Genealogy Resources for Librarians

Genealogy is the hobby of a large and growing segment of the population. While public libraries often explain collection development policies by reminding people they aren’t an archive, when it comes to local history they are often the only organization that CAN serve that function. Public Libraries are called on by both local patrons and people traveling from distant places to provide support for local history and genealogical research.

What a library can do (from most basic to most advanced):

- Make sure that everyone working the desk understands genealogy questions are legitimate questions and worth their time.
- Have at least one person that has looked deeply at what resources are in the area that other staff members can ask questions, if they get asked something out of their depth.
- Create a handout explaining where local resources (newspapers, government records, school records are kept) this will differ by state and area.
- Have clear policies in place about how much you will do by mail or e-mail and clearly state charges if you have them.
- Contact your local genealogical society and historical society and make friends.
- Offer resources, like databases, plat books, newspaper databases, etc.
- Offer programs with speakers, about how to do genealogy, identifying photo programs, etc.
- If there is a strong local genealogical society or historical society, they can sometimes form a partnership where volunteers can help other patrons with genealogy questions, helping to stretch library resources. Sometimes a local genealogical or historical society can even be co-located with the library and volunteer to keep it open during certain hours as a local history/genealogy center. Any partnership though should be clearly spelled out in writing who is responsible for what by when and include an exit clause on what will happen if the partnership grow untenable for either group.

Articles for Further Reading

*NOTE: Articles are all available full text in EBSCO as of September 2013.


Basic steps in library service for genealogists 5 suggestions and a list of references.


Provides information on the differences between a genealogy reference interview and a regular one, includes a very helpful flowchart of additional questions.


A guide to how libraries can help genealogists, with an Illinois slant.


Discusses special demands of cataloging genealogy materials, gives examples.

A history of the interaction of libraries and genealogy, plus an argument that genealogical holdings facilitate other kinds of historic research. It also addresses some of the non-computer technological aspects of genealogy that libraries have to deal with.


Libraries work with other local agencies and volunteers to produce new online sources.


A librarian turns genealogist and reports back on her experiences. Describes expectations of genealogists from libraries and expectations of librarians from genealogists and suggests ways to make interactions better. Also includes long further resources section which may be out of date.


A roughly 20 page article that gives basics of genealogy and libraries, plus short explanations of the types of records genealogists use.


A discussion of the roles public libraries can play in helping genealogists, guidelines and ethics with a case study of the Palm Beach Public Library.


Discusses how to add extract information to catalog records to increase their use to genealogists and therefore their use.

**Other Resources**


Multiple ones available, search Amazon for “QuickSheet Genealogy”
