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Why Don't Librarians Like Genealogists?: Beginning Genealogy for Librarians

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Why Don't Librarians Like Genealogists?

Beginning Genealogy for Librarians

by Anne Billeter, Ph.D.

IT'S TRUE: Most librarians don't like genealogists. Why? Librarians are human: they don't want to admit their ignorance of the specialized resources genealogists use. They believe (erroneously) that they don't need to know about these resources in order to assist other patrons. They are wrong: genealogy resources are an eye-opening treasure-trove for historians, the source of clues for adoption and missing persons researchers, and increasingly important for genetic medical research.

Why else don't librarians like genealogists? Because genealogists often are not library users prior to becoming genealogists, so they don't know library jargon (ILL, Ref, Circ, fiche) or procedures (using the catalog, using microfilm and microfiche readers, requesting an interlibrary loan). Notice that even spelled out the jargon isn't self-explanatory to the new library user: interlibrary loan, reference, circulation, microfiche.

Even the smallest public or academic library can be a great resource for local genealogy patrons, not by spending scarce money and space on lots of library materials about genealogy, but by devoting some time and energy to learning the basic terms and resources of this special field of knowledge. By doing this, the library will be able to assist an underserved group of patrons pursuing a hobby, an interest, a passion, and sometimes even medically essential data. What an opportunity to gain a whole new group of library users and supporters!

Steps in Library Service

- 1) Learn a little about genealogy. Be sure the library has an adequate circulating collection of how-to books for genealogists and READ one of the books for beginners recommended on the following page.
- 2) Take a beginning class in genealogy. You will learn basic terms and re-

sources (ancestor charts, family group sheets, Sutró, census, Soundex, LDS); become familiar with the local genealogists; and learn about the local organizations and agencies to which library patrons should be referred (the local genealogical society, the local historical society, county archives, the city department responsible for cemeteries, etc.). Learning the language of any special clientele is an important part of continuing library education.

- 3) Have a core reference collection for genealogists and become comfortable with using these resources (see the recommended resources below).
- 4) Learn about regional and state organizations, agencies, and libraries and REFER, REFER, REFER. Refer neophytes to the local genealogical society: part of their mission is to help new genealogists get started. Refer patrons doing local research to the appropriate agencies. Refer patrons doing research involving distant places to the appropriate organizations, resources, and libraries.

The local genealogical library often has many resources pertaining to distant places, past and present, but many times the patrons' needs are best met by referring them to a larger resource. Oregon is blessed with a number of strong libraries which are well worth the travel effort, if the genealogist is well-informed about the specifics of their collections. (See "Libraries in Oregon with Strong Genealogy Resources" below.)

- 5) Explore the Internet and refer patrons to appropriate sites. Genealogists have capitalized on the strengths of the Internet. The genealogical resources available on the Internet are numerous and well-organized. They include



wonderful indexes, images of original documents, electronic mailing lists for people with common research interests, and much, much more. (See "Genealogy on the Internet" and the article by Tom Kenyon.)

These five steps will put you well on the way to providing services to genealogists. Learn their vocabulary and resources, and you will enhance the quality of your library's service to its community.

Beginning Genealogy Booklist
Each of these books presents the beginner with basic information.

Croom, Emily Anne. *Unpuzzling Your Past: A Basic Guide to Genealogy*. 3rd Edition. Betterway Publications, Cincinnati, 1995.

Hartley, William G. *The Everything Family Tree Book: Finding, Charting, and Preserving Your Family History*. Adams Media Corp., Holbrook, Mass., 1997.

Hinckley, Kathleen W. *Locating Lost Family Members & Friends: Modern Genealogical Research Techniques for Locating the People of Your Past and Present*. Betterway Publications, Cincinnati, 1999.

Melnyk, Marcia Yannizze. *The Weekend Genealogist: Timesaving Techniques for Effective Research*. Betterway Publications, Cincinnati, 2000.

Rose, Christine, et al. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Genealogy*. Macmillan, New York, 1997.

Willard, Jim, Willard, Terry, and Wilson, Jane. *Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide to Family History and Genealogy*. Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1997.

ogy. Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1997.

There are a number of books to help genealogists learn to use the Internet effectively.

Helm, April Leigh and Helm, Matthew L. *Genealogy Online for Dummies*. Hungry Minds, Inc., New York, 2001.

Howells, Cyndi. *Netting Your Ancestors: Genealogical Research on the Internet*. Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1999.

McClure, Rhonda R. and Wilcox, Shirley Langdon. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Online Genealogy*. Alpha Books, Indianapolis, 1999.

Richley, Pat. *The Everything Online Genealogy Book*. Adams Media Corporation, Holbrook, Mass, 2001.

