

The Internet As Tool

by Arnold L. Dean

A while back, I made a trip through Georgia. While there, I stopped at the Andersonville Civil War Prison National Park and Cemetery.

While viewing the site, I talked to a couple who live near where I grew up (this acquaintance took place due to seeing their license plate). While talking together, I mentioned that one of the reasons I was at the site, was to locate the gravesite of a Civil War soldier from Ohio that had died at the prison.

One person of this couple said "Oh, you are into genealogy, too. I tell people that it is just so easy! You just go on the Internet and put in the name, and all this information comes up!" Having several years experience in this field, and being concerned about individuals' feelings, and the quality of research, I thought "How do I make a comment regarding this without them feeling I was really hitting them hard?"

So, I was able to make a comment by saying "I'm glad if you have been able to find your family information that way. Personally, I have had to search out my family information, bit by bit, and piece by piece, from libraries, county courthouses, and other record sites around the country over several years."

The person who had made the Internet comment just looked at me with their mouth open, as though they had never heard of such a thing.

Personally, I would really wonder about the quality and value of a family record, if the only place the person constructing the record had gotten information was off the Internet.

While the Internet is "another tool" in the family historian's toolkit, it is certainly not the only set of tools a reputable genealogist needs to use.

Without the primary evidence sources, and proofs of the dates, places and persons involved in various life events, and whatever details we can garner, a "family history" constructed merely from items we can find on the Internet doesn't carry much weight when compared with a "Family History" which is backed up with as many sources of primary evidence, and secondary proofs as it is possible to locate.

The primary evidence sources can only be found by learning how to find the information, and going to or contacting the courthouses, health departments, National Archives, and other records repositories, and searching out those proofs, to make our "Family History" really valuable, and verified.

Arnold L. Dean has several years experience as a professional family history researcher, and has published a number of books regarding Wayne County, Indiana records.