

# **IN-GENious!**

## ***Home, Where the Heart ... & Sources Are***

**By CURT B. WITCHER, MLS, FUGA**  
**IGS Northeast District Director**

If, as the old saying goes, home is where the heart is, then the home and home sources are surely the heart of any successful, new genealogical endeavor. Family and home sources can provide a wealth of meaningful information if one takes the time to seek them out and then thoroughly evaluate the data they offer.

One of the first and best things to do when beginning any genealogical endeavor is to explore thoroughly one's home for any documents, records, or memorabilia that might provide some information about family members past and present. A number of individuals, when first starting to research their family history, brush off this step as something nice to do but not really necessary. *It is very necessary!* Beginning one's genealogical endeavor well will greatly impact one's overall success.

There are three key pieces of information one will be searching for over and over again throughout any genealogy project. Those three pieces of data are names, dates and places. One wants to be able to put a properly identified ancestor in a particular geographic

**Curt B. Witcher** manages the Historical Genealogy Department of the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and is curator of its Rare and Fine Book Collection. Active in historical and genealogical organizations and recipient of numerous awards and honors, Curt is founding president of the Indiana Genealogical Society, a former president of both the Federation of Genealogical Societies and the National Genealogical Society, a member of the Genealogy Committee of the American Library Association and coeditor of the *Periodical Source Index*. Curt has consulted on many major projects including the two PBS Series, "Ancestors," and was the National Volunteer Data Input Coordinator for the Civil War Soldiers System. In 2000 he authored *African American Genealogy: A Bibliography and Guide to Sources*.



place at a specific time, and then attach some activity to him or her in that place. That activity can be something as well noted and important as a birth, marriage or death, or it can be something as common or simple as when someone started to school or began work at a particular job or joined the army.

Any item one finds at home or in a relative's house containing names, dates or locations relating to family members is well worth recording. So what kinds of things might one expect to find in a home setting? First, there may be many documents of all types and kinds just waiting to be discovered. These documents may include birth, marriage, and death certificates, letters and diaries, newspaper clippings including obituaries, and remembrance or memorial cards. One should keep a careful eye peeled to find as many of these written documents as possible.

### **Documents Kept in Special Spaces**

Many families put letters, birth and baptismal or christening certificates, marriage licenses, death records, obituaries, and other written documents in special places. Take the time to discern what and where these places might be. Family Bibles and other holy books are frequently used by families for important papers because that is the one item family members are fairly confident neither they nor anyone else in the family will discard. Some families have keepsake boxes; still others use scrapbooks and shoe boxes to collect papers into one location for safekeeping. Many families use photograph albums as a form of hybrid scrapbook, containing both photographs and paper documents. Look for all of these storage possibilities when exploring the home setting.

Family Bibles and holy books themselves can be sources of family data. Many Bibles have "Family Record" pages between the old and new testaments or in the front of the Bible. On these pages one often finds births, christenings, marriages, and deaths recorded. Other holy books may have family pages in the front or back. Paying attention to the publication date of the holy book and noting changes in handwriting can assist one in beginning to ascertain whether all the entries were made at one time or whether some of the entries were made closer to the actual dates of the events recorded.

In addition to birth records, marriage certificates, and death records, official records or certificates also frequently found in the home may include church records; abstracts of deed or title; and military records including discharge papers. Typically it is rather

easy to copy information from these official records to an ancestor or pedigree chart for easier tracking of family members and their associated genealogical data. It is a very good idea to begin recording these informational elements from the very first day of your genealogical exploration.

Ancestor charts and family group sheets are available in the genealogy and local history rooms of many libraries. Free forms also can be obtained online. Clicking on the appropriate right-hand links on the FamilySearch website <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> will give one access to free downloadable forms. Some of the best free forms and charts can be found at the PBS *Ancestors* website: <[www.byubroadcasting.org/ancestors/charts](http://www.byubroadcasting.org/ancestors/charts)>. Both pedigree or ancestor charts and family group sheets can be found here. A very handy "Family and Home Information Sources Checklist" can also be found at the PBS *Ancestors* website: <[www.byubroadcasting.org/ancestors/charts/oldpdf/checklist1.pdf](http://www.byubroadcasting.org/ancestors/charts/oldpdf/checklist1.pdf)>.

Ancestor or pedigree charts along with a clean piece of notebook paper are the best tools to use when starting to explore home sources. When family documents have been uncovered, the data one wants to record in addition to names, dates and places are types of documents (e.g. marriage license, military discharge, etc.), where the documents or data were found (e.g. in the family Bible at 6219 Dewhurst Drive in Saginaw, Michigan; in Grandma Englert's keepsake box at her home in Jasper, Indiana; etc.), and the date one viewed the document and recorded its information.

## **Check Unofficial Records for Personal Information**

While official records such as those mentioned above may be the easiest from which to abstract data, one should diligently look for all the records one can find – both official and unofficial. Examples of what some may call unofficial records include letters, diaries, sales receipts, photograph albums, and scrapbooks of all kinds. Letters and diaries regularly contain some of the most personal information one may ever read by or about an ancestor. The names and other facts, as well as clues to different people and places, often buried in letters and journals are amazing. It is exciting both to get new genealogical information and to "listen" to one's ancestors in their own voices – hearing first-hand about their successes and triumphs, their challenges and disappointments.

For some, photograph albums can initially be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it is wonderful to see likenesses of ancestors and

potential ancestors. On the other hand, it can be frustrating when the individuals in the photographs are not identified and the photographs themselves are not dated. Because photographs abound for most families, looking for and using these home sources is important. Look for names, events and dates listed anywhere on the photographs themselves as well as anywhere on the photograph albums or boxes. If possible, make copies of as many of the photographs as possible - whether color copies or digitized images. The copies can be used in the future for sharing with other relatives as well as ensuring that these valuable home sources are preserved for future generations.

A collection of photographs can often provide extraordinary detail even if many of the photographs themselves have incomplete identification. Using incomplete data recorded on one photograph with the incomplete data recorded on other photographs of the same time period and involving the same individuals can sometimes give one more complete data than perhaps originally believed possible.

### **Scrapbooks: A Wonderful Potpourri**

Scrapbooks typically contain a wonderful potpourri of information. From printed programs of school and social events to church bulletins, memorial cards, more photographs, and newspaper clippings, scrapbooks offer a unique view into family members' lives. Thoroughly exploring all the items found in scrapbooks can uncover many interesting facts about one's ancestors. From operating manuals and sales receipts one can get an idea of the farm implements that may have been used; newspaper clippings tell of relatives coming to visit a particular area or of favorite vacation places and visiting locales of ancestors; report cards, attendance documents, and graduation certificates may tell of schools one's ancestors may have attended; newspaper clippings, souvenir booklets or event programs may give details that affected your ancestors' lives or were celebrated by your ancestors.

Completely evaluating and scrutinizing scrapbooks for genealogical clues about family members challenges one to be thorough and critically analytical - the same approach that must be used in all family history research in order to be successful. Individuals interested in genealogy should think and act like the crime scene investigators on the popular CSI television drama - and the scene to be explored is the home!

Truly, leave nothing unexplored in your home. Explore attics, clos-

ets and cellars. Some of the best clues are uncovered only after a lot of searching. Make sure you look in the fronts and backs of any books that have been handed down from family members – and check for any writing. Look carefully at family heirlooms to see if any cryptic messages are etched, written or otherwise detailed on surfaces you might not normally check. Framed portraits handed down from one generation to the next should be explored for writing on the framing paper. A few framed portraits may even have notes or letters included in the framing behind the backing paper.

### **Next: The Ultimate Home Source**

When one feels confident that all the documents from the home setting have been uncovered and the genealogical data they contain recorded in an organized way, it is time to explore what I like to call the ultimate home source – one's living relatives! And before one is tempted to argue that these individuals are not home sources because they live in their own homes, I hasten to remind all that these individuals are typically not discovered in the stacks of libraries and archives or in an online database. Hence, what else can one call them!

Just as one should leave nothing unexplored in one's home, engaging every living relative on a particular branch of the family is imperative. Invite them to your house, attend their church and talk to them after the service, telephone them, email them, send them old-fashioned postal letters – do whatever it takes! Both those younger and those older should be queried. Younger cousins as well as nephews and nieces may have unique records and valuable information. Recall that siblings of a common ancestor may all have different pieces of the family's documentary history – different letters and diaries, different photographs and scrapbooks. Ask them if you can look at their family Bibles and holy books; inquire if they have photo albums and scrapbooks you could peruse for information about ancestors of interest

One will likely run into a few family members who initially are not very cooperative. They may claim, "I don't know anything . . ." or "I don't talk about that past . . ." While being respectful, there are a number of tactics one can engage to entice and encourage these individuals to share what they do know. Photographs are among the very best discussion starters. Instead of asking a reluctant family member for genealogical data, seek the person's assistance in identifying a photograph or two. Sometimes even making a guess yourself about the identity of a person in a photo or the time

period of a particular picture will encourage an otherwise disengaged family member to agree with or correct you.

More often than not, one will find family members interested both in dialoging about the past and in discovering new data about a shared ancestor or family. Coupling living relatives with home sources will certainly get one's research off to a great start.

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Missouri *Democrat* 3 March 1868

## Photographs of Missouri Soldiers

### Their Preservation in the Dead Letter Office

[Special correspondence Missouri *Democrat*.]

Washington, February 26, 1868.

Heretofore it has been the practice of the Post Office department to destroy annually the accumulations of the Dead Letter Office which were not of special value after efforts to find their owners had extended over a year.

Of late, however, the Postmaster General has been causing the effects of soldiers and sailors to be retained for a longer time, and furnishing lists of photographs and other like mementos to papers in the States where the parties interested are known to have resided.

Applications for any of these articles [--unreadable--] be addressed to the Third Assistant Postmaster General should name the State lists to which reference is made, and, if possible, describe the article.

The following list is for Missouri:

The address of the writer is first given; next the address on the letter, and the contents and date.

N[--?--] Allen, 2d Ark vol, Lewisburg, Ark, to Mr. John Allen, Springfield, photograph, July 21, 1864. ...

[About five dozen entries are included from soldiers (and sailors?) in a variety of states, although none appeared related to Indiana; most addressees are from Missouri; items included are photographs and ambrotypes. Similar reports may exist.]

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