

It's Not On The 'Net: Now What?



DIANE L. RICHARD LOOKS AT WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU CAN'T FIND IT ONLINE

LET ME START BY stating that I always find that I cannot complete a research project solely by using the Internet — and believe me, I have tried! There is always a point where essential information and documents are only available via fax and/or snail mail and/or a personal visit. This is said by someone who has been doing genealogy and using the Internet since the advent of the World Wide Web — in fact, even before the Internet as we know it, I used newsgroups!

Since I have never lived anywhere near where my family originated or lived, I have always done my research remotely. Even now that I do genealogy research professionally, I continue to make extensive use of Internet-based resources. With the plethora of resources coming online, I am always looking for new ones and revisiting old ones (which are frequently updated with new information).

For all the information available online, there is still so much that is not yet available to the Internet genealogist! If that's the case, when is the right time to turn off the computer and reach for paper and pencil or your phone? Here are some signs that it is time to shift from Internet-based research to other more conventional avenues.

EXCELLENT LOCAL RESOURCES

The Sign — After visiting Linkpendium, www.linkpendium.com/genealogy/USA/, for your state or county, you realize that there is

a) very little listed, b) you have already checked out all that is listed, c) you still don't know anything about great-grandpa James and d) you learn that there is a local history library and/or genealogy society offering very affordable research services.

What — Many communities have a wonderful local history library and/or genealogy society that offers low cost or donation-based research services. These are frequently staffed by volunteers and are a delight to work with! Many of these local history libraries and/or genealogy societies have web pages that will tell you how much money (\$) to send and there is often a form you can fill out giving the details of what you need. And, the society frequently lists what resources it has available to it to perform the research. Some services that I have recently used and been satisfied with include:

- Hemet-San Jacinto Genealogical Society (CA), www.hsjgs.org/research.htm (\$)
- CCKG-HS (KS), <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/cherokee/society/cckghs.html> (\$)
- Cabell County Public Library (WV), <http://cabell.lib.wv.us/pages/depts.htm> (\$)
- Old Fort Scott Genealogical Society of Southeastern Kansas (KS), <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/society/ftscott/> (\$)
- Sno-Isle Genealogical Society (WA), <http://rootsweb.com/~wasigs/> (\$)

Of course, there are many

other research services provided by local genealogy, history and library societies, so do a little digging for what's available to you.

Why — 1. Many printed publications (books, journals, newsletters, newspapers, etc.) have been produced over the last three centuries, most of these have not been digitized and many of the indices have not been digitized. 2. Select documents have been digitized and are available for sale. Unless you believe that the publication would be a great addition to your personal library, you may not want the expense of purchasing it. 3. The local library/society can research this and many other local resources for the same or less cost. 4. Local knowledge of documents, trends, history, resources, etc., is invaluable. No matter how much I learn via the Internet or think I know of an area... someone local always knows about the "hidden" research gems.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

The Sign — You have reason to believe that a will was filed or that your family owned property or that a family member died (or was married) in the community. You may or may not have found the documents (through GenWeb

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archives, www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/, or similar local repositories) or indices available via the web for these events. You really want this information to learn who the heirs were or who property was transferred to or maybe it's the parents of a deceased individual or couple that you seek.

What — Though death (and marriage) certificates are typically also available at the state level (you may want to obtain them locally as often it is less expensive and quicker to do so), most probate and deeds transaction documents are only kept at the county level. Though many communities are expanding their offerings of indices for deeds and probate, you can typically only obtain the document by sending a check and a SASE. Typically you will send a check with a note indicating the limit that is payable. Some services that I have recently used and been very satisfied with include:

- Donna Spencer, Catawba County Register of Deeds (NC) — birth, marriage, death records: www.co.catawba.nc.us/depts/regdeed/ (\$)
- Sally Smith Howe, Court Clerk, Tulsa County (OK) — probate: www.courtclerk.tulsacounty.org/ (\$)
- Town of Oxford, Office of the Town Clerk (MA) — death certificates: www.town.oxford.ma.us/Town_Clerk.htm (\$)
- Lawrence County Public Library (KY) — marriage certificates: www.lawrencecountypubliclibrary.org/genealogyrequest.htm (\$)

And many other branches of local government (city or county) who have been most helpful.

Why — You have exhausted all means of obtaining these documents via the Internet and they are important to your research. These are probably the types

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of documents that you most likely will have to pay to obtain and most likely cannot use the Internet to do so. Once you identify the appropriate jurisdiction holding the documents, find out the contact information — frequently they will post any fees involved in

searching for and/or copying the requested document(s). Note: Many jurisdictions do charge a search fee and then a separate copying charge applies. Whether the document is found or not, you will still have to pay the search fee.

