

Network Research: Facebook For Genealogists

I WILL ADMIT that, despite my enthusiasm for new technology, I did not jump on the Facebook, www.facebook.com, bandwagon until mid 2008. Even then, it was only because the North Carolina Genealogical Society (NCGS) had set up a Facebook site to promote the society and its sponsorship of NGS 2009.

Now, I wonder why I didn't join Facebook earlier! Besides the social aspects, the "real-time" information that I can glean on a daily basis, both relevant to me as a genealogist/family researcher and to me personally, is astounding! Instead of having to visit various blogs and websites, or sort through e-mails, I often just scan my Facebook home page and see what my colleagues and friends are doing. In just minutes, I have a sense of what's happening — locally and globally!

Initially, I was a bit hesitant to join for security reasons. I am typically a private person and, like everyone else, had heard the horror stories about Internet-based social networking sites and abuses that have occurred. I also had the impression that most of the social networking sites, including Facebook, were geared to the 20-and-under crowd — of which I have not been a member for decades! Then, I was invited to join by an NCGS member and decided to venture in.

It was quite reassuring to learn that you have complete control over how much (or little) information you share and with whom. For example, you control who can see your profile and personal information (including any photos or videos that you post), who can search for you, how you can be contacted, what stories

about you are published to your profile and to your friends' news feeds and what information is available to applications you use on Facebook.

I started out with only the basic information — my name, e-mail address and a few other details. Over time, as I have become more comfortable with the environment, I have provided more information about myself and my interests. And, by the nature of Facebook, you learn a lot about one another just by the applications you participate in,

genealogist, such as Family Builder; Caribbean Genealogy & History — Jamaica Family Search; UK Genealogy Search; The Scottish Clan Group; and the Lithuanian Global Genealogical Society to name just a few.

Many surname groups, both those associated with DNA projects and single-name groups, have a Facebook page. Some DNA test providers, such as Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation and Family Tree DNA, also have pages.

A number of genealogy con-



Though Facebook isn't geared specifically towards genealogists, there are thousands of groups and users who use the site to network with other researchers, connect with family and plan genealogy-related events.

and the comments and news users post.

Let's look at what Facebook has to offer genealogists.

RESOURCES

Some of the genealogy-related items that I am a "Fan" of include: Forensic Genealogy; JSTOR; The National Archives (UK); Cyndi's List and Dear Myrtle.

There are many others that would interest an Internet

researcher. You can use Facebook to keep up with the latest news about the conferences you're interested in.

Facebook isn't just for those who speak English! It has an extensive global focus. I have found genealogy-related pages in Turkish, Spanish, French and Egyptian, as well as English-language pages for non-English speaking countries.

This gives you an idea of the

presence that genealogy resources have on Facebook.

NETWORKING

Though I have mentioned all the great resources for genealogists, Facebook is, after all, a social networking website. This means that there are many ways to get to know your colleagues and friends better, in addition to your own family! By "friending" individuals such as Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak, Maureen Taylor (the photo detective), Dick Eastman (EOGN), Pat Richley (Dear Myrtle), Myra Vanderpool Gormley, Gary Mokotoff, Rhonda McClure and many other well-known experts, you get a real-time feel of what they are posting to their blogs or Facebook pages without having to go to their websites, or wait to receive the blog feed to your inbox. You can also ask them questions, or see

what others are asking.

I've found that I communicate more with my sisters via Facebook, and we actually see family photos more frequently than when we had to remember to mail or e-mail them to one another! By spending a few minutes every day on the site, I get caught up on news topics of interest to my family and friends, as well as getting news about the events or situations that are affecting those I know.

Obviously, there are many others like us (genealogists and family historians) who are using Facebook!

JUST FOR FUN

Though Facebook is a great tool, it's not just about helping us with our genealogy. There are fun applications — some support charitable causes and some are just for fun! You can become a

fan of a music group you like, a food you enjoy, a community group or cause that you identify with, sign a petition, be invited to an event, share an interesting article or book you just read, a news item and more.

CONCLUSION

Whether you're interested in advancing your genealogy research or just having some fun participating in a dynamic and active global community — do check out Facebook.



Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for more than 20 years. Even though she has used the Internet since newsgroup feeds, she has not necessarily embraced all that the new technology has to offer. She currently does professional research in North Carolina and she can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy

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