

Read Up On Research: Genealogy Book Reviews

WHEN YOU SPEND as much time as I do on the Internet, typically when I get a book to read, it's not about genealogy. It's what I call "forgettable fiction" — just something to relax with and enjoy for the moment. When I heard of, not one, but two, new books that focused on genealogy and the Internet, I just had to check them out.

GOOGLE YOUR FAMILY TREE, BY DANIEL M. LYNCH

This is the first book about Google that specifically addresses using the search engine as a genealogy research tool. Though, it's not just about genealogy uses. The skills you learn, or refine, from this book will assist you when you use Google and its myriad elements for any purpose.

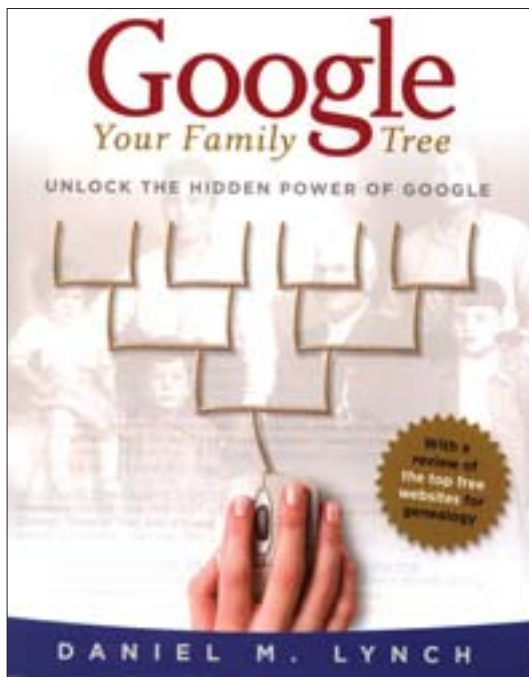
Many people will be tempted to skip the first few chapters on general search principles — don't! I consider myself a pretty savvy Internet researcher, and I learned some things from these early chapters, such as how to search for a date range, or excluding variants or considering similar words.

Once you have a grasp of the fundamentals, the book moves on to sections that focus on topics that will specifically interest genealogists, such as language tools, Google Books, Google News Archive, blog searching, Google Maps and Google Earth. It also talks about some technical features that can be helpful, such as Google Alerts and the Google Toolbar. And, there is an appendix which details other search engines. For the novice genealogist, there are two appendices, titled "Getting Started in Genealogy" and "Top Sites for Genealogists", that would be of particular interest.

The book has screen shots on almost every page that allow you

to "see" the site as you read the book. I really like this, as it makes it easy to read the book, and use it as a quick reference via the chapter headings and index. You don't have to worry about translating what he is saying to what you might see on your computer screen.

A question that is frequently asked is, "Won't this book be out of date in six months?". The answer is no! "This is because Google hasn't changed how they present results, how they determine relevance or how we should best ask for them," Lynch says.



"They have simply added new functions and content areas over time ... Even when Google has acquired products (like YouTube), they have been good about quickly integrating [them] in their search and relevance functionality."

One of the purposes of the book is to help you save time when you search — this way, you actually get better, more targeted

results quickly, and then you can spend more time evaluating relevant results and less time searching! And remember, Google is free. Anyone interested in genealogy should try to get as much out of a free service as possible before paying for records and subscriptions.

Since it wasn't feasible to create a 700-page book, Lynch is in the process of creating a companion website, *www.GoogleYourFamilyTree.com*, where additional resources will be made available. It will keep you up-to-date on the newest tools, and will feature tips and examples from other users.

You will be able to take advantage of Genealogy PowerSearch, which gives a few examples detailed within the book, as well as links to Genealogy PowerSearch templates.

Additionally, you'll have access to "Google Tips Blog" for genealogy and "Video Tips".

THE EVERYTHING GUIDE TO ONLINE GENEALOGY, BY KIMBERLY POWELL

Whereas Lynch's book focuses on a particular series of tools that genealogists can use on the Internet, Powell's book steps back and looks at the Internet from a broader viewpoint.