And, many documents are still kept at only the local level. As previously stated, sometimes, copies of the documents are kept at both the local and state level. In this case, you will typically find that you will pay less and have to wait less time if you request the record through the local authority.

OBITUARIES AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

The Sign — You have exhausted Ancestry.com's newspaper collection and/or the Godfrey Memorial Library, www.godfrey.org, newspaper access and/or ProQuest (via your local library or other portal) and/or the newspaper's own electronic archives (e.g. *New York Times*, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/nytimes/advancedsearch.html>, *Chicago Tribune*, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/chicagotribune/advancedsearch.html>, *The Newtown Bee* (CT), www.newtownbee.com/Search.asp) and/or a local libraries obituary index (e.g. St. Louis Public Library, www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/obit.htm, Duluth Obituaries, <http://dlibrary.cpinternet.com/scripts/runisa.dll?dlibrary:pgobitsearch>) and/or Online Searchable Death Indexes, Records & Obituaries, www.deathindexes.com, and/or any other source for this information. If you have reached this point and your target newspaper and/or obituaries are not online, this is the time to contact a local library and/or genealogy society.

What — Many local libraries (often at the county level) will have a history and/or genealogy section. Normally they are the best repository for the archives of local newspapers and often they will have a service where they can economically (or for free) provide the requested obituary. Sometimes they have created an index that you reference and other times you will be asked to provide a specific name and death date. Some services that I've recently used and been quite satisfied with include:

- Indiana Room, Anderson Public Library (IN), www.and.lib.in.us/indianaroom/ — various databases, including obituaries and then you can request a copy (usually no charge)
- Oakland Public Library (CA),

www.oaklandlibrary.org/RemoteRefFiles/form/familyhistory.html — various services, including obituaries (\$)

- St. Joseph County Public Library (IN), <http://sjcpl.lib.in.us/aboutsjcpl/departments/localhistory/localhistory.html> — South Bend Tribune Obituary Index and other databases and services (\$)
- Everett Public Library, Northwest Room (WA), www.epls.org/nw/ (there can be a charge)
- Contra Costa County Library, Obituary Request (CA), www.ccclib.org/ask/question/obit_form.html (Free)
- Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection (NY), www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/brooklyncollection/ (there can be a charge)

Why — 1. You really need a copy to learn about parents, marriages, children, locations, etc. and the newspaper of interest is not available digitally. 2. Newspapers are not typically something that is readily available through interlibrary loan or Family History Centers.

FUNERAL HOME RECORDS

The Sign — You have found where the individuals are buried and their tombstones tell you little. It's not clear if an obituary was published and you are having no success learning more about your research subjects. Even if there is an obituary published, you feel that it may be less than complete. Don't overlook the records of the funeral home involved!

What — If you can learn which funeral home, or if the community is small enough, get a list of all the funeral homes and make contact! Frequently, a "Google", www.google.com, or other search will reveal local funeral homes, their address and phone number (you can sometimes find an e-mail address or fax number). My experience is that most funeral homes do not have a web presence. And, local history and/or genealogy societies websites sometimes discuss funeral homes and their history. It's not uncommon for a funeral home from the early 1900s to have merged with another local funeral home and for the records to have survived. For example:

- Harford Funeral Home, Hemet (CA), www.dirmapsusa.com/hemet-sanjacinto/Hemet-SanJacintoDir2005.pdf. I used the Chamber of Commerce

Directory to obtain a fax number, as a Google search only gave me the address and phone number. I faxed them with a request and a week later, I received an envelope that was full of information!

- Evergreen Cemetery, Everett (WA), www.evergreenfuneralcemetery.com/template/three.asp?lid=2040&plid=&mid=21. I found their website easily, sent an e-mail and within a week, I received a fax with some great information and a second packet in the mail with further details and information!

Since it's fairly easy to get a death certificate or obituary, only in rare instances will I contact the funeral

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home. However, if the funeral home (or its records) still exists and I have made an inquiry, I've always been able to get some wonderful information.

Why — Funeral home records can be a goldmine of information. They tell you the details of the person, they also tell you where they are buried (and the details of those involved) and often include the contact information and relationship of the person whom they were dealing with. They also collect the information for the obituary and often note in which newspapers it was published.

Though the Internet is a wonderful resource for doing your genealogy research, sometimes what you want is not online and you'll need to use "old-fashioned" research techniques to obtain the information you need. So, don't be surprised if you have to turn off the computer for a bit and dig out those postage stamps — and, you may find that the pause in your research gives you some time to really think about your research! I have done some of my best problem solving while I wait for the mail! Or, I write some of my pieces for publication... as with paint drying, waiting for the mail always seems to go slower when you are "watching"!



Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for almost 20 years. She currently does professional research in NC and has never lived where any of her ancestors migrated from or to! So, she is very experienced with using the Internet (since its inception) to do research and she can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy

