

Ancestry.com

by *Mike@Blackledge.com*

As part of Albuquerque Genealogical Society's 40th Anniversary celebration in November 2012, AGS hosted "Ancestry Day", featuring a speaker from the Ancestry.com organization. Our local contact for the event, **Nancy Greenberg**, indicated that this event was five years in the making. Nancy reports that it was quite a success, as 120 people attended and enjoyed the event (and the door prizes), and AGS ended up \$3,000 to the good – a significant contribution toward the society's goal of obtaining genealogy references for our Library. **Bruce Lindell** took the speaker's handout and 'filled it in' with complete notes. At the end of this article, the References indicate that Bruce's notes are now available on our AGS web site: *abqgen.org*

What is Ancestry.com? For those experienced with the sophisticated on-line resource of today, it is surprising to note that this reference source began about 22 years ago as a church service publishing company. In 1990, two BYU grads, Paul B. Allen (not the Microsoft Paul G. Allen) and Dan Taggart began offering LDS publications on floppy disks and CDs sold from the back seat of their car. By 1994, their efforts had become one of the fastest growing companies in the burgeoning database world. Ancestry, Inc., a publisher of Ancestry magazine and genealogy books, was purchased in 1997, and the masthead began using the Ancestry.com web address. In 1999, they sold off their print book business and focused on their three internet genealogy sites: Ancestry.com, MyFamily.com, and FamilyHistory.com. Ten years later, the company officially changed its name to Ancestry.com.



The company opened an office in San Francisco, CA in 2010 with new engineering, product, and marketing teams. The San Francisco office is geared toward developing some of Ancestry's cutting-edge technology and services to include recent iPhone and iPad application development. In the past two years, the professional and enticing Ancestry.com television advertisements have become ubiquitous, and the company has developed a partnership with NBC for the popular *Who Do You Think You Are?* television series.

Today, Ancestry.com Inc. is the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world, operating a network of genealogical and historical record websites focused on the U.S. and nine foreign countries. Still headquartered out of Provo, Utah, the company develops and markets genealogical software and offers a wide array of genealogical related services. Ancestry.com is a publicly traded company, and in Oct 2012, just previous to our Ancestry Day, the company was acquired by a private equity group for \$32 a share, a transaction of around \$1.6 Billion. As of June 2012, the company provided access to more than 10 billion records, 38 million family trees, and 2 million paying subscribers.

In addition to its flagship site, Ancestry.com, the company today operates Archives.com, Fold3.com, ProGenealogists, 1000memories.com, Newspapers.com, Genealogy.com, MyFamily.com, and Rootsweb.com. Our library system provides access to Fold3, and Librarian **Lisa Kindrick** and her staff can assist you with other genealogy research tools – however the focus of this article is the main site, Ancestry.com

Barefoot Genealogy: Our speaker for the 10 Nov 2012 event was **Crista Cowan**, known as "The Barefoot Genealogist" for two reasons that she pointed out at the beginning of her talk. Crista also has an informative blog by that same name, which you can find if you Google for, you guessed it, *The Barefoot Genealogist*. An entertaining and informative speaker, Crista has been working for Ancestry.com since 2004, and has been doing genealogy since she was a child. Here's what Crista says about her predilection against footwear:

"I hate wearing shoes. But, invariably, as I travel around the country doing genealogy research I find that librarians and archivists are kind of sticklers about me running around their facilities in my bare feet. Also, it gets pretty painful trekking through a cemetery without good, sturdy shoes on my feet. That's why it makes me so happy that every passing day brings more and more genealogy and family history resources online. I can do genealogy AND be barefoot as often as I want."



Crista films videos on a regular basis on using Ancestry.com. Go to YouTube.com and in the search box, look for "barefoot genealogist." Videos are also available at Ancestry.com – on the Home page, go down and click on the YouTube "button" -- there, you can select by topics and Crista has done many of the videos found there.

Once the audience accepted Crista in her bare feet, they were again challenged that regardless of how experienced we might be with the product, with genealogy, with family research, all of us would learn something from her talk – including her. Was that true for you? Let's examine tips some audience members took away from her talk, and then we'll look at a couple of the ideas expressed:

Cheril Raub:

The tip that I was excited about is this: You go to the Card Catalog and click on Pictures, then you click on US Historical Postcards, put in a location, and up comes postcards of that area.