For library patrons who need to maximize their use of limited time on the Internet, the printed version of *Cyndi's List* will allow them to plan their Internet search prior to going online.

Howells, Cyndi. *Cyndi's List: A Comprehensive List of 40,000 Genealogy Sites on the Internet*. Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 2000.

Reference Resources

For genealogists who are doing local research there are a number of useful resources. The first title on the list is specific to genealogy; the others are titles which serve a number of uses, but to which the genealogist may need to be introduced.

Battaile, Connie Hopkins. *The Oregon Book: Information A to Z*. Saddle Mountain Press, Newport, Ore., 1998.



Librarians believe they don't need to know about genealogical resources in order to assist other patrons.

They are wrong.



Lenzen, Connie. *Oregon Guide to Genealogical Sources*. Genealogical Forum of Oregon, Portland, 1996.

McArthur, Lewis Ankeny. *Oregon Geographic Names*. Oregon Historical Society, Portland, 1992.

Oregon Blue Book. Secretary of State, biennial, Salem, OR. (Latest edition is 2001–2002; includes an excellent history of the state, and a wealth of other information.)

Oregon Historical Quarterly Index. 3 volumes. Oregon Historical Society, Portland. (The *Oregon Historical Quarterly* contains serious articles on every aspect of Oregon history. The index in three volumes indexes the quarterlies published from 1900–1980.)

The following resources will begin a core reference genealogy collection.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Luebking, Sandra H. *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*. Revised Edition. Ancestry Incorporated, Salt Lake City, 1997.

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*. 3rd Edition. Genealogical Publishing Company, 2000.

Everton, George B., ed. *The Handybook for Genealogists: United States of America*. 10th Edition. Everton Publishers, 2001.

Eichholz, Alice and Dollarhide, William, eds. *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*. Ancestry Incorporated, Salt Lake City, 1992.

Harris, Maurine and Glen, eds. *Ancestry's Concise Genealogical Dictionary*. Ancestry Incorporated, Salt Lake City, 1998.

Thorndale, William and Dollarhide, William. *Map Guide to the U. S. Federal Censuses, 1790–1920*. Genealogical Publishing Company, 2000.

Dollarhide, William and Derheim, James A. *The Census Book: A Genealogist's Guide to Federal Census Facts, Schedules and Indexes*. Heritage Quest, 1999.

Libraries in Oregon with Strong Genealogy Resources
Use each library's Web page to access practical information (hours, fees, and how to get there) and, for most, their catalog of library materials.

Oregon State Library

State Library Building
Summer & Court Streets
Salem, OR 97310

Web page: <http://www.osl.state.or.us/home/>
Special Resources: Oregon Index, a 3 x 5 card index filling almost 600 drawers, primarily indexing newspapers and periodical literature. (Many Oregon libraries have an old microfilmed version of this index.)
The Genealogy Room on the 2nd floor is a comprehensive collection of genealogical materials with special attention to Oregon.

Oregon State Archives

800 Summer St. NE
Salem, OR 97310-1347

Web page: <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/>
E-mail: reference.archives@state.or.us
Electronic mailing list:
or-roots@archive14.sos.state.or.us
(to subscribe send message:
"Subscribe OR Roots.")



Special Resources: vital records, naturalization records, military records, probate files, and the Oregon Historical Records Guide. The latter is an inventory of records in county courthouses and the Archives. It is available on the Archives web page and in print, and has been published for each county.

Multnomah County Library

801 SW 10th Ave.
 Portland, OR 97205-2597
Web page: <http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/>
Special Resources: Library Association of Portland Newspaper Index. (A name and subject index for more than 100 years, primarily of the *Oregonian* and the *Oregon Journal*. (Many Oregon libraries have a microfiche version of this index.) Comprehensive collection of Polk's City Directories, particularly for Portland; newspapers and censuses on microfilm.

Oregon Historical Society Library

1200 SW Park Ave.
 Portland, OR 97205-2483
Web page: <http://www.ohs.org/>
 (click on Collections; click on "Horizon Online Catalog.")
Special Resources: Several card indexes, including an extensive one of biographies in Oregon county histories, the Pioneer Card File, and the Overland Journeys Index; manuscripts; over two million photographs; second largest newspaper on microfilm collection.