To give you some perspective on the Internet and its use in genealogy, in her introduction, Powell says: "When I first began with online genealogy ... there were very few online

records ... The Internet was primarily a medium for connecting with fellow genealogists ... Now you can find your ancestors on census enumerations, ship passenger lists, passport and social security applications, Revolutionary War pension files, Civil War service records, land grants ... Even those still necessary visits to the court-house, library or cemetery are made easier because you can

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use the Internet to do advance scouting, ask questions..."

The topics covered in this book include: basic research; working backwards from yourself; search engines and tools; Soundex; death records; census; vital and court records; maps; newspapers; military records; locating records abroad and more.

If you choose to simply pick out bits and pieces of information in the book, rather than reading it cover-to-cover, there are some handy visual guides to help you do so.

I will be honest and say that with more than 20 years of genealogy research under my belt, I was anticipating that I would find Powell's book a bit too basic for my taste. I was wrong! In the first three chapters on "basic" research, I learned about some software (e.g., Clooz), database features (e.g., audio storytelling on Ancestry.com) and Internet tools (e.g., Spiders Apprentice) that I wasn't previously aware of or hadn't looked at closely.

The book is full of real examples from genealogy research that wonderfully illustrate the suggested research strategy or document set being discussed. And, many references to available online resources are cutting edge in the sense that they have only recently become available. Additionally, Chapter 15 includes more involved examples for Laura Ingalls Wilder, George Herman Ruth, Robert Lee Frost, Neil Armstrong, and the solving of a "mystery box" found at a library.

As with Lynch's book, people will no doubt wonder how relevant a book focused on the Internet will be in six months, a year or two years? I don't think this book will lose its relevance. Because it is so thoroughly based on presenting genealogy research strategies, relevant document types and how to search for these out on the Internet, if a particular resource disappears or re-locates on the web, you will be savvy enough to know how to go and look for the resources you need!

Besides the content on research strategies and document

collections, this book imparts many of the same lessons it took me more than 20 years to learn.

Powell provides a great overview of the vast scope of documents and resources that a thorough genealogist will want to have explored — regardless of whether using the Internet or traditional research methods! Remember that the Internet is just a tool to help you in your research — it won't, and can't, do it for you.

As Powell told me, "Yes, the book is definitely geared toward beginner and intermediate genealogists, but I figure that everyone still has something to learn. Like you, I've been researching for more than 20 years, but I can say I am still discovering new ways to use the Internet all the time! I also chose to make the book more about the research process rather than just the tools and databases, so that it could hopefully be applied by just about anyone ... I get so many questions from users that remind me every day that even people who have been 'researching' on the Internet for a few years, really don't have a good grasp of the big picture — the genealogical research process, the constant searching out of new tools and databases, how to use what they learn from one source to lead them to the next, and so on."

So, with Powell's guidance via *The Everything Guide to Online Genealogy*, thorough research into the many types of available records, avoiding some of the mistakes made by many (including myself) much earlier in your research, your project will proceed more smoothly and be better for it!

CONCLUSION

With *The Everything Guide to Online Genealogy*, you can learn how to undertake a quality genealogy research project as you make use of online resources. Everything from how to create a genealogy search strategy, to effectively using clues gained from records to build a well-researched, well-documented family tree. Use

Google Your Family Tree to learn how to make the best use of one of the most powerful search engines (and its host of related tools) to better implement your online search strategy and locate records that will advance your research!

Both books can be used by beginner and experienced Internet users. There are always some things that any of us can learn more about — especially with a relatively new technology such as the Internet and such a complex project as unraveling the lives of our ancestors. Both books stress the importance of not expecting the Internet to have all the answers, instead they suggest using the Internet to find clues. And, most importantly, both of these books can help you better locate materials and information that are available on the Internet. Just don't expect that you can only use the Internet to research your family. There is, and will continue to be, some information only available in a local archive, library, family file or elsewhere.

As Lynch said, "I'm so thankful that I did genealogy for 20 years before I ever touched the Internet. That made me a much better researcher online because I knew how records are kept, why, how they're stored, how they're [indexed], what Soundex is and why it was created, and all those things [...] having that understanding, I think, is critical to getting the most out of any shortcut, which is certainly what the Internet helps us with."

Now that I am a savvy Internet genealogy researcher, the time spent searching for elusive ancestors is even more satisfying!



Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for more than 20 years. Even though she has worked with the Internet since it was just newsgroup feeds, she has stumbled her way around it. She currently does professional research in North Carolina and she can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy.