

If your ancestors lived near the county line, you may find them documented among the records of the adjoining county. While a bit uncommon, I actually have an ancestor whose land straddled the county lines of three counties, making it necessary for me to routinely check the records of all three counties when researching that particular family.

- **Who Has the Records?**

Many of the records you'll need, from vital records to land transactions, are likely to be found at the local courthouse. In some cases, however, the older records may have been transferred to a state archives, local historical society, or other repository. Check with members of the local genealogical society, at the local library, or online at the local GenWeb site to learn where the records for your location and time period of interest can be found. Even within the courthouse, different offices usually hold different types of records, and may maintain different hours and even be located in different buildings. Some records may also be available in multiple locations, as well, in microfilm or printed form.

- **Are the Records Available?**

You don't want to plan a trip halfway across the country only to find that the records you seek were destroyed in a courthouse fire in 1865. Or that the office stores the marriage records in an offsite location, and they need to be requested in advance of your visit. Or that some of the county record books are being repaired, microfilmed, or are otherwise temporarily unavailable. Once you've determined the repository and records you plan to research, it is definitely worth the time to call to make sure the records are available for research. If the original record you seek is no longer extant, check the Family History Library Catalog to see if the record is available on microfilm.

- **Create a Research Plan**

As you enter the doors of a courthouse or library, it's tempting to want to jump into everything at once. There usually aren't enough hours in the day, however, to research all records for all of your ancestors in one short trip. By planning your research before you go, you'll be less tempted by distractions and less likely to miss important details. Create a checklist with names, dates and details for each record you plan to research in advance of your visit, and then check them off as you go. By focusing your search on just a few ancestors or a few record types, you'll be more likely to achieve your research goals.

- **Time Your Trip**

Before you visit, you should always contact the courthouse, library or archives to see if there are any access restrictions or closures which may affect your visit. Even if the Web site includes operating hours and holiday closures, it is still best to confirm this in person. Ask if there are any limits on the number of researchers, if you have to sign up in advance for microfilm readers, or if any courthouse offices or special library collections maintain separate hours. It also helps to ask if there are certain times which are less busy than others.

- **Learn the Lay of the Land**

Each genealogical repository you visit is going to be slightly different - whether it's a different layout or setup, different policies and procedures, different equipment, or a

different organizational system. Check the facility's Web site, or with other genealogists who utilize the facility, and familiarize yourself with the research process and procedures before you go. Check the card catalog online, if it is available, and compile a list of the records you want to research, along with their call numbers. Ask if there is a reference librarian who specializes in your specific area of interest, and learn what hours he/she will be working.

- **Prepare for Your Visit**

Courthouse offices are often small and cramped, so it is best to keep your belongings to a minimum. Pack a single bag with a notepad, pencils, coins for the photocopier and parking, your research plan and checklist, a brief summary of what you already know about the family, and a camera (if allowed). If you plan to take a laptop computer, make sure that you have a charged battery, because many repositories do not provide electrical access (some do not allow laptops). Wear comfortable, flat shoes, as many courthouses don't offer tables and chairs, and you may spend a lot of time on your feet.

- **Be Courteous & Respectful**

Staff members at archives, courthouses and libraries are generally very helpful, friendly people, but they are also very busy trying to do their job. Respect their time and avoid pestering them with questions not specifically related to research in the facility or hold them hostage with tales about your ancestors. If you have a genealogy how-to question or trouble reading a particular word that just can't wait, it is usually better to ask another researcher (just don't pester them with multiple questions either!). Don't request records or copies just before closing time, either!

- **Take Good Notes & Make Plenty of Copies**

While you may take the time to reach a few on-site conclusions about the records you find, it is usually best to take everything home with you where you have more time to examine it thoroughly for every last detail. Make photocopies of everything, if possible. If copies aren't an option, then take the time to make a transcription or abstract, including misspellings. On each photocopy, be sure to make note of the complete source for the document. If you have time, and money for copies, it can also be helpful to make copies of the complete index for your surname(s) of interest for certain records, such as marriages or deeds.

- **Concentrate on the Unique**

Unless the facility is one you can easily access on a regular basis, it is often beneficial to begin your research with the parts of its collection that aren't easily available elsewhere. Concentrate on original records that haven't been microfilmed, family papers, photograph collections, and other unique resources. At the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, for example, many researchers begin with the books as they are generally not available on loan.

- *Taken from gotgenealogy.com*