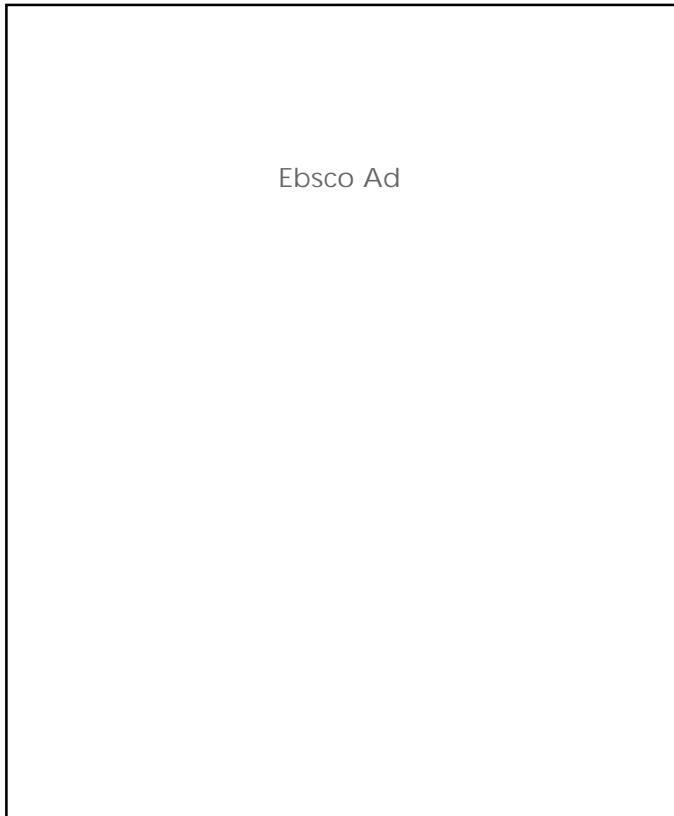
Genealogical Forum of Oregon Library

1505 SE Gideon
 Portland, OR
Web page: <http://www.gfo.org/>
Special Resources: Early Settlers file, Civil War Soldiers Who Lived in Oregon card file, very strong Oregon resources; strong U.S. resources; some international resources.

Knight Library

University of Oregon
 Eugene, OR 97401
Web page: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/>
First Special Resource: Oregon Collection Room, which is in the Knight Library, but which has more limited hours. Has a card file index of scrapbooks of newspaper clippings of Fred Lockley's column "Observations and Impressions" which ran for many years in the *Oregon Journal*; has a comprehensive Oregon collection, including many city directories. Only 30 percent of holdings are currently in the online catalog; there is an extensive card catalog.

Second Special Resource: Manuscript and Rare Book Collection, which is in the Knight Library, but which has more limited hours. Arrangements should be made for materials to be retrieved from storage prior to arrival. Strong collection of WPA papers



and of personal papers, including diaries and correspondence.

Third Special Resource: Newspapers on microfilm collection, which is in the Knight Library and is accessible whenever the Library is open. This is the most complete collection of newspapers on microfilm in the state. They are arranged alphabetically by city, which is a wonderful timesaver. The microfilm may be borrowed through local libraries via interlibrary loan, and may be requested by city and date (as long as only one newspaper was published simultaneously in the city!).

Fourth Special Resource: Map Library, which is in the Knight Library on the first floor, and which is accessible whenever the Library is open. Has a large Oregon collection, including Sanborn maps and Metsker county atlases. A special web resource has been created which indicates which of four libraries (University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Oregon Historical Society, or Oregon State Library) has which Metsker county atlases (these show actual land owners at the time they were published.)
<http://libweb.uoregon.edu/mapmetskers.htm>

Genealogy on the Internet

<http://www.CyndisList.com>

One of the most complete listings of genealogical sites on the Internet. Over 100,000 links categorized and cross-referenced in over 150 categories. Updated constantly.

<http://www.usgenweb.com>

A countrywide project to provide and link Internet Web sites for genealogical research in every county of every state in the United States.

<http://www.familysearch.org>

This is a page to begin the search for ancestors. The IGI (International Genealogical Index) contains millions of names and events such as births, christenings, and marriages. The Ancestral File will provide entire family group records and pedigree charts. Also includes the catalog for the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.


<http://www.ancestry.com>

Has a number of free databases such as the Social Security Death Index and the American Genealogical Biographical Index (which indexes 1628 databases), plus ever-changing databases which are free for several weeks and then available by a membership subscription fee. For an additional fee actual images of the census pages may be viewed.

<http://www.familytreemaker.com>

Includes millions of names in their Family Finder Index, Internet Web sites, CD-ROMs and more. Has areas for genealogy help, how-to articles, a Web site directory, and more.

<http://www.rootsweb.com>

The Internet's oldest and largest genealogy site. Includes surname, subject, and regional electronic mailing lists. 



Anne Billeter is the Manager of Children's, Young Adult, and Outreach Services for Jackson County Library Services. She has been an amateur genealogist for more than 20 years. She compiled the genealogies included in a number of Oregon Trail diaries and other books published by Bert Webber.