Another tip I liked was you can go to the learning center, click on Family History Wiki and on the right hand side of the page you can click on the Red Book and access it right there online.

Mike Dietz:

Use the other resources of Ancestry, such as Postcard collection, Yearbooks, maps, etc, found under the Card Catalog – Pictures.

Posting a picture of an ancestor with some genealogy on FaceBook might lead to other cousins.

To make wildcard characters work in a search, the field must be "Exact" selection.

Karen Jones:

Try out all the menus and buttons just to see what's there.

To reduce the number of unrelated hits, begin searches using the card catalog and locations rather than searching by name.

Wild card asterisks and question marks work only when the "exact spelling" boxes are checked.

What goes onto Ancestry message boards shows up on RootsWeb, and vice versa.

Rosemary McNerney Winkler:

Crista mentioned "Card Catalog" often, so I think it carries lots of possibilities on Ancestry.com. Located there are high-school yearbooks, postcards, and much more.

One tip she gave that we should all know: When searching, the * (asterisk) replaces multiple characters and ? (question mark) replaces one character anywhere in a word.

She emphasized: know something about **FAN** which represents **F**amily, **A**cquaintances, and **N**eighbors. This means all children in a family are important in a search, as well as the family next door and families known to the one you are searching.

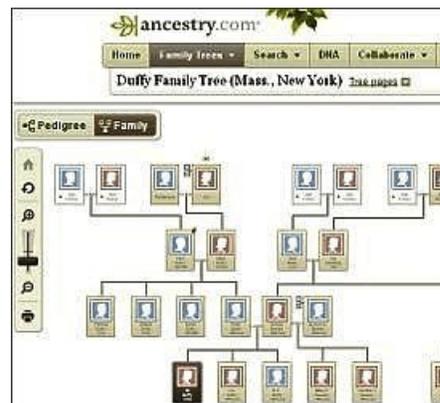
Crista mentioned that message boards are important as you never know when something might appear days or years after posting a query or information.

She said to Google "books" and see on the right side of the page for free "family histories" but I could not make

it work. Those I looked at are subscription or members only searches. Maybe you can do better.

Mary Ann Blackledge: *(a colleague of mine, who echoes what our attendees heard):*

I don't like the way they changed their search 'engine' a couple of years ago since I find it more difficult to narrow the focus of a search. E.g., if I query Isaac Blackledge, I will get hits for just about any Blackledge as well as Blackney, Blackman, etc. – sometimes hundreds and hundreds of hits. To narrow the search to just Isaac Blackledge I have to click the 'exact only' boxes...requires additional work on my part...not much, but more than formerly and then I won't get some close variations in a name that I might want to get. I do like that Ancestry has a very large collection to search. I also like being able to do a wildcat search, e.g., Blackl*dge will bring hits of both Blackledge and Blacklidge. That is very useful since both spellings are often found for individuals...especially prior to 1900.



Card Catalog: Several attendees noted that Crista emphasized Ancestry.com's Card Catalog. Here's an excerpt about this feature from an article by Kimberly Powell (see References):

*"Similar to the card catalog you've probably used at the library, the **Ancestry Card Catalog** is a gateway to the databases on Ancestry.com. There are currently more than 30,000 database titles on Ancestry.com, each containing anywhere from 1500 to over a billion names. The Card Catalog is fully searchable by either title or keyword, but don't just search for an ancestor's surname and call it a day. Searching by title searches only the words in the title of the database, whereas searching by keyword will also search the extended description of that database. This is the easiest way to find a database for which you already know the title - perhaps you've seen it included as a source in an online family tree or published genealogy."*

Here is what Mary Ann notes about finding Ancestry.com databases under a paid subscription:

*"I usually don't take the time to look at the list of new databases that Ancestry shows on its home page. Rather, I rely on a pertinent database coming up as a hit when I do a query. For example, I came across the database **Alabama, Deaths and Burials Index, 1881-1974** accidentally when I queried someone and that was one of the hits. When I query "Blackl*dge" on that site, I get hits that include the individual, parents and spouses with that name. That is how I found individuals of other names that fit into our research. Another good thing about Ancestry is that if you want to query just one source, you can go to 'Search' and then 'Card Catalog' and then enter either the exact name of the database you want to search or certain key words that will bring up their databases with those key words. That has been a useful feature."*

Library vs Home: There are four editions of Ancestry.com that we need to distinguish – and all are available to us.

