Genealogical Research, Ancestry.com, and Archives

by

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Abstract

Genealogy is one of the most popular leisure activities in the world. Until the 1990s, genealogical research was conducted either by visiting at or corresponding with physical repositories. The rise of the Internet, particularly the growing popularity of Ancestry.com, challenges archival institutions' role as a main research location. To discover how much Ancestry.com has affected genealogical research and archives, this study includes a survey of genealogical researchers at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Although the survey yielded useful information, the results cannot be considered as representative of genealogists as a group because of the limited number of participants (thirty) and the administration of the survey at only one location. Instead, the survey serves as a pilot project to promote further study of Ancestry.com. The survey showed that most of the participants use Ancestry.com, yet relatively few have subscriptions to the Web site. Instead they use the free access available at the archives. Participants like Ancestry.com's ease of use, speed, and access to numerous records. They consider the site another tool to help them in their genealogical research, a tool that will not replace their need to research at physical repositories. Survey participants continue to visit archival repositories to receive help from staff and to access original records and records not available online. Thus, while Ancestry.com has made genealogical research easier, it has not replaced the need to visit archives for the participants in the survey.

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List of Abbreviations

ADAH   Alabama Department of Archives and History

GEDCOM   Genealogical Data Communication (see note seven for a definition)

LDS   The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as Mormons)

NARA   National Archives and Records Administration

SSDI   Social Security Death Index

SAA   Society of American Archivists

SARC   Southeastern Archives and Records Conference

TGN   The Generations Network (former name of Ancestry.com)

Chapter 1: History of Genealogical Research

Genealogical research in the United States, like numerous American pastimes, has its origins in Western Europe. The tracing of genealogical lineages in Western Europe dates back, at least, to St. Matthew's gospel which was first written in Greek.[1] From the time of St. Matthew in the first century until the sixteenth century, genealogy was primarily a tool of the aristocracy, used to prove one's membership in noble or royal families and, thus, to affirm their entitlement to power and wealth. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the beginnings of "modern scientific genealogy," which required genealogies to be supported by documentary evidence and written down, not just repeated orally. The impetus on written proof resulted from economic and social factors of the times. The two centuries were rife with "economic instabilities and demographic crises" including the rise of new families to the nobility who sought to connect themselves to established families and the disappearance of many well-established lines. Coincidental with this instability was increased interest in literacy and history, which also contributed to the rise in genealogy's popularity.[2]

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[1] Matthew 1: 1—17 NIV (New International Version). Although genealogies can be found throughout the Old Testament, genealogists, such as William Roskey, trace genealogy's beginning to the New Testament. The reason for this apparent discrepancy is "[t]he word [genealogy] itself comes from two Greek words meaning birth and study, and . . . [in the New Testament] it appears in the original Greek. See William Roskey, "History for Genealogists." In How to Trace Your Family Tree: A Complete and Easy to Understand Guide for the Beginner. Ed. American Genealogical Research Institute Staff, 7—14. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975 for more on this topic.

[2] American Genealogical Research Institute Staff. *How to Trace Your Family Tree: A Complete and Easy to Understand Guide for the Beginner* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 2-3 and Hannah Little, "Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever: Coming Home to Scottish Archives," *Archivaria* 64 (2007), 91.

The rise in literacy rates also contributed to the shift from oral to written genealogies. Until the twelfth century, genealogical information was transmitted orally, with the genealogy recorded in the *Bible* being an exception. As the population—beginning with royalty and the upper classes that were genealogy's main practitioners—became more literate, reliance on oral transmission of information gave way to recordkeeping. The change from oral to written records, including genealogies, was a gradual development that was not firmly established until four centuries later and its progress varied geographically and by record type.[3]

Unlike their European relations, early settlers in the thirteen colonies did not spend much time, if any, tracing their ancestors. Given that they were trying to settle the New World they likely lacked the time and resources to pursue genealogical research. It was not until the 1700s that a few published genealogies appeared in the colonies. These early works included 1731's *Memoirs of Roger Clap*, a 1763 Bollinger broadside, and Luke Stebbins's *The Genealogy of Mr. Samuel Stebbins and Hannah, his wife* published in 1771. Stebbins's work is considered by some to the first major American genealogical work. Like most early genealogists, Stebbins was interested in solely the lines of direct descent—brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles were not included.[4]

Despite these early examples of American genealogical activity, genealogy was not a popular pursuit of the new nation's citizens or, at least, not one pursued in public. The American Revolution and the resulting independence of the United States had a significant

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[3] M. T. Clanchy. *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066—1307,* 2nd ed. (Padstow, Cornwall: T. J. Press Ltd., 1993), 68 provides just one example of the transition from orality to literacy. Little, "Archive Fever," 91.

[4] Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age:' History's New Frontier," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly Centennial Issue* 91 (2003), 262.

effect on how Americans viewed nobility, royalty, and their connections to Europe. The new

nation's focus was the establishment of a self-supporting, self-governing nation whose

leaders' rise to power was not based on wealth and family connections, but on ability. Thus,

the need to prove one's familial relationships was, at least in theory, moot. In fact, an

interest in one's family came to be seen as Old World snobbery and anti-American. Despite

the unpopularity of genealogy, a few ancestral organizations did form in the decades

following independence. American and French veterans of the American Revolution formed

the Society of the Cincinnati in 1783 "to preserve the rights and liberties for which they had

fought and to foster the bonds of friendship that had been formed among them during the

long years of war." Because future membership in the organization would be limited to the

descendants of American and French military officers who had fought in the war, the public

feared that the organization's founders were trying to establish themselves as the leaders of

the new nation. The public's fears caused those who were interested in their ancestors,

including George Washington who served as president of the Society of the Cincinnati from

1783 until his death, to publicly denounce genealogy while privately researching their

families' roots. As the United States became more established as a nation, the fears of

elitism and disdain for genealogy abated, allowing those who privately pursued their

ancestors' past to publicly research, discuss, and publish their findings. For most of the

nineteenth century, genealogy was an acceptable pastime, but not widely practiced.[5]

      Genealogy witnessed its first dramatic increase in popularity in the late 1800s, an

increase that, not surprisingly, coincided with the nation's centennial in 1876. Americans

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[5] Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age,'" 262; The Society of the Cincinnati, "History of the Society of the Cincinnati," The Society of Cincinnati, www.societyofthecincinnati.org/history.htm; Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age,'" 262; and Society of the Cincinnati, "History."

took great pride in tracing their roots back to ancestors who had come to Jamestown, landed

at Plymouth Rock, and fought in the American Revolution. Organizations such as the

Daughters of the American Revolution (1890) and the Mayflower Society (1897) were

founded in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In addition to the centennial, the

United States experienced a rise in nativism which resulted from the large waves of

immigrants who came to United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Many of the new arrivals were from countries in southern and Eastern Europe, places whose

people were considered inferior by the majority of Americans who were of northern and

western European descent. Consequently, many Americans wanted to prove that not only

had their families been in the United States since its founding, if not earlier, but they also that

their ancestors where from locations they considered more respectable, such as northern and

western Europe.[6]

The increased interest in genealogy during the latter half of the nineteenth century

was evident by growing number of published family histories that appeared, a trend that has

continued to be popular ever since. These early publications contained little information on

the people listed. Aside from basic information such as dates and places of birth, marriage,

and death, the only other information routinely given about ancestors were men's military

and political accomplishments. If a male ancestor was not a soldier or politician, his

profession most likely was not given. Women received even less attention.[7] As there were

no standards for proving or recording genealogy, these early forays into published

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[6] The General Society of Mayflower Descendants, "The Mayflower Society," The General Society of Mayflower Descendants, www.themayflowersociety.com; Daughters of the American Revolution, "DAR," Daughters of the American Revolution, www.dar.org.
[7] Patrick Cadell, "Building on the Past, Investing in the Future through Genealogy and Local History Services" (paper presented at the 68th IFLA Council and General Conference, Glasgow, Scotland, August 18—24, 2002), www.ifla.org/iv/ifla68/papers/165-137e.pdf.

genealogies were subject to errors and contain little, if any, citations.[8] Patriotic

organizations, such as the Mayflower Society and DAR, were less rigorous in requirements

for membership than they are today. For example, in the DAR's early years, those who

wanted to become members only had to provide basic information on each ancestor between

the applicant and the Revolutionary War soldier.[9]

Despite the lack of citations in published genealogies and no requirement of proof of

ancestry for patriotic societies, some organization began to actively collect documents. The

most well-known of these organizations was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

(LDS), most commonly known as the Mormon Church, which began to collect and make

available records in 1894. The Mormon's focus on genealogy "is in part explained by the

dogmas of the faith: as part of their creed, Mormons are required to keep a complete and

accurate record of their immediate family and to trace their direct line of ancestry as far back

as possible."[10] The LDS Library has grown to become one of the largest repositories of

genealogical records in the world. The basis for the Mormon Church's interest in genealogy

rests in its doctrine "that a descendant can retroactively secure salvation for an ancestor, even

if that ancestor was not a church member. Church members have an obligation to determine

the identities of their ancestors so that the 'sealing' rite can be performed."[11]

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[8] According to Laura Prescott, not all early genealogies contained errors and, thus, once their accuracy is proven, they provide valuable research to today's genealogists. Some genealogists also use the flawed genealogies as guides, realizing that the people who wrote them were closer in time or contemporaries to the ancestors today's genealogists are looking for. Laura Prescott, "The Evolution of Published Genealogies." *Ancestry Magazine* (2004), www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=9271.
[9] Today, DAR requires documented proof, preferably at least two separate records for as many ancestors as possible, of direct descent from a Revolutionary War solider. Because so many of the early members did not have to prove their claim, some have turned out to be false. This has resulted in members being removed from the organization later, in some cases generations later, when records show that their unproven claims were false.
[10] American Genealogical Research Institute, *How to Trace Your Family Tree,* 159.
[11] Aprille Cooke McKay, "Genealogists and Records: Preservation, Advocacy, and Politics," *Archival Issues* 27 (2002), 26.

The rise in genealogy's popularity in the late nineteenth century led to calls for standardization in the early twentieth century. The calls did not go unheeded for long. By the 1920s and 1930s, the shift from ad hoc to established practice had begun. Leading genealogists wanted to make their pastime more scientific and scholarly. In the 1920s, one of the first attempts to make genealogy more academic was to strongly recommend source citations. This was due, in part, to the lack of citations in published genealogies which made it difficult for other genealogists, particularly those of later times, to locate the original documents and to verify details. Leading genealogists of the time also began advising their peers to use multiple documents to support their work. In addition to citation and documentation, these two decades saw the establishment of other standards of practice such as the use of wills and deeds as documentary sources. It was during this time as well that genealogists began to look outside their families and started to learn about the communities in which they resided to find out more about their ancestors' lives. These new approaches to genealogical research—citation, multiple documentation, and looking at the larger historical picture—did not catch on immediately. In fact, not all genealogists employ them today. Nevertheless, the move towards standardization in genealogical practice began to turn the hobby into a more academic pursuit.[12]

As genealogy became more standardized, its popularity continued to increase. Like the post–Civil War period, the two decades following World War II witnessed a surge in genealogy activity. This period witnessed the establishment of four major genealogical institutions: the American Society of Genealogists (1940), the National Institute for Genealogical Research (1950), Samford University's Institute of Genealogical and Historical

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[12] Prescott, "Evolution of Published Genealogies."

