

Help for Genealogists at Your State Library

by Bill Sowers, Cataloger, State Library of Kansas

Genealogy is a word that can strike fear into the hearts and minds of many librarians. For years genealogists have scoured libraries thumbing through fragile tomes, vertical files and old newspaper clippings. They have worn out microfilm readers and photocopiers in a quest to know more about themselves through older selves. Always seeking to add to their own never-ending story, they can keep interlibrary loan staff jumping and show up at the reference desk with questions that would boggle the wisdom of the Oracle of Delphi.

Not even the Oracle could have predicted the wealth of information the Internet would supply to genealogists. The book, microfilm, CD and vertical file collections of libraries have been augmented by millions of web pages and documents. And although most researchers spend many hours at home on personal computers there is still a steady stream of family history researchers crowding into libraries personally or via e-mail wanting guidance on the Information Highway to an off-ramp that might just lead them to a lost ancestor's hideaway.

Although the State Library has no true genealogy collection we still get people wandering into the library in person or "virtually" with questions. Having few family history books we have come to rely on the Internet in helping genealogists directly as well as referring them to other libraries in Kansas better able to meet their research needs.

Within the past few years here at the State Library we have set up a basic genealogy links page to help genealogy researchers who come our way. The links have expanded and changed to meet the changing needs of those who contact us and the ebb and flow of different information resources on the Web. I've noticed that several other libraries in Kansas provide similar pages. Our web page is found at <http://www.kslib.info/ref/misc/genbib.htm>.

As a genealogist, I have come to appreciate the ability of librarians to point me toward possibilities. As a librarian, I have gathered basic resources as a means of offering others possibilities. A links page or "webliography" like this is a sign post offering a few possibilities. It can assist both patrons and staff and can be broadened or limited to serve the individual needs of library clientele. Like any links page it requires constant care and upkeep. Links needs to be checked at least monthly to ensure their continued presence on the Internet as well as the quality of the information present. Staff should be mindful of new resources and encourage patrons to suggest possible additions/deletions.

It's all about possibilities. Most genealogists are devoted library supporters who are appreciative of any help we can give them in traveling down the Information Super Highway. A few signs along the way can be of great help.