Library Edition: **David Schneider**, a genealogy staff specialist at our own Genealogy Center at the Main Library, reminds us that the Library Edition of Ancestry.com is available to us at any branch – all you need for access is your library card. There are thirteen computers in the Genealogy Center, each with desktop icon links to Ancestry Library Edition, Heritage Quest, Fold3, and the Genealogy Center home page. At a branch, you won't see these desktop icons; you will need to use a browser to bring up the Genealogy Center home page, and then click on Ancestry Library Edition. This Library Edition gives you free access to around 7,000 of Ancestry's 30,000 databases. The difference is that the Library Edition will not include Family Data Collections (individual records; births; deaths; marriages), Millennium File, One World Tree, and Private and Public Member Trees. Furthermore, the Ancestry World Tree and Ancestry Message Boards are read-only in the Library Edition. You will not be able to upload GEDCOM data or other family

tree software (such as Family Tree Maker), post messages, or reply to messages using Ancestry Library Edition. David conjectures that Ancestry wants you to learn the benefit of having the databases available, in hopes that you will be motivated to sign up for a Home Edition.

Home Editions: The Home Edition comes in three different varieties: **Free, U.S. databases,** and **Worldwide.** All three allow you to build your family tree on-line (essentially into a Family Tree Maker on-line version), something that you cannot do on the Library Edition. The term “user-friendly” is out-dated and over-used describing computer applications, but Ancestry has become “über user-friendly” over the years – for example, once you start building your family tree on any of the home versions, a search of the database produces a screen that shows what you have now, and what you could add from that database – just by clicking the box “Add” – or selectively dismissing each new find. Additionally, a mouse-over of any database hit produces a pop-up box with a summary of what is found at that resource for your individual.

Some resources are free – e.g., the Card Catalog entry to some databases such as Historic US Postcards, and other ‘standard’ databases such as the 1940 US Federal Census. The paid versions encourage a free trial, as one can try out the ‘full’ paid Ancestry.com for 14 days by choosing one of the packages. Ancestry will charge your credit card once the trial period is up and you don’t cancel; once you are a member, they won’t automatically renew your account unless you so authorize. The cost is as follows, once the free 2 week trial is over:

- **U.S. databases:** \$22.95 per month, or commit to at least a six-month membership for \$12.95 per month.
- **World databases** (unlimited access to all of Ancestry.com): \$34.95 per month, or commit to at least a six-month membership for \$24.95 per month.

“I have had the complete subscription for several years...probably should have dropped the International by now, but keep thinking I will have more time to study the UK Blackledges. I was especially interested in seeing if I could link any of the short lines in our database who are more recent immigrants, but so far I just haven’t found the time to do that. I don’t even know if our local library in Grants Pass has a full subscription. If I relied on the local library system, I would practically live there. I am online with Ancestry most days for at least several hours in the morning, afternoon, and again in the evening.”

“Ancestry also has begun to get more raw data, other than the census images – e.g., some death certificates. I found some of those first on familysearch.org, but find it easier to work with images on Ancestry rather than on familysearch.”

Summary: Crista was correct: we all can learn something new from Ancestry.com. Much is available to us from the free home version as well as the ABC Library System resource. The availability, database diversity, and usability of Ancestry.com has helped it to dominate the field of genealogy website research. With more than four billion names and 30,000 searchable databases, the flagship site is a favorite with genealogists and a researcher’s delight.

References: for additional details, see:

- Blogs.ancestry.com
 - Abqgen.org – Notes from “ANCESTRY DAY” by Bruce Lindell.
 - Genealogy.about.com – entries on Ancestry.com by Kimberly Powell.
 - Wikipedia.com – article on Ancestry.com with 130 article references.
 - library.cabq.gov/genealogy
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