



Letting the Genie out of the Bottle

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR LIBRARY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH
GENEALOGISTS

“Bring in the Genealogists”

- ▶ Genealogy ranks as the second most popular hobby in U.S.
- ▶ Approximately 73 percent of Americans report having an interest in learning more about their family history.
- ▶ Family historians have dramatically increased the number of requests for help and research materials at libraries and archives around the world.

--"Overview of Family History Research," *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy* (2013)

“You Don’t Want to See That”

- ▶ Unprepared researchers
- ▶ Exhaustive requests
- ▶ Requests near opening, during lunch, near closing

“You Don’t Want to See That”

- ▶ Chronic understaffing
- ▶ Acute understaffing
- ▶ Multi-tasking and double duty
- ▶ Inadequate and insufficient equipment and materials—deliberate and unintentional
- ▶ Insufficient acquisitions budget
- ▶ Outside of collection focus
- ▶ Intellectual superiority

Understanding Genealogists

- ▶ One of few examples in everyday life where information seeking requires intensive and extensive use of libraries and archives
- ▶ Genealogy is a broad based phenomenon
- ▶ Have their own social systems and networks to support their needs to seek, analyze and manage information
- ▶ Work includes preservation of information as well as collecting and managing
- ▶ Genealogists as likely to work around archival systems as to use them; they rely upon their own networks more than upon professional librarians and archivists

--Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, "Genealogists As a 'Community of Records'", *The American Archivist* (Spring-Summer 2007)

Stages of Genealogical Research

- ▶ Collect names of family members
- ▶ Gather detailed information about these family members
- ▶ Find out about the society

--Wendy M. Duff and Catherine A. Johnson, "Where Is the List with All the Names? Information-Seeking Behavior of Genealogists," *The American Archivist* (Spring-Summer 2003)

When Genealogy Becomes Family History

“Genealogists and local historians often cross the boundary that separates these two fields. The genealogist often pieces together the history of a particular place in order to situate his or her ancestor; the historian undertakes enormous genealogical labors in order to understand the precise chemistry of a chosen community.”

--Jefferson M. Moak , “Family Traces: Placing our Families in the Past,”
Pennsylvania Legacies (Nov. 2009)

Steps and Missteps

- ▶ Genealogists should first assess what they already know and what they have at home
- ▶ Genealogists should next reach out to immediate family, then extended family
- ▶ Genealogists should familiarize themselves with secondary sources as keys to primary sources
- ▶ Primary sources should provide core information
- ▶ Secondary sources provide bridges and context for primary sources

Mutual Appreciation and Support

“A Genealogy Researcher’s Positive Relationship with the Library Staff
Can Be Profitable on All Sides.”

--Dahl Elizabeth Moore in *The Librarian’s Genealogy Notebook: A
Guide to Resources*

Prepare Researchers

- ▶ Learn about genealogy methodology and have a circulating how-to collection on hand
- ▶ Take a beginning class in genealogy
- ▶ Have a core reference collection on hand for genealogists
- ▶ Learn about genealogical organizations and be able to refer patrons to them
- ▶ Explore genealogy Web sites and be able to refer researchers to them

.—Anne Billeter in “Why Don’t Librarians Like Genealogists? Beginning Genealogy for Librarians,” *OLA Quarterly* (July 2014)

Making Requests Less Exhausting

“Public libraries can provide context, anticipate questions, and make referrals for genealogical and local history researchers in their regions. We can perform the same service with our websites for individuals who may never visit our buildings. Libraries not only obtain and store information; we also find ways to get it to those who can use it.”

--Greta Bever in “Tombs among the Tomes” in *American Libraries* (Aug. 2003)

Timing Is Everything

- ▶ Place well-publicized limits on how close to opening, lunch, and closing that reference requests can be made.
- ▶ Be prepared to direct researchers to other avenues when these limits are in effect.
- ▶ Library cafes and guides to dining choices can alleviate demands during these times.
- ▶ At the closing rush, offer options for follow-up by Internet.

It's Not Them, It's You

- ▶ Make your users the priority
- ▶ Anticipate peak hours
- ▶ Create an all-hands-on-deck plan
- ▶ Enlist experienced family historians as volunteers

Lions and Tigers and Microfilm Readers, Oh My!

- ▶ If you use limits on equipment use, make them clear and realistic
- ▶ Never make patrons fend for themselves
- ▶ Be creative in deciding equipment use
- ▶ Engage genealogists in targeted fundraising for equipment and acquisitions

Seeing the Forest, Not Just the Trees

- ▶ Consider your mission and vision
- ▶ Reconsider your collection focus

Would You Recognize Your Benefactor?

“Many of them are well educated and a few are professional people. They include doctors, university professors, teachers, lawyers, homemakers, students, business people, farmers, ranchers, and laborers.”

--J. Carlyle Parker in “Becoming the Ideal Reference Librarian for Genealogy Patrons” in *RQ* (Winter 1983)

Would You Recognize Your Benefactor?

- ▶ Plug into the social systems and networks
- ▶ Include family historians and genealogists on committees and boards
- ▶ Don't just solicit money from them, include them in leading campaigns
- ▶ Don't cut off your nose

Questions, Comments, and
Otherwise...