Research (1964), and the Board of Certification of Genealogists (1964). One objective of the founders of these organizations was to "forge standards for sound family research" a goal which continued the move towards standardization begun in the 1920s. The need for standards resulted from a growing disdain of historians, librarians, and archivists who viewed genealogy as nonscholarly, error-filled works of family pride.[13]

The postwar period also witnessed the rise of social history, a historiographical movement, which influenced genealogical research in that, for the first time, American genealogists began to realize that all their ancestors, not just the rich and famous, had value. While researchers continued to rejoice in discovering a Revolutionary soldier in their family, they saw "that family pride is as much the birthright of the poor and oppressed as that of the upper crust." The contempt that previous generations of American genealogists held towards non-western European ancestors began to disappear as nativism fell out of favor and the horrors of the Holocaust and World War II changed perceptions towards other races. The rise in social history also meant that, for the first time, academic historians and allied professionals, such as sociologists and demographers, had an interest in the records valued by genealogists. Academics studying human migration began examining records showing population movements over periods of time including census and immigration records. Women's and minorities' studies led historians to value diaries and oral histories because these groups are harder to locate in traditional record sources.[14]

One of the major inspirations in the shift from the quest for only famous ancestors to search for all forbears was the publication of Alex Haley's novel *Roots* in 1977. Many

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[13] Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age,'" 265 and Sheila O'Hare, "Genealogy and History," *Common Pl*ace 2 no. 3 (2002), www.common-place.org/vol-02/no-03/ohare.
[14] Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age,'" 265-66.

archivists, including Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres, and genealogists, including

Elizabeth Shown Mills, credit the novel and the resulting miniseries with not only the

celebration of all ancestors, even the ordinary, but contributing to the surge in genealogical

interest as a whole in the last quarter of the twentieth century.[15] *Roots* traced Alex Haley's

family's story for seven generations, beginning with Kunta Kinte, who was born free in

Gambia in 1750, kidnapped, and brought to America as a slave in 1767, and ending with

Haley himself. The work tells of the experiences of the different generations and offers a

perspective on the American experience that had largely been ignored, that of slaves and

freedmen in the years immediately following emancipation. The stories and experiences

passed down orally through the generations helped to shape who Haley became. His readers

saw that their families were similar in that every generation influences its successors

somehow. Thus, they realized that they needed to learn about all their ancestors, not just the

famous, to more fully understand their families' story; as a result, genealogists began to seek

out all their ancestors. *Roots*' influence on genealogists continued despite accusations of

plagiarism and fictionalization, to which Haley did admit. In the narrative, Haley admitted

that, although he did use documentation to support the family's oral history, "most of the

dialogue and most of the incidents are of necessity a novelization of what I *know* took place

together with what my researching led me to plausibly *feel* took place." Coincidently, the

publication of *Roots* occurred during the nation's bicentennial celebration. As with the

centennial, the bicentennial caused Americans to look more closely at who they are and

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[15] Elizabeth Yakel and Deboarh A. Torres, "Genealogists as a 'Community of Records,'" *American Archivist* 70 (2007), 93; Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age,'" 266' and O'Hare, "Genealogy and History."

where they came from.[16] Thus, together with the move away from nativism, the horrors of

Nazism, and the rise of social history, the bicentennial and the publication and miniseries

adaptation of *Roots* led to a surge in genealogy's popularity and an increased interest in

knowing one's whole family background.

Roots drew a substantial portion of its readers from the baby boom generation, a

demographic group, that today accounts for a large portion of genealogists.[17] Baby boomers,

like all genealogists, get involved in genealogy for reasons that vary from person to person.

Some genealogists research their family roots to reconnect with their past and preserve the

stories and traditions of their family. Others get involved with genealogy to obtain

information of importance for medical needs, for financial reasons such as inheriting estates

and winning scholarships limited to specific groups, or to obtain "a sense of continuity and

belonging." Other genealogists become hooked because they "get a charge out of the

detective-like work that goes into discovering the next generation back."[18] The growth and

availability of the Internet has contributed to the rise in popularity of genealogy by making it

easier and faster to conduct research using e-mail, message boards, online records, and Web

sites. According to *American Demographics*, "[i]n 1995, some 113 million adults in the

United States . . . were at least somewhat interested in family history. This makes genealogy

one of America's most popular avocations. And remember these statistics were gathered

before the Internet found its way into many American homes. Internet access has increased

the popularity of genealogy as the 'mildly curious' now have a convenient place to start

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[16] Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age,'" 266 and Alex Haley, *Roots* The 30th Anniversary Edition (Los Angeles: The Roots Venture, 2007), 884-85.

[17] Mark Howells, "The Changing Face of Genealogy," *Ancestry Magazine* (1999), learn.ancestry.com/LearnMore/Article.aspx?id=81.

[18] Elizabeth Powell Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003),

looking."[19] The Internet's effect on genealogy's popularity became apparent when it was the cover story for the April 19, 1999, of *Time*. The cover of the magazine showed a family tree with a search button and told readers "Genealogy is America's latest obsession. And thanks to the computer, it's as easy as one, two . . . tree!"[20] Accord to the *Time* article, genealogy had become one of the most researched topics on the Web.[21] With baby boomers reaching retirement age, interest in genealogy will only increase. Genealogical research is also a multicultural phenomenon that has rapidly increased in popularity since the 1960s and 1970s.[22]

Pre-Internet Genealogical Research

Prior to the advent and, later, explosion of the Internet, genealogical research was restricted by physical location and time. When genealogists wanted to research records at distant repositories their options were limited to traveling to the location, hiring a local professional genealogist, or using interlibrary loan services to obtain copies or microfilm of the desired records. Those who chose to personally visit the archives were advised to examine all possible pertinent records during their research trip. However, genealogical research builds on all previous research and, thus, it is impossible to know what records will be valuable to future research. Genealogists also collaborated with each other and archivists through letters and by sending queries to genealogical publications. Not only was this a slow, tedious process, there was also no guarantee that anyone would respond or that the genealogists would find information obtained useful. In the latter part of the twentieth

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[19] Howells, "Changing Face."
[20] Cover, *Time*, 19 April 1999, www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19990419,00.html.
[21] Dick Eastman, "What's in the Future for Genealogy?" *Ancestry Magazine* (2002), www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=6826.
[22] Mark Howells, "Changing Face."

century, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gave genealogical research a boost

by expanding its main library in Salt Lake City and making microfilmed copies of its records

available at numerous regional Family History Centers.[23] These centers reduced, but did not

eliminate, the need for genealogists to travel to distant repositories in search of records.

Computer Technology

Genealogical software and data CDs set genealogists on the path of adapting

traditional genealogical practices to computers. Genealogical software first appeared on the

market in 1979 and the first CDs containing genealogical data sold in 1990. These

technological innovations did not revolutionize genealogical recordkeeping or research, but

they did make them easier. The software provided a simple way to build family trees and

keep track of research notes in one place. Searchable CDs meant genealogists could spend

less time manually locating records during a repository's limited hours of operation. CDs

also proved less cumbersome to use than microfilm readers, the traditional way genealogists

viewed census and other government records. One downside was, as with paper records,

genealogists could not always ascertain if a CD would contain records pertaining to the

specific individuals they sought. Because early CDs cost between twenty and thirty dollars,

some genealogists were understandably hesitant to spend money on something that might not

contain what they needed.[24]

The Internet

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[23] Don Devine, "Making the Most of Your Research Trip," *Ancestry Magazine* (2003),
www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=7201; Morgan, *The Official Guide*, XVII; and Eastman,
"Future for Genealogy."

[24] Eastman, "Future for Genealogy;" John Phillip Colletta, "Technology's Impact on Immigrant Records,"
Ancestry Magazine (2001), www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=5079; Mark Howells,
"Changing Face;" and Eastman, "Future for Genealogy."

When the Internet began to become commonplace in homes in the early 1990s, genealogists quickly saw it as a tool that could help them in their research. In the early days of the Internet, genealogists used bulletin boards and genealogical services available via their online service providers, such as Prodigy. Because these companies were platform dependent, genealogists could only access the services of their online service providers and communicate with fellow genealogists who subscribed to the same provider. Hence Prodigy's users were limited to only those genealogical tools offered through Prodigy and could only collaborate with fellow Prodigy subscribers. There was no way for them to obtain access to America Online's databases or communicate with its members. These early forays into Internet genealogical research were further limited by the text-based technology of the time, which made it impossible to view digital facsimiles of records.[25] Only textual transcriptions of records existed, raising questions of authenticity and the possibility of transcription errors. A change came when the Internet powerhouse of the early 1990s, America Online, introduced Genealogy Forum which offered many of the features now available through the Internet, such as chats and the ability to post and download GEDCOM[26] files. The appearance of the Internet browser Netscape in the mid-1990s helped pave the way for the Internet revolution from which today's online genealogical researchers benefit. The new browser aided genealogical research in that it provided enhanced support for graphics, allowing the capacity for viewing facsimile images of records. Not surprisingly genealogists rejoiced with this new innovation as facsimiles of records were an improvement

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[25] Morgan, *Official Guide*, XVII.

[26] GEDCOM stands for Genealogical Data Communication. According to Elizabeth Powell Crowe, "GEDCOM is a defined, specific structure for a file of genealogical data. The file format is a standard ASCII text file, so it can be read by or written to virtually any computer and/or any genealogical program." Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 314 and 316.

over transcriptions. Netscape also revolutionized Web browsing. Prior to Netscape, accessing Web sites required typing in series of commands, a process which baffled those not technogically-savvy. Users of Netscape "only had to type in a site's server address to view it—no master list of commands was needed." Thus, the Internet became more user-friendly and its use skyrocketed. As the speed and bandwidth of the public's access to the Internet improved, more documents were scanned and placed online. Additionally, the growth of e-mail as a means of communication allowed genealogists easier access to repository staff and to other researchers. Coupled with a rise in overall popularity, it is of no surprise that genealogical research became a favorite Internet pastime.[27]

The Internet allowed genealogists to connect with one another in ways the analog world could not, making it a popular medium for collaboration. The speed and accessibility of the Internet meant that genealogists no longer had to wait weeks or even months to receive replies to query letters sent to repositories or requests for information placed in genealogical publications. E-mail and message boards replaced letters and magazine queries as the dominant forms of genealogical communication.[28] Although the turn-around time and delivery methods changed, the protocol did not. Message board posts followed the same format of traditional written queries. Both written and electronic queries were quick to the point and contained only pertinent information. This briefness resulted from the media used. The longer a query in a genealogical magazine, the more it cost. Internet queries are short because online users want information instantaneously and are not willing to muddle through long-winded posts.

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[27] Beth Bartlett, "The History of Netscape Navigator," eHow, www. Ehow/about_5402065_history_netscape_navigator.html and Morgan, *Official Guide*, XVII−XVIII.
[28] Eastman, "Future for Genealogy."

The Internet also helps genealogists locate obscure records and information. With the exception of their descendents and perhaps social historians, few, if any, are curious about how many children William and Jane Elliott had or their life experiences. In the pre-Internet world, their descendants might find it difficult to obtain information about the couple. On the Internet, however, researchers can use message boards, databases, and e-mail to track down distant relatives who have information, either through their own or previous generations' research and stories that have been passed down. This ability to connect helps genealogical researchers overcome the dead ends they all encounter at some point in their research.[29]

Online service providers were not the only organizations placing genealogical research tools on the Internet during the 1990s. In the latter part of the decade, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints launched its Web site FamilySearch.com (now.org). This free Web site allowed researchers to search for their ancestors in the 1880 United States federal census and the Social Security Death Index (SSDI)[30] and to submit GEDCOM files to FamilySearch.com. Government archives also began posting some of their records online. In a study conducted in 1997, Christopher Barth "found that the digital environment was having a considerable impact on genealogical research, and he suggested that archives . . . digitize more collections."[31] In addition, many also posted finding aids, card catalogs, and other information about their collections. In 1999, Kristin Martin conducted a survey at the

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[29] McKay, "Genealogists and Records," 26 and Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, XX.
[30] According to George Morgan, "[t]he Social Security Death Index (SSDI) is a database that contains the names of deceased persons who applied for and were assigned Social Security numbers and whose deaths were reported to the Social Security Administration (SSA). These records usually include a full name, birth and death dates, and last known residence." Morgan, *Official Guide*, 117. Although Social Security records are relatively new in comparison with other government records, such as censuses, they can be invaluable to people whose family lines do not trace far back. As time progresses, their value will continue to grow.
[31] Wendy Duff and Catherine A. Johnson, "Where is the List with All the Names? Information-Seeking Behavior of Genealogists," *American Archivist* 66 (2003), 81.

University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill., specifically studying the e-mail requests submitted to archivists at the Southern Historical Collection and General and Literary Manuscripts repository. Martin compared requests submitted in 1995 with those submitted in 1999. Her examination showed the effects of the repositories posting information about their collections on the Internet. According to Martin, the requests became more specific after the repository posted its collections' finding aids online as "remote users . . . refined[d] their search before contacting the archives."[32] Although narrow in scope, this study demonstrate that, when given the opportunity, researchers will use the Internet to prepare themselves before embarking on a research trip, thus saving themselves time and frustration by knowing what is available before leaving home. Genealogists planning research trips were further aided when archives began posting their hours, research room rules, and driving directions.

In addition to the Mormons and repositories placing the copies of the records in their holdings online, genealogical societies and individual genealogists created Web sites containing queries, tools, tips, and information. These Web sites address a wide variety of genealogical foci including surname, patriotic societies, ethnicities, and geographical regions. Surname Web sites tend to be owned and operated by individual genealogists and include information based solely on their families. The amount of information varies widely from site to site, from some having just their direct lineages to those that include generations of families and all their descendants. For instance, the Parker Family Tree (see www.parkerfamilytree.net/nameindex.asp) includes information on multiple Parker lineages and includes siblings and some information on specific people. Patriotic groups with a Web

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[32] Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, XXI and Kristin E Martin, "Analysis of Remote Reference Correspondence at a Large Academic Manuscripts Collection," *American Archivist* 64, (2001), 39.

presence include The Mayflower Society (see www.themayflowersociety.com) and the

Daughters of the American Revolution (see www.dar.org), to name two. Web sites devoted

to ethnic groups are extremely valuable to those whose ancestors were either from persecuted

minority groups, such as African Americans and Native Americans, or groups that constitute

a very small minority, such as Estonian Americans. The USGenWeb Project (see

www.usgenweb.org) is a leading example of geographically focused genealogy Web sites.

The Web site is broken into state pages and from there into county ones. It is run entirely by

volunteers and is available at no cost. Because each county's page is maintained by a

separate administrator and exists separately from other counties' pages, the types of records

and degree of sophistication vary amongst the various counties. County Web sites of the

USGenWeb Project include a wide variety of material, including, for example, lists of

sheriffs, histories, atlases, church and cemetery listings, tombstone inscriptions, tax records,

and census data. Web sites of all varieties appear on the popular Cyndi's List (see

www.cyndislist.com) which has links to hundreds of genealogy Web sites, as well as tips and

advice to genealogists.[33]

Finally, several for-profit companies have created and maintain Web sites that

provide resources to genealogists. Many of these companies formed before the Internet was

widely available to the public and have since established a Web presence to reach more

consumers. One such company is Lineages founded in 1983. The company's founder, Johni

Cerney, used her own money to start the company because she could not obtain a loan to start

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[33] ParkerFamilyTree Net, *Parker Family Tree* Parker Family Tree, www.parkerfamilytree.net;
USGenWeb.Project Team, *USGenWeb Project*, USGenWeb Project, www.usgenweb.org; The Florida
GenWebProject, Monroe County, Florida, *Welcome to Monroe County, Florida*, FLGenWeb Project,
beyreuth.net/flmonroe/index.html; and The ALGenWeb Project, *The ALGenWeb Project Montgomery County,
Alabama*, The ALGenWeb Project, www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~almontgo.

a genealogy business back when interest in genealogy was just starting to expand. Fourteen

years later, the company had earned over $1 million and employed twenty-one researchers.

Like many genealogy companies, Lineages is based in Utah with its high concentration of

Mormons. The company does genealogical research for its clients. Specific types of

research include Native American (to help people prove ancestry for tribal membership),

probate and heir research, general records research, African American genealogy, and slave

research. The Web site has useful information for researchers such as addresses of library

and archives, tips for beginning genealogists, and information on certain types of records

such as ones related to Cherokee Indians. An even older company is Everton located in

Logan, Utah. Founded in the 1940s as a publication company, Everton is still in the process

of transitioning to the Internet. Genealogists who want access to its library with its records,

books, and maps must still travel to Logan to view them. However, that will soon change

once the material is placed onto the company's Web site (see www.everton.com). Currently

the Web site offers a store which sells census records, how-to genealogy guides, and

subscriptions to *Everton's Genealogical Helper*, and a few other useful genealogy tools.[34]

Two other popular genealogy subscription companies are Heritage Quest and

GenealogyBank.com. Heritage Quest is part of ProQuest and provides records including the

federal census, Revolutionary War pensions and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications, and

Freedman's Bank records.[35] The Web site also has a searchable book sections which allows

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[34] Lineages Inc., *Genealogical Services and Products*, Lineages, www.lineages.com; Joel Campbell,
"Genealogy Business Booms as Boomers Seek Out Roots," *Desert News* (1997),
archive.deseretnews.com/archive/print/553060/Genealogy-business-booms-as-boomers-seek-out-roots.html;
and Everton Publishers, *Everton Publishers*, Everton Publishers, www.everton.com.
[35] ProQuest, *Heritage Quest*, www.heritagequest.com/en-US/products/brands/pl_hq.shtml.

subscribers to search "over 26,000 family and local histories."[36] Like Heritage Quest,

GenealogyBank.com also contains military records and books with genealogical value,

however the Web site also has an extensive collection of newspapers, both historical and

current, which allows genealogists to not only search for their ancestors by name but to

discover the events they experienced.[37]

There are countless other genealogy companies with an online presence, and they

vary vastly in material provided and online sophistication. One thing they all have in

common is that they must compete against Ancestry.com, which is by far the largest, most

well-known, and most used online genealogy resources. The following chapter will detail

the company's history and popularity.

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[36] Heritage Quest Online, www.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/index.
[37] GenealogyBank.com, www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/information/about_us.html.

Chapter 2: Ancestry.com

Launched in 1996, Ancestry.com was one of the earliest Web sites devoted solely to genealogy. In its thirteen years of existence, Ancestry.com has grown exponentially and is now the largest of its kind. Countless genealogists have used it at some point in their research.[38]

History of Ancestry.com

Ancestry.com's roots date back to the early 1980s, before the Internet found its way into homes and archives. Originally called Ancestry, Inc., the company was founded by John Sittner, Robert Shaw, and W. Rex Sittner in February 1983 and, at the time, focused on publishing genealogical magazines and reference books. While Ancestry, Inc. was not the first publishing company to concentrate on genealogy, its founders took a different approach from the other companies. Instead of having professional genealogists and archivists as its targeted audience, Ancestry, Inc. honed in on amateur genealogists. The company's first publication, *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy* (1984), reflected its focus. The book covered a wide range of topics that amateur genealogists needed to know about to conduct effective research, such as the different types of records and how to use them. Following the guidebook's publication, Ancestry, Inc. devoted its money and staff to the development of a bi-monthly newsletter. *Ancestry Newsletter*'s first edition contained the humble beginnings of the research side of what later became Ancestry.com. Advertisements

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[38] Chad Milliner, "A History of Ancestry, Inc.," *Crossroads* (2008), 195 and Morgan, *Official Guide*, XVIII.

in the newsletter informed readers that, for one hundred dollars, Ancestry, Inc.'s staff would

research a subscriber's ancestor. Early on the company also showed an interest in the use of

computer technology in genealogical research and recordkeeping. This interest was evident

in the publication of *Computer Genealogy* (1985), a book devoted to the topic of

computerized family trees. In addition, between 1986 and 2006, the company published

Genealogical Computing, a journal focused on computer technology and genealogy.[39]

Between its books and magazines, Ancestry, Inc. began to attract attention amongst all levels

of genealogists.

As the Internet began to appear in homes in the late 1980s, Ancestry, Inc.'s founders

realized the vast potential of having an online presence. The Internet of 1990 was very

different from today's Web. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the online service

providers of the time were proprietary. Despite the limitations of platform-dependent online

service providers, the founders of Ancestry, Inc. wanted to harness the Internet's potential by

making the company's genealogy databases available to the subscribers of the various online

service providers. In 1990, co-founder John Sittner approached Prodigy. Not only was

Prodigy his personal provider, but the company had recently changed to a monthly

subscription rate, unlike other companies which continued to charge based on time spent

online. Thus, genealogists using Ancestry's databases on Prodigy would not feel the

pressure of time limits, a feeling they often experienced at physical repositories. Ancestry,

Inc. and Prodigy quickly reached an agreement. Nevertheless, before the databases could be

made available on Prodigy, they had to be converted to media formats compatible with the

Prodigy's system. After conversion, Ancestry's databases debuted on Prodigy in 1992. Due

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[39] Morgan, *Official Guide*, 231 and Milliner, "History of Ancestry," 190−2.

to the technological limitations of the time, only texts of original records (rather than facsimile images) were available and they were slow to download. Fortunately, advances in technology eventually rectified the situation, allowing for digital images of documents to be downloaded. In addition to hosting Ancestry, Inc.'s databases, Prodigy also permitted the company to have an online store which sold books and other services. Following the agreement with Prodigy, Ancestry, Inc. negotiated similar deals with other online service providers, such as CompuServe. Thus, what would become Ancestry.com had an early presence on the Internet and gained even more attention from genealogists, many of whom had embraced the Internet early.[40]

In 1995, the Netscape browser revolutionized the Internet and Ancestry, Inc. quickly recognized the potential of the World Wide Web. Netscape, the first Internet browser, was created in 1993 in the academic world. Initially called Mosaic and introduced to the public in 1995, the browser changed the Internet by allowing people "to access each image or piece of data or media. . .[without] hav[ing] to open a new file or window." This made viewing Web sites much easier and quicker and, as a result, the number of people online and the number of Web sites grew exponentially. Just months after Netscape went public, in December 1995, Ancestry, Inc. registered the domain name "Ancestry.com," and its Web site was launched late the following year. The five databases it offered at the time, including the popular Social Security Death Index, were free.[41]

Since its debut thirteen years ago, Ancestry.com has evolved and expanded. In 2002, the Web site had 3,000 indexed databases available to researchers. Two years later, the

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[40] Milliner, "History of Ancestry," 192-5.
[41] Robert Hobbes Zakon, Hobbes' Internet Timeline v.8.2, Zakon Group LLC, www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/#1990s and Milliner, "History of Ancestry," 195.

company had over one and a half million subscribers, approximately one tenth of all

American online genealogical researchers. In addition, over ten million visited the Web site

each month. In 2005, the company enhanced its Web site to aid subscribers. Some of the

Web site's new features included a tab to track recent activity, which allowed users to

quickly resume their searches from previous sessions and a more streamlined community

connections tab which made it easier to collaborate with other genealogists. The company

also continued to add databases. In 2008, Ancestry.com had 25,000 databases, though not all

were indexed.[42] That number is expected to rise as Ancestry.com has reached digitization

agreements with various government archives, including the National Archives and Records

Administration, and several genealogical organizations, such as the New England Historic

Genealogical Society, in the past two years. In addition, in June 2008, Ancestry.com and the

LDS site FamilySearch.org reached an agreement that will improve the quality of scans and

indices on both organizations' Web sites. FamilySearch.org will give Ancestry.com its

census images to replace those on the latter's Web site that are of poor quality. The two

companies will also combine their census indices, allowing for names that are spelled

differently on the two Web sites to have both spellings available to researchers in one index.

For instance, if Ancestry.com lists a person as Robert Games in its 1920 census index and

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[42] Diane Kovacs, *Genealogical Research on the Web* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers,
Inc., 2002), 60; Ancestry.com, "MyFamily.com, Inc. Exceeds 1.5 Million Paid Subscribers," *PRNewswire*,
January 12, 2004, tgn.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=17&printable; Ancestry.com, "MyFamily.com,
Inc. Dynamic Redesign Invigorates Ancestry.com," *PRNewswire*, September 7, 2005
tgn.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=52&printable; and Media.Ford.com, *Ford Partners with NBC News
for World Premiere of "Meeting David Wilson" and a 90-Minute Live Discussion on Race Relations Kicks Off
Promotion with Ancestry.com*, April 4, 2008, media.ford.com/article_display.cfm?article_id=28018.

FamilySearch.org lists him as Robert Game, the combined index will include both versions of his name.[43]

As the company's mission has evolved over the years, its name has changed to reflect the changes. In its pre-Internet days, when its main focus was publications, it was called Ancestry, Inc. When the company launched its Web site in 1996, it became MyFamily.com, Inc. to reflect its online status. In December 2006, the corporate name was changed again, this time to The Generations Network (TGN). The change followed the acquisition of Web sites, such as RootsWeb.com, and the creation of country-specific Ancestry.com Web sites, such as the United Kingdom, to serve a global audience. After a few years, TGN's owners once again changed the name of the company in hopes of establishing a stronger corporate identity that would bring together the different Web sites and the different products, such as Family Tree Maker, it offered its clients. Consequently, in July 2009, TGN became Ancestry.com, after the company's most well-known and most used Web site.[44]

Today, Ancestry.com can be broken into two sections: research and exchange. The research side contains databases of records, while the exchange portion allows for collaboration between genealogists.[45] Ancestry.com's wide array of databases includes family trees, state and federal census records, wills, immigration and naturalization records, and military records. Most of the databases on Ancestry.com are available only through

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[43] National Archives and Records Administration, *NARA-The Generations Network Digitization Agreement*, (Washington, D.C.: NARA, 2008), www.archives.gov/digitization/tgn-agreement.pdf; Dick Eastman, "NEHGS and Ancestry.com Announce Collaboration," *Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter*, (2007), blog.eogn.com/eastmans-online-genealogy/2007/08/nehgs-andances.html; and Dick Eastman, "Commentary About FamilySearch Cooperative Project with Ancestry.com/The Generations Network," *Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter*, (2008), blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2008/07/commentary-ab-1-.html.
[44] Millner, "History of Ancestry," 194; MyFamily.com, Inc., "MyFamily.com, Inc. Changes Corporate Name to The Generations Network," *PRNewswire*, December 19, 2006, tgn.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=77&printable; Ancestry.com, "The Generations Network Becomes Ancestry.com," PRNewswire, July 6, 2009, corporate.ancestry.com/press/press-releases/view/?id=439.
[45] Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 281.

subscription; but; a few, such as the SSDI, are free for anyone to access. According to

George Morgan, in addition to tens of thousands of record databases, Ancestry.com has

"more than twenty thousand digitized, indexed, and searchable volumes in the Family and

Local Histories Collection. . . [and] hundreds of digitized, indexed, and searchable

periodicals and historical newspapers online." The Web site also has a free research library

which includes articles from *Ancestry Magazine*. Meanwhile, the exchange side of

Ancestry.com includes message boards and user submitted GEDCOM files. Like the SSDI

and research articles, the message boards and many of the family trees are available to

everyone.[46]

Ancestry.com the Web site is just a part, albeit the largest part, of its parent company,

also known as Ancestry.com. According to the mission statement of Ancestry.com, the

company "is in the business of converting records of historical and genealogical value into

digital form, and publishing them on the Internet and in other digital media." The company's

array of Web sites includes—Ancestry.com, Ancestry.co.uk, Ancestry.ca, Ancestry.de

(Germany), Ancestry.com.au, Ancestry.it, Ancestry.fr, Ancestry.se (Sweden), and

www.jiapu.cn (China). In addition, Ancestry.com has purchased both Genealogy.com and

RootsWeb.com and owns Family Tree Maker, the most popular genealogical software.

Ancestry, Inc. remains a part of the company and continues to publish genealogical

magazines and books. In its twenty-five year history, the company has published over fifty

books, including three editions both of two of its most frequently used books of *The Source:*

A Guidebook to American Genealogy (1985, 1997, and 2006) and *Ancestry's Red Book:*

American State, County, and Town Sources (1989, 1992, and 2004). From helpful tips to

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[46] Morgan, *Official Guide*, 32 and Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 283.

research to collaboration, virtually all aspects of genealogy are covered by some part of

Ancestry.com's empire.[47]

Included in that empire is Genealogy.com, which, although part of the company,

continues to exist as a separate Web site. Like Ancestry.com, Genealogy.com has both free

and subscription-only databases and also includes message boards, records databases, expert

advice, and a library of online resources. Nevertheless, the two Web sites differ in other

areas and in the details. Unlike Ancestry.com, Genealogy.com provides free online

genealogical workshops. Its message boards, called GenForums, are searchable only by

surname. One must choose a specific surname, such as Armstrong or Riley, before

searching. Ancestry.com's message boards, in contrast, are much more powerful, allowing

researchers to search all message boards at once or narrow the search to specific boards such

as a location or surname. Thus someone researching Sarah (Riley) Armstrong in

Genealogy.com would have to search both the Riley and Armstrong GenForums separately,

but; on Ancestry.com, the researcher could perform a global search across all boards at once.

Not only does this save time, but it enables genealogists to locate information on a board they

would not have otherwise known to search. For instance, someone may have posted

information about Sarah on GenForum's Shelby County, Alabama message board. If a

researcher only knew that she was born in Georgia and did not know she had lived in Shelby

County, he or she would not know to look at that message board. If a similar post was place

on Ancestry.com, however, the "search all message boards" feature would allow researchers

to locate her on a posting on any message board. Ancestry.com also has many more

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[47] Morgan, *Official Guide*, XX; NARA, *NARA-TGN Digitization Agreement*; The Generations Network, *Corporate Overview*, www.tgn.com/default.aspx?html=overview; Milliner, *History of Ancestry*, 191; and Morgan, *Official Guide*, XX.

databases than its sister Web site. In addition, although the two Web sites have databases

that are similar, they may cover different time periods or geographical areas. One may have,

for example, birth records from Massachusetts in the 1790s, while the other has birth records

from the same time period from Connecticut.[48]

Unlike Ancestry.com and Genealogy.com, RootsWeb.com is a free genealogy Web

site that was started in 1993 by volunteers who worked for RAND (Research ANd

Development Corporation) and had an interest in genealogical research. RootsWeb.com's

creators wanted a low-cost Web site that contained useful genealogical data and collaborative

services. Over time, the Web site approached its maximum storage capability and costs

became too high for it to remain free. Even after the site's users began donating money in

1996, RootsWeb.com's operating costs continued to be too high for volunteers to maintain it.

The site's operators knew they needed outside help to keep it going and, in 2000,

Ancestry.com bought RootsWeb.com, adding it to its growing empire. The acquisition of

RootsWeb.com has helped the company acquire new subscribers who become interested in

genealogy after exploring RootsWeb.com's free databases and want to know more. A link

brings them to Ancestry.com and many subscribe to the Web site to learn more about their

ancestors. Despite Ancestry.com being primarily a subscription based service,

RootsWeb.com's collaborative services and many of its databases remain free and

unchanged. Those databases that are no longer free and have been altered have been moved

to Ancestry.com. Like Ancestry.com and Genealogy.com, RootsWeb.com also contains vital

records and family trees. Despite being a part of the Ancestry.com network, RootsWeb.com

and Genealogy.com remain as distinct Web sites, the only exception being the merger of

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[48] Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 288.

Ancestry.com's and RootsWeb.com's message boards. Everything else remains separate between the three Web sites.[49]

Ancestry.com's Effect on Genealogical Research

Like many technological innovations of the last thirty years, Ancestry.com has had a significant effect on genealogical research. It is the dominant genealogy Web site because so many of its tools — message boards, tens of thousands of databases, family trees, tips and tools to guide researchers, searchable books — are ones genealogists of all levels want available in one place and at any time. Ancestry.com's virtual repository means researchers do not have to wait for runners to get records which may turn out to not be what they need. They also do not have to worry about missing pertinent records while visiting a distant repository. All they have to do is turn on their computer, go online, and access Ancestry.com. An additional benefit is that researchers can have all their notes at hand unlike in physical repositories which often have strict rules about what patrons can bring into the research room. Thus genealogists are better able to relate what they find on Ancestry.com to what they already have.[50]

Although Ancestry.com has affected genealogical research, it has not changed the fundamental methods. Genealogists still must gather known family information, chose what ancestors to research, locate the necessary records, and build on that information. In doing research online, as with traditional research, genealogists must be vigilant about the integrity of what they find. They must keep five criteria in mind when determining the validity of the

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[49] Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 262, 270, and 262; Peter Wayner, "From Shared Resources, Your Personal History," *The New York Times,* April 22, 2004, www.nytimes.com/2004/04/22/technology/from-shared-resources-your-personal-history.html?sec=&spon=&pagewanted=print; and Dick Eastman, "RootsWeb.com Acquired by MyFamily.com," *Ancestry Magazine* (2000), www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=1797.
[50] Devine, "Making the Most."

information contained in a document: origin, accuracy, authority, bias, and sources.[51] In a

sense, genealogical research is not all that different from historical research. Both seek to tell

the stories of the past, though with different purposes. It is not surprising, therefore, that

genealogists should be as critical of their sources as historians. A downside to Ancestry.com

is that source citations are not required for family tree and other member-submitted

information. Like some of the early published genealogies in the late 1800s, the information

may be correct but, without source citations, the submitted data cannot be easily cross-

checked and verified by other genealogists.

Ancestry.com and Archival Repositories

Ancestry.com's exponential growth would not have occurred if not for the

cooperation of archival repositories. In recent years, Ancestry.com has approached many

state archives and similar organizations to obtain permission to digitize and make available

specific records in their holdings that have significant genealogical value. Many archivists

see the potential benefits of working with Ancestry.com. The company digitizes records free

of charge to the repository. Often the records Ancestry.com wants to digitize are frequently

requested by the archives' patrons and, therefore, many are in danger of overuse. One

example of overused records is the Alabama Department of Archives and History's (ADAH)

collection of Confederate muster rolls. These records are popular with genealogists and Civil

War enthusiasts, but some of the documents are falling apart or have been lost entirely from

overuse. Ideally, ADAH would digitize these and other frequently used records and provide

patrons access to the digital copies, thus, protecting the originals from deterioration from

overuse. Unfortunately, the department does not have the necessary money, time, or staff to

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[51] Kovacs, *Genealogical Research*, 10 and George Morgan, *How to Do Everything*, 36−7.

digitize all of its frail and overused holdings, nor do many other state archives. As state

archives are not often considered to be as important as other state agencies such as Medicaid

and law enforcement, they rarely receive sufficient funding to carry out all of their plans,

including digitization. Not surprisingly then, outside vendors' offers to digitize records for

free appeal to many archivists. Ancestry.com sweetens the deal by providing archival

institutions with a digital master copy that includes not only the scans of the records, but the

metadata needed to access and reconstruct the digital images to prevent them from being lost

due to technological changes. Archives can use the master copy and metadata for in-house

archival purposes, often as a form of preservation. As Brewster Kahle of Internet Archives

reminded the Society of American Archivists (SAA) members at the association's Annual

Meeting in 2006, having multiple copies in multiple media at multiple locations should be a

goal of archives. To drive his point home, he made frequent references to the ancient Library

of Alexandria, noting that "If there's one lesson from the first library of Alexandria—which

is probably best known for burning—it's don't have just one copy."[52]

Working with Ancestry.com may also offer archival repositories new opportunities

for publicity. Genealogical organizations, Web sites, and magazines may announce archives'

agreements with Ancestry.com. Also, if asked, the company will provide source citations

with records which state what repository holds the original documents. Diligent genealogists

pay close attention to the origins of their sources, and many will note where records come

from and may visit the archives in search of other records. Because the basis for funding of

some state archives is tied to the number of on-site visitors, any increase in patrons could be

used as a bargaining tool for budget increases.

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[52] NARA, *NARA-TGN Digitization Agreement*; Wayner. "Shared Resources;' .Brewster Kahle, "Universal Access to All Knowledge," *American Archivist* 70, (2007), 29.

Although working with Ancestry.com offers repositories many benefits, the relationship raises numerous questions. What types of quality control does Ancestry.com use? Who will make the decisions about which records are digitized, the archives or Ancestry.com? If the records are in the public domain, is it ethical and legal to charge the public to view them? Are archivists comfortable allowing their records to be used for commercial gain? As Linda Henry points out, archivists feel that archival custody over records "guarantees they offer the world . . . an uncorrupted and intelligible record of the past." Archival integrity could be at risk when a third party, whose main purpose is commercial, performs work traditionally done by archivists. Many of these issues were raised by Kahle in comments to the SAA membership at the society's 2006 meeting. Although Kahle supported digitization because it produced in multiple copies in multiple media, he worried that exclusive agreements with for-profit companies could limit access to records. Remote researchers would have to subscribe to Ancestry.com to view the records; otherwise they would be denied access to the records online. Thus they would find themselves in the same situation as pre-Internet genealogists who wanted to view records located at a distant repository. On the opposite side of the argument is Dick Eastman, a noted genealogy expert who has written many articles on genealogical research, tips, and trends. He maintains that subscription fees that provide access to records at any time from any computer with an Internet connection are justified.[53]

Archivists have found themselves weighing the pros and cons of working with Ancestry.com and have discussed the matter at length in repository staff meetings and at

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[53] Linda Henry, "Schellenburg in Cyberspace," *American Archivist* 61 (1998), 327; Kahle, "Universal Access to All Knowledge," 26; and Dick Eastman, "Ancestry.com Terminates Free Access in Family History Centers," *Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter*, (2007), blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2007/03/ancestrycom_ter.html.

regional and national archival conferences. At the 2007 meeting of the Southeastern

Archives and Records Conference (SARC) in Frankfort, Kentucky,[54] Ancestry.com was a

major topic of discussion in the digitization focus group's sessions. Everyone wanted to

know what other states were doing and how they viewed the legality issues. Some states'

representatives had specifically been told by their directors and assistant directors to address

the issue of Ancestry.com. SARC representatives discussed working with Ancestry.com

again at the 2008 meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. By this time, some of the states had

made contracts with Ancestry.com, and others, including Alabama, were in the process of

making agreements with the company. Nationally, Ancestry.com had made agreements to

digitize and make available records with twenty states by summer 2008.[55]

On the national level, the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) met in the spring of

2007 with the goal of outlining guidelines for archives to follow in making agreements with

Ancestry.com and similar vendors. The CoSA guidelines appeared in its *Statement on

Digital Access Partnerships* released in April 2007. In the statement, CoSA recognized that

the various state archives had different needs, issues, and goals, and, thus, what works for

one state might not work for another. For example, the ideal agreement would require

outside vending contracts to follow the same rules as those the archives followed for in-house

digitization. As each archives has its own specific in-house digitization rules, different

archives would require different specifications in their contracts. Another CoSA guideline is

to check the vendor's claims and work before making a contract. Ideally, this would be done

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[54] SARC is made up of eleven southeastern states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The 2007 meeting was held in Frankfort, Kentucky in spring 2007.
[55] Al Viera, comment on the Ancestry.com Blog, comment posted July 21, 2008, blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/author/aviera, (accessed July 24, 2009).

by requiring the vendor to perform a test project on a small sample of the documents to be digitized. Also CoSA encourages archives to ensure that imaging, indexing, copyright/exclusive use, fees, work location and process, and delivery and storage methods are specifically addressed in the contract before the project begins.[56] As the old saying goes, "the devil's in the details" failure to address even one of these items could be disastrous. If the contract does not specify, for example, imaging requirements, all record types might be scanned, for example, at 300 dpi, a resolution far below the level necessary for capturing highly detailed maps. In the two and a half years since the guidelines were issued, many state archives, as well as the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), have used the CoSA guidelines when making agreements with Ancestry.com. As is expected, the various agreements are not exact duplicates—each adapted the CoSA guidelines to meet their specific needs.

On May 20, 2008, NARA and Ancestry.com, known then as The Generations Network, signed the *NARA—The Generations Network Digitization Agreement*. The agreement requires Ancestry.com to perform a test project before NARA will permit the company to scan any of its records. NARA will only provide the original records if high quality microform versions do not exist and will train Ancestry.com staff on how to properly handle both microform and original media, as well approve all scanning equipment and locations. These specifications ensure the records are not subject to abuse, intentional or not. In terms of use, a five year exclusion period prevents NARA from either posting on its Web site or selling large portions of the scanned images and metadata that Ancestry.com provides

[56] Max Evans, "Archives of the People, by the People, for the People," *American Archivist* 70 (2007), 392 and Council of State Archivists, *Statement on Digital Access Partnerships* (2007), www.statearchivists.org/issues/ocp/index.htm.

to the institution. The scans may be used at NARA by both staff and patrons; off site

researchers, however, can only access the records through their personal subscriptions to

Ancestry.com. NARA will be free to do what it wishes with the images once the five year

period ends or if Ancestry.com goes out of business or is bought by another company before

the five years lapse. While the exclusion period may seem like a burden, it is one NARA is

willing to pay in order to have records digitized for free. In addition to these specifications,

both organizations have stated responsibilities. While Ancestry.com's responsibilities focus

on care, handling, and quality control of the records and end products; NARA's include

training, equipment, keeping track of costs, ensuring it has copyright ownership over the

materials, and double checking Ancestry.com's quality control of the scanned items. Both

organizations view the agreement as a cooperation of two independent organizations, not a

partnership. The agreement is expected to be a part of a series of agreements between the

two. However, NARA will reevaluate the cooperation based on Ancestry.com's performance

after each project is completed. The first records to be digitized include the Immigration and

Naturalization Services (INS) Passenger and Crew Arrival and Departure Lists from 1897–

1958 and Death Notices of U.S. Citizens Abroad from 1835–1974. Currently researchers

have to visit NARA or one of its branch repositories to view these collections. Following the

digitization of the first group of records, other vital, immigration, and military records will be

scanned, based on the stipulations of the contract and separate project specifications outlined

before the start of each new project.[57]

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[57] NARA, *NARA-TGN Digitization Agreement*; "Ancestry.com and National Archives Join Forces to Make
Millions of Historical Documents Available Online to Americans Wanting to Research Family History This
Memorial Day and Beyond," *Reuters*, May 20, 2008, www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS98861=20-
May-2008+PRN20080520, (accessed September 6, 2008; and NARA, *NARA-TGN Digitization Agreement*.

In addition to contracts with government archives, Ancestry.com offers grants to help government archives digitize records. In 2009, the company awarded $1.5 million worth of digitization services to government archives. Many aspects of the agreement between grant awardees and Ancestry.com are nearly identical to those laid out in the contracts between government archives and the company—archives can not sell the digitized records or their indices to third parties; records of high genealogical value, such as vital and military records, are preferred; and the participating archives receive free Ancestry.com subscriptions in their research rooms. Agreements with grant awardees do, however, include a number of differences: volunteers, not Ancestry.com employees, do the indexing; historical groups that provide indexing services also receive free access to records and indices; and local government archives sometimes receive grant money indirectly through their state archives.[58]

Ancestry.com's interest in locating records for its subscribers reflected a change in the company's focus that has been evolving since its founding in 1983. Ancestry, Inc.'s main focus was on publishing guides to help amateur genealogists. Although the company's services included genealogical research for paying clients, research was not its main goal. As computer technology evolved, the company began to focus more on technology's potential role in genealogical research. While the Ancestry, Inc. continued to publish books on genealogy, the overall focus of the parent company shifted away from publishing and toward providing records to online subscribers. As the Internet's speed and storage capacities grew, the number of records databases available to subscribers expanded exponentially, resulting in Ancestry.com having the largest online collection of records as well as being the dominant genealogy Web site. Many of the records acquired and placed online came from reliable

[58] Ancestry.com, *State Digitization Grant Program*, www.ancestry.dps.com/Grants.pdf, (accessed July 24, 2009.

sources, such as government archives and established historical societies. With the increase

in records came an increase in subscriber demand for even more documents. This demand

led the company to approach more state archives and other records repositories for

permission to digitize their records. Although many repositories have made agreements with

Ancestry.com, many archivists and patrons continue to raise concerns about allowing a for-

profit company to charge subscription fees to access public records. Some genealogists,

meanwhile, also have concerns regarding the accuracy of unsourced materials on the

Ancestry.com Web site. Genealogists' concerns and opinions on the effects of Ancestry.com

on their research will be discussed later in this paper.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

For many theses, a literature review summarizes works relating directly to the topic of research. Therefore, one would most likely expect a thesis on the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research and archives to examine works discussing Ancestry.com and genealogical research and Ancestry.com and archives. However, no previous study has been conducted examining the effects of Ancestry.com on either genealogical research or archives. As a result, the works summarized in this literature review are indirectly related to the topic. They were chosen because they suggested possible outcomes of the survey of genealogists conducted for this thesis.

This literature review is broken down into different sections that relate in some way to the overall topic. The first section examines the effects of the Internet on archival practice. By examining how archivists alter their practices to meet the changing landscape of record keeping caused by technological innovation and the effects of the Internet on the public's expectations of archives, these articles offer hints of how Ancestry.com affects archives. This section includes a minisection covering the effect of the Internet on government archives. Government archives are singled out from other archives as they are a major source of records for Ancestry.com. It was the company's solicitation of records with genealogical value from all of the participating state archives at the 2007 meeting of SARC and the continued discussion at the conference's meeting the following year that helped spark my interest in studying Ancestry.com, genealogical research, and archives. The second

section looks at genealogical research and the Internet. Understanding how other Web sites and the Internet in general has affected the research of genealogists suggests some basic assumptions regarding Ancestry.com's influence on genealogical research. Section three examines the relationship between archivists and genealogists. Genealogists count for large portions of archival users; at some archives they constitute the largest group of patrons. Understanding archivists' attitudes and perceptions of genealogists may offer insight into the factors that influenced their decision regarding collaboration with Ancestry.com. The final section looks at a few studies of archival users, including a couple which focused on genealogists. User studies are only now becoming popular with archivists who had traditionally concentrated on the needs of their records over those of their patrons. It was not until the 1980s that archivists began to look at their patrons' needs and wishes. Hence, the amount of literature available on users is limited, and studies regarding genealogists are especially limited. As this thesis is a user study of genealogists, it is useful to examine previous user studies and to know what information was learned by them. This study is not designed to repeat knowledge previously gained from earlier surveys but to build upon them and to help increase understanding of the relationship between Ancestry.com, genealogical research, and archives.

The Effects of the Internet on Archival Practice

How does the Internet affect the mission and work of archives? How can archives harness the Web's reach for their benefits? Will the Internet reduce the need to visit archives? These are just some of the issues that archivists have addressed in the professional literature since the Internet became a common fixture in homes and businesses.

Understanding how archives embrace the Internet can help predict the relationship archivists will chose to have with Ancestry.com.

Should archivists adjust their practices to meet the expectations of today's technologically-savvy researchers? In "Reimagining Archives: Two Tales for the Information Age," an article that appeared in 2002, archivist Leon Stout noted that museums had adjusted their approaches and practices to meet the expectations of a technologically-driven clientele and wondered if archives should follow suit. Museums had shifted their focus from their collections' physicality to the stories behind them. This shift resulted in an emphasis on physical and online exhibits and marketing ventures. The impetus for these changes, Stout maintained, was to increase the number of visitors who desired entertainment over a learning experience and, thus to increase the museums' revenue and presence in their communities. Although he could understand why museums had made the change, Stout argued that by becoming commercialized and entertainment-focused, museums had sacrificed part of their integrity and moral standing. Archives, meanwhile, continued their long tradition of focusing on the records in their custody, not on entertaining patrons and commercialization. Archivists consider themselves neutral, allowing patrons to form their own judgments based on their interpretation of the records. Consequently, Stout argued, it would be difficult for archives to make a similar shift as museums made without an even larger loss in integrity and moral standing. Nevertheless, Stout did believe archivists should embrace some of the technological innovations to meet the expectations of modern users—such as using e-mail to answer patron requests, sending scanned requests to patrons via the Internet, and placing finding aids and digital images online. The downside is that embracing

technology may not save archives money and could increase staff workloads. Not only

would records still have to undergo traditional processing work, but, to be placed on the

Internet, they would have to be scanned and modified as technology evolves. Nevertheless,

Stout believed the trend is toward a larger online presence and it is on the Internet where new

users, different from traditional patrons, will first discover archives. Therefore the cost and

staff time required to go digital is necessary for archives to continue to be a trusted and relied

upon source for information.[59]

Dealing with the future of archives in a digital world was the center point of Richard

Pearce-Moses' presidential address to the annual meeting of the Society of American

Archivists (SAA) in 2007. Pearce-Moses compared the archival profession with the two-

headed Roman god Janus, preserving the records of the past to meet the needs and desires of

patrons of the future. Today's archivists not only have to keep both the past and future in the

mind, but also cope with the effects of technology on the profession's present and future

practices. Patrons have come to expect find everything they need online. Archivists must

find ways to not only meet patron expectations but to stay at the forefront of technological

change.[60] Pearce-Moses realized it will not be easy noting that archivists were "entering

risky territory, leaving the comfortable behind. We cannot wait until we have everything

figured out."[61] In adapting to the digital world, archivists cannot lose sight of the

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[59] Leon J. Stout, "Reimagining Archives: Two Tales for the Information Age," *American Archivist* 65, (2002), 11, 12, 14, and 15.
[60] Richard Pearce-Moses, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era," *American Archivist* 70, (2007), 13, 14, 15, and 19.
[61] Ibid., 19.

profession's "core principles and goals."[62] They must use the technology in ways that fit the needs of the records and patrons.[63]

When making decisions on how to adapt technology to fit the needs of their records and patrons, archivists must anticipate potential problems. In "Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users," published in 1997, Barbara L. Craig analyzed "four real issues archives should consider—and consider sooner rather than later."[64] The first issue is commercializing archives—selling the information held by archives for a profit. Archival commodities can serve either to document culture—and, thus, should be preserved for posterity—or they can be treated as items that only serve a short term purpose and then be destroyed once they have served that purpose. Craig left open the question of whether archives should adopt a business-like approach and sell their information as a commercial venture or preserve their holdings as cultural resources for posterity. The second issue, according to Craig, deals with meeting the needs of remote users. Before archivists can meet the needs of these patrons, they must first discover who their remote users are and determine their needs and wants. Although it is likely that most distant users will be similar to traditional patrons, the Internet opens the door to previously unknown users. One expectation of users, both old and new, is a quick response to their requests, but most archival material is not suited for immediate delivery to researchers. Archivists must find a way to include enough background information about their holdings online so that the material is understandable without the help of an archivist. Placing highly informative

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[62] Ibid., 20.
[63] Ibid., 20.
[64] Barbara L. Craig, "Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users," *Archivaria*, 45 (1997), http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:zMsiHu45xc8J:journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/article/viewFile/12228/13251+old+myths+barbara+craig&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a, 121.

finding aids online would provide substantial assistance for distant patrons.[65] Finally, the

third and fourth issues identified by Craig go hand in hand—dealing with an increase in users

without an increase in funds or staffing and using "technology to cater to the needs of

customary users—the academic, the public servant, the genealogist."[66] Archivists can

address these two issues, Craig maintained, by creating Web sites that serve as informative

windows into archives that are "highly visible properties on the information

superhighway."[67] These Web sites will help attract new users, while continuing to serve

established users.[68]

Brewster Kahle's keynote speech to SAA's annual meeting in 2006 laid out some of

the advantages and disadvantages of digitization. Digitization allows for archivists to do new

things with records, including placing them on the Web for a wide audience, who, in turn,

can print it out at their location. The ability to access records remotely and download them

reduces the need for original documents to be accessed. Thus, original documents, many of

which are rare and fragile items, are kept safer due to less handling.[69] To him, preservation

meant making multiple copies and keeping the originals safely locked up. He strongly

favored placing as many records online as possible. Nevertheless, he noted that this can lead

to problems. Because archives are not capable of digitizing vast portions of their collections,

they often turn to outside vendors who scan the items and make them available via a

subscription service. The use of outside vendors raises three concerns: the companies often

want exclusive rights to the scanned items, copyright ownership of the digitized materials,

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[65] Ibid., 122, 121, 121-2, 124, 123, and 121.
[66] Ibid., 121 and 123.
[67] Ibid., 123.
[68] Ibid., 124-5.
[69] Brewster Kahle, "Universal Access to All Knowledge," *American Archivist* 70 (2007), 24-25.

and a commercial company making money off of records that are often in the public domain.

There is the additional problem of technological life spans, which are short due to rapid

innovations. Any agreement with a commercial vendor must address how the company will

migrate or update the digitized materials so that they continue to be accessible despite

changes in technology. Kahle's solution to this fourth problem was to work with multiple

technologies and to make copies.[70]

Government Archives

While the previously discussed articles deal with archives in general, a couple of

articles focused solely on government archives. Government archives are a main collecting

focus of Ancestry.com because their collections include the government-created records

genealogists need for their research, such as marriage licenses. As with all types of archives,

government archives are concerned about the effect the Internet will have on users

researching their holdings. As previously discussed in this section, the Internet's rise in

popularity has substantially altered the information gathering habits of many individuals.

Media sites are steadily replacing print newspapers as sources for news, and online social

sites and e-mail are changing the ways people communicate. Government archives must

decide how to harness the Internet to ensure that people will continue to use their resources in

their quest for information. Ancestry.com is one way government archives can place some of

their holdings online.

In "State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions," Victoria Irons

Walsh gave a snapshot of the status of state archives and the challenges they would likely

encounter in the coming years. The primary challenge archives faced was financial due to

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[70] Ibid., 29, 26, and 30.

decreasing budgets and politicians who did not see their significance to society. As a result,

some archives had to take measures to find their own sources of funding, including charging

higher service fees. Meanwhile, archivists faced challenges caused by technological

innovations which included increasing demands for public access, distance access,

efficiency, and accountability. Already, some archives had adapted to the new technologies

in various ways, such as creating online catalogs and Web sites. In 1997, most state archives

Web sites contained only general information—such as hours and location, and e-mail

contacts—but a few had begun to place records on the Web itself. According to Walsh,

placing records online dramatically increased the number of online hits and physical visits to

repositories.[71]

Technology innovation is not the only changing trend affecting archives. In "The

Business of Government and the Future of Government Archives," published in 1997,

Kathryn Hammond Baker discussed how government archives are affected by both changes

in government and in technology. As government entities, archives must abide by certain

administrative regulations, serve a cultural function, and serve the taxpayers. Due to the

evolution of technology, the public's view of how government services should be handled

has changed. People expect the government to be more effective, efficient, and quicker to

respond, yet it must continue to protect privacy. One result is an increase in privatization of

traditional government functions, including recordkeeping.[72] Because the government uses

taxpayer money to pay outside companies to handle records, most people believe "the public

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[71] Victoria Irons Walch, State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions, *American Archivist* 60 (1997), 139, 142, 145 and 149-50.

[72] Kathryn Hammond Baker, "The Business of Government and the Future of Government Archives," *American Archivist* 60 (1997), 235 and 236.

should not have to pay twice for the same product."[73] Although taxpayers usually understand

the need to charge the public fees for the staff time to locate records and make copies, when

access to government records generates profit for private companies citizens are less tolerant.

However, government records have begun to be sold for profit which has resulted in conflict.

On one side are archivists who believe in universal access especially of records that are in the

public domain. On the other side are those who think the money generated from the sale of

records can help increase the records' accessibility, see it as a form of preservation, and as a

way to increase the documents' value. Baker suggested a possible solution to the debate is to

use the power of the Internet to create a Web site where all government records can be

located. Such a Web site would increase access, particularly for distant researchers; increase

efficiency and effectiveness; and lower costs.[74] She believed the public would readily accept

a Web site that served as a centralized database for all government records stating "[u]sers

are accustomed to communicating and responding to Web sites in a particular way; they are

likely to respond to government Web sites as Web sites first and government second."[75]

The articles summarized in this section all noted the need for archives to embrace the

Internet while being aware of potential risks. Today's society is technologically-savvy and

often looks first to the Internet for information. Archives therefore must have an online

presence to ensure information-seekers discover their records amongst everything else

online. A Web site and e-mail contacts are the first steps towards establishing an online

presence. Placing digitized versions of records online is a logical next step but one that

comes with risks. Archives that do their own digitization and uploading of material to the

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[73] Ibid., 238.
[74] Ibid., 243 and 250.
[75] Ibid., 251.

Internet must devote tremendous amounts of time and money to do so, time and money which most do not have. Contracting with commercial vendors to do the work for them also raises problems. A main concern is commercialization—both of archival practice (making records available) and of records themselves, many of which are in the public domain.

Although Ancestry.com was not mentioned in any of these articles, the potential benefits and risks of working with the company are suggested. Ancestry.com allows archives to place records online without devoting staff time and money to the project. By having the records online, users can find records they need. Some may then visit repositories which have the records they found online to see the originals and to discover other records they have that are not on the Web site. The downside to working with a commercial vendor like Ancestry.com is that only its subscribers can access those records. Those without subscriptions either must visit a library or archive with an Ancestry.com subscription or not have online access to the records. Additionally, many of the records Ancestry.com seeks from archives are in the public domain, and thus charging for access to them raises legal concerns.

Genealogical Research and the Internet

How does the Internet affect genealogical research? This is a key question asked by both archivists and those behind Ancestry.com. As earlier sections have shown, people expect to find the information they seek on the Internet. As this section shows genealogists expect to find useful information for their research on the Web as well. The following two summaries examine genealogical research on a broad perspective. Because one author, Diane Kovaks, is a reference librarian and the other, Elizabeth Powell Crowe, a genealogist

the two works provide two different perspectives on online genealogical research. Both works discussed Ancestry.com as a tool, not how it affects genealogical research. There are two reasons for this, the first is that both books are reference—not research—works on genealogical research and the second is that Ancestry.com, while rapidly increasing in size and influence at the time the books were published, was not as dominant when they were published as it is today. Nevertheless, these two works are noteworthy for this thesis because they discuss the advantages and limitations of online research in general which can also be viewed as the advantages and limitations of Ancestry.com.

Diane Kovaks' *Genealogical Research on the Web*, which appeared in 2002, is a reference work for genealogists of all experience levels and for library reference staff (as well as for archivists). As a reference librarian Kovacs has seen the positive effects of the Internet on genealogy, specifically in reference and documentation. Before the Internet, she was unable to assist genealogists who came to her library looking for information from records not in its holdings. Today, the Internet allows her to locate sites that house the records or even to find them online. Kovacs noted that although the Internet has many advantages, genealogists must recognize its limitations. One issue which should concern genealogists who find records on the Internet is the authenticity of the documents. It is often difficult to ascertain whether or not primary records have been altered (either inadvertently or intentionally) in the digitization process. Additionally, genealogists must be as leery of secondary and tertiary sources published on the Web as they are of their paper counterparts, using them as guides to locate primary documents and the facts they contain. Kovacs urged genealogists to seek out the originals from trusted repositories. The holding repositories can

copy records and send the requested materials to them or they might already have scanned the records online and, thus, one can trust those documents because they are from a reliable source. Although the Internet makes it easier to conduct research at a distance, Kovaks still encourages genealogists to visit archives as they serve as good starting off places for beginning genealogists to learn how to conduct their family research and to learn about records. Similarly, genealogists who are looking for minority ancestors benefit from visiting archives because reference staff can help them understand what records may contain information about their ancestors who often do not appear in traditional genealogical resources, such as censuses. Finally, more experienced genealogists who want to learn about the historical experiences of their ancestors also benefit from a trip to archives where they can research about the time and place their ancestors lived to give them a more well-rounded understanding of their ancestors' lives.[76]

In 2003, the year following Kovacs' publication, Elizabeth Powell Crowe released the seventh edition of her *Genealogy Online*. Crowe believed genealogists will adapt the research standards and principles they used while researching paper documents to researching online records. To Crowe, the Internet is another tool to help genealogists locate their ancestors.[77] As with any source, genealogists must question the authenticity of online records. In fact, according to Crowe, many professional genealogists refuse to consider online records as authoritative: "[t]heir attitude is this: A source is not a primary source unless you have held the original document in your hand. And a primary source is not proof

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[76] Diane Kovacs, *Genealogical Research on the Web* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2002), XV, XVI, 6, 7, 105, and 118.
[77] Elizabeth Powell Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 359.

unless it is supported by at least one other original document you have held in your hand."[78]

While this statement may sound harsh, Crowe quickly pointed out that online research is no different from other genealogical research. Genealogies published on paper and those published online can both contain errors. Original documents may also contain errors due to information being recorded incorrectly. According to Crowe, the standards and methods of genealogical research are the same regardless of the media used. Genealogists must always question the sources and find accurate documentation for all the information they uncover. The only difference between online and offline research is the tools. Online researchers use printers, e-mail, and the Internet; traditional researchers use letters, photocopiers, and records in physical repositories.[79] Like Kovaks, Crowe believed genealogists will still need to visit repositories, not only to see the originals of documents available online but also to consult those documents not online.

The two books summarized above are representative of other works written about online genealogical research. The ability to locate records held by distant repositories is a benefit of researching online. Nevertheless many guidebooks and reference materials warn genealogists to question everything they find on the Internet and to rely only the physical original to authenticate facts.

Users of Ancestry.com are no different from users of other online genealogical research tools. Although the records on Ancestry.com often come from trustworthy sources and allow user access to records held by distant repositories, there is no quality control on family trees or message board postings, many of which are not sourced. Users of Ancestry.com will continue to rely on the services of archival repositories to ensure that

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[78] Ibid., 19.
[79] Ibid., 20 and 30.

information they find on the undocumented areas of the Web site is accurate and to examine the numerous records that are not available online.

Archives and Genealogists

Although genealogists account for over half of many archives' users, the archival profession has often viewed them as second class users. Recently, however, the negative sentiment has begun to change as archivists have come to realize genealogists can serve as strong allies—helping them to preserve records and increase their budgets. As genealogical sites on the Internet—in particular Ancestry.com—threaten to draw some genealogists away from archives, archivists need to embrace and reach out to this important patron group.

In the article "Doors Opening Wider: Library and Archival Services to Family History," which appeared in 2006, Susan Tucker examined the past relationship between archivists and genealogists and conducted a survey to study how genealogist-friendly certain repositories' Web sites were. "The impetus for addressing these topics came from several events in 2002 that signaled new ways in which the worlds of genealogy and archives have become connected . . . These events include the overwhelming response when the 1901 British Census was placed online" as well as the Committee on Outreach and User Services of the International Council on Archives' increased attention on genealogy at its meeting.[80] The meeting focused on outreach and educational programs for genealogists who, according to Tucker, constitute anywhere from 50 to 90 percent of archives users and their numbers continue to increase. Tucker stated that nearly half of all genealogists do the majority of their work online. In addition, instead of seeking out archives which provide free access to records, genealogists have begun to do their research using commercial Web sites. Tucker

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[80] Susan Tucker, "Doors Opening Wider: Library and Archival Services to Family History," *Archivaria* 62 (2006), 128-9.

argued that archivists need to actively work to keep genealogists from completely turning

away from archives. Because genealogists usually are a repository's largest group of

patrons, an increase in online genealogical research could threaten to reduce genealogical

research at archives. Many repositories' funding is based somewhat on the number of patron

visits, a reduction in the number of genealogical patrons could lead to a decrease in funding.

Consequently, Tucker recommended that archivists create Web sites that both publicize the

repository and serve as valuable tools for genealogists. Tucker conducted two surveys to

study the effectiveness of archival Web sites on both points. The initial survey looked at the

Web sites of sixty archives and genealogical organizations in four countries: the United

States, Canada, England, and Scotland. The follow up survey conducted a year later

examined twenty of the initial Web sites from the United States. Of those Web sites

examined in the initial 2004 survey, 58 percent had home pages mentioning genealogy; 80

percent had a separate page dedicated to genealogy; 2 percent were Web sites solely devoted

to genealogy; 48 percent mentioned genealogy on their home page and had a separate page

dedicated to genealogy; 9 percent mentioned it without having a separate page; 34 percent

had a separate page but did not mention it on the home page; and 19 percent neither

mentioned it on the homepage or had a separate page. Of those surveyed the second time in

2005, 92 percent had a separate page dedicated to genealogy and 71 percent mentioned it on

their home page. Also 48 percent of the Web pages in 2005 required one click to reach

information on genealogy, 35 percent two, 13 percent three, and 4 percent 4. In the 2004

survey, nearly two-thirds of the Web sites offered user education for genealogists and over

half contained the information in 2005.   Some of the positive aspects of the Web sites

included ease of navigation and increase in information and a refining of the Web sites between 2004 and 2005.[81] The downsides to archival repositories were lack of explanation and visuals of physical repositories, no mention of professional researchers available for hire, and "lack of standardization among Web sites."[82] Although Tucker's study showed the Web sites became more genealogist-friendly between 2004 and 2005, there was still room for improvement.

In "Genealogy in the 'Information Age': History's New Frontier," published in 2003, Elizabeth Shown Mills argued that archivists and historians should be more open to genealogists. According to Mills, genealogies that are researched properly can serve as valuable resources to a variety of researchers—including economists, sociologists, historians, geneticists, anthropologists, and legal scholars—because well-rounded family histories contain information relating to each discipline, such as socio-economic data which helps economists and historians. Scholars in these disciplines have largely ignored genealogists' work because many of these professionals have viewed it as nonacademic research, that is, self-gratifying research without standards; that contains little information about people beyond names, dates, and locations. This negative perspective is changing, however, as some academics have begun to realize the value of genealogists' work and knowledge of records and historical patterns. Some in the archival profession have come to realize that genealogists are strong allies who will lobby on their behalf for funding.[83] Indeed, in some instances, genealogists' "lobbying efforts had saved archives, records, and budgets."[84]

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[81] Ibid., 130, 131, 138-9, 141, 143, and 147-9.
[82] Ibid., 150.
[83] Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age': History's New Frontier?" *National Genealogical Society Quarterly Centennial Issue* 91 (2003), 261 and 267.
[84] Ibid., 269.

Nevertheless, academics and archivists must continue to be cautious about embracing all genealogists because many individuals engaged in family research do not abide by established research standards and do not understand the records they use.[85] Mills identified three types of genealogists. The first type, "Family Tree Climbers," have given genealogy its negative reputation because they do not abide by standards established by genealogical organizations such as the National Genealogical Society nor check for accuracy. They are the ones who see genealogy as a name collecting hobby. The second group, "Traditional Genealogists," for the most part abide by the standards and check their facts. Although their family histories are likely to be more accurate than those of the family tree climbers, their trees contain little information aside from vital data and people. The final group, "Generational Historians," produce work that scholars can use as valuable information because in their "thirst for historical knowledge in all its cultural, economic, legal, religious, and social contexts . . . they approach research with a commitment to standards and excellence."[86]

As shown by the works in this section, archivists are only now beginning to realize the important role genealogists can play in their work. Like archivists, genealogists want to see records preserved and made available and are willing to lobby for increased access to records and better funding for archives. In return, for this support from genealogists, archivists need to become more responsive to the research needs of genealogists. Establishing partnerships with Ancestry.com is one means of improving services for genealogists. By placing records online, access to them will increase. Although some genealogists will be denied this access due to subscription fees, many more will benefit from

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[85] Ibid., 271.
[86] Ibid., 272.

the collaboration. Before archivists decide to work with Ancestry.com, however, they need to know what the needs and wants of the patrons are and the best way to do so is to study and ask them.

User Studies

Until the 1980s, studies of archival users, including genealogists, were virtually unheard of, instead studies tended to focus on theory and practice.[87] Although archivists have begun to look at their users' needs and wants, they have yet to examine all aspects of patrons' interactions with archivists, finding aids, and records as well as their opinions of archival policies, practices, and approaches. Studies focusing on the needs of genealogists have been particularly limited. The user studies in this section include two that examined the impact of technology, in particular e-mail correspondence and the posting of information on archival collections online, and three that studied genealogists' online research approaches. These five user studies are included in this literature review because, like the other works reviewed for this thesis, they hint at the effects of Ancestry.com on archives and genealogical research.

In "Analysis of Remote Reference Correspondence at a Large Academic Manuscripts Collection," published in 2001, Kristin E. Martin studied traditional and electronic forms of correspondence. Her goal in analyzing such correspondences was "to observe the effects of providing online holdings information and the increased use of e-mail in reference correspondence."[88] Martin conducted her study at the Southern Historical Collection and General and Literary Manuscripts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and

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[87] Kristin E Martin, "Analysis of Remote Reference Correspondence at a Large Academic Manuscripts Collection," *American Archivist*, 64, (2001), 17.
[88] Ibid., 17.

looked at reference requests from 1995 and 1999. According to Martin, this was a notable

period to study users because the repository had launched its Web site in 1995, thus allowing

for a before-and-after look at the effects of an online presence on reference questions. The

study considered the method of correspondence (e-mail, phone, fax, and written letter), the

types of users (including genealogists), and the types of requests. The study found an

increase in requests by recreational users, including genealogists, as well as an increase use

of e-mail for inquiries between 1995 and 1999. Martin discovered that genealogists

increasingly used the online holdings to learn more about the collections. This was evident

as their requests in 1995 were very broad, asking for any records that contained a person's

name; while in 1999, their requests were more collection-specific.[89]

Wendy Duff's and Catherine Johnson's "A Virtual Expression of Need: An Analysis

of E-mail Reference Questions," which appeared in 2001, examined e-mail requests from

distant users of eleven archival institutions. The authors reasoned that e-mail requests are

more indicative of what users truly want because with e-mail there is no interaction between

the requestors and archivists which could influence how requests are formed. In addition, e-

mail do not require filling out a request on a form which may manipulate responses to fit into

the form's design. Duff and Johnson found the highest percentage of requests were service-

oriented, such as photocopying records.[90] The service-oriented requests showed patrons had

looked at the online finding aids before submitting their requests, as "[i]n all cases the

request was accompanied by at least the call number or title of the item, and in 50 percent of

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[89] Ibid., 17, 28-9, and 32-3.
[90] Wendy M. Duff and Catherine A. Johnson, "A Virtual Expression of Need: An Analysis of E-mail Reference Questions," *American Archivist*, 64 (2001), 48, 54, and 50.

the cases, the exact citation."[91] The second highest type of requests was "material-finding...[t]he user wants to know whether the archives has any sources about a particular person, place, or event."[92] The third highest type of request was user education queries in which "the user has only a vague sense of what records he or she wants access to and needs advice on where or how to get started."[93] Many of these requests appeared to come from beginning genealogists who did not know what types of records and collections would be beneficial to their research. Instead of asking to see specific collections, their requests often included "proper names, dates, places, subject, form, and, occasionally, events."[94] These pieces of information reflect that genealogists are interested in four main types of information: names, dates, and places; as well as records that show relationships between people.[95]

In 2003, two years after publication of their study of e-mail reference requests, Duff and Johnson published another study, this time focusing entirely on genealogists. In "Where is the List with All the Names? Information-Seeking Behavior of Genealogists," the authors interviewed genealogists to discover "the stages of genealogical research, how genealogists search for information, the access tools they use, the knowledge they require, and the barriers they face."[96] Duff and Johnson interviewed ten genealogists, most of whom were professional genealogists. The small number of participants with the majority being professionals meant that the findings could not be used to generalize the views of all

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[91] Ibid., 56.
[92] Ibid., 54 and 49.
[93] Ibid., 54 and 51.
[94] Ibid., 58-9.
[95] Johni Cerny and Arlene Eakle, *Ancestry's Guide to Research: Case Studies in American Genealogy* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry Inc., 1985) 11.
[96] Wendy Duff and Catherine Johnson, "Where is the list with all the names? Information-seeking Behavior of Genealogists," *American Archivist,* 66 (2003), 79.

genealogists. However, considering genealogists had largely been ignored in previous user

studies, this study was a start. The interviews showed that genealogical research is circular—

often genealogists are at different stages of research with different family lines at the same

time. Research at all stages requires genealogists to consult archival holdings, whether to

locate a census record, discover the next generation or research records of a town to learn

more about the historical context of their ancestors' lives. As for where genealogists went

for information, the participants strongly favored fellow genealogists over archivists and

finding aids. Due to the nature of their research, many of them had built networks with

fellow genealogists and these were the first place they would go for information and

suggestions. Some of the participants said they did not even know how to use archival

finding aids. Nevertheless, they indicated also less experienced genealogists would be best

served by consulting archivists to help them begin their research. The authors noted one way

to meet genealogists' needs was to have a larger online presence, both by digitizing relevant

collections and by putting more information about their non-digitized holdings on their Web

site.[97]

Four years after Duff and Johnson published the results of their interviews with

genealogists, Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres published their own findings from

interviews they had conducted of genealogists. Their findings appeared in their 2007 article

"Genealogists as a 'Community of Records.'" The interviews provided insights on how

genealogists "search for records and how [they] construct meaning through their interactions

with the records, their families, and other genealogists."[98] Yakel and Torres discovered that

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[97] Ibid., 82, 84, 83, 93-4, 92, 89, and 81.
[98] Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres, "Genealogists as a 'Community of Records," *American Archivist* 70 (2007), 95.

genealogists' top issue is physical and intellectual access to records, and they noted that genealogists "have lobbied successfully to increase physical access to records."[99] Genealogists and genealogical associations also improve intellectual access to records by educating others about what is available and build upon their own experiences with a variety of record formats. Yakel and Torres noted that genealogical newcomers often focus only on the basic facts—names, dates, and places—and stick to vital, census, and similar records that provide the barebones information. As they become more experienced genealogical researchers, they begin to use a wider variety of records to discover more about who their ancestors were as individuals and what they experienced. Because genealogists often exchange their findings with other genealogists, they often share information about the existence and use of the variety of records available, thus leading to greater access. Genealogists are experts at interacting with the records. They realize that records can have transcription errors or that errors may have even been made at time of creation. Thus, they always question the records. Although they interact with fellow genealogists and the records, they do not have much collaboration with the records keepers, including archivists. Genealogists are natural allies of archives, they do not often turn to them for help in their research.[100]

For his 2001 master's thesis on genealogical tourism, Richard Frazier conducted an online survey of genealogists to discover the effects of the Internet on genealogical research. Frazier found that genealogists continue to conduct research offline because not all records are available online, and, most likely, never will be. The survey results suggest that genealogists will also continue to visit archives to see and touch records that document the

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[99] Ibid., 98.
[100] Ibid., 99 and 111.

lives of their ancestors. Nevertheless, Frazier's results also suggest that genealogists

consider the Internet a valuable tool in their research. According to Frazier, online

genealogical research provides commercial vendors with opportunities to customize their

products to meet the wants of individuals, has no restraints due to time and locations, and

gives people a chance to try out genealogy without committing to it. The Internet also

benefits the holders of the original documents because digitizing and placing records online

increases a repository's visibility and leads people to make physical visits to find out what

other records they have not digitized. Frazier's survey found the Internet had little effect on

participants' initial interest in genealogical research; they started researching their ancestors

for other reasons not given. Not surprisingly, younger genealogists were more likely to start

their research after gaining access to the Internet than those older than them.[101] The use of

the Internet has had a positive effect on genealogical tourism (traveling to places that hold

the records or are associated with ancestors, such as place of birth) with "78.0 percent of

genealogists using e-mail subscriptions lists hav[ing] indicated that their genealogy related

travel has increased compared to 8.5 percent indicating it has decreased."[102] The top Web

sites used by those surveyed were: 1) Rootsweb (now part of Ancestry.com), 94 percent; 2)

USGenWeb, 75.3; 3) Ancestry.com, 74.2; 4) Social Security Death Index (available on

Ancestry.com) 69.2; 5) Cyndi's List, 65.6; 6) Family Search, 61.6; 7) Family Tree Maker

(also part of Ancestry.com), 53.1; and 8) state archives and historical societies, 52.1. The top

places visited by participants were: 1) cemeteries, 85.2 percent; 2) libraries with genealogy

sections, 75.3; 3) libraries with historical archives, 73.0; 4) county courthouses, 60.9; and 5)

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[101] Richard A. Frazier, "Genealogy Research, Internet Research, and Genealogy Tourism" (MA thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, 200), www.uwstout.edu/lib/thesis/2001/2001frazierr.pdf, 5, 26, 16-20, 32, and 60-2.
[102] Ibid., 67.

state archives, 45.9. At the end of the survey, participants voiced their opinions about the

Internet and genealogical research. The negative comments included the lack of states

archives' records online, the rise of commercial Web sites, the commercialization of formerly

free Web sites, and the abundance of misinformation online. Despite the negative responses,

the genealogists responded that, overall, the Internet was having a positive influence on

genealogical research.[103]

Understanding the needs and desires of their patrons is vital to the health of archives.

Archives must know if their efforts to meet the needs of their patrons, such as creating

finding aids and Web sites, are helpful. They also must use technological innovation to meet

the needs and desires of their patrons. In order to know what their patrons' needs and desires

are, archivists must ask them, whether through conducting interviews or providing

questionnaires. Interviews and questionnaires should also be made before archives enter into

agreements with Ancestry.com. Archivists must know what types of information and records

researchers would like to be available online. One of the questions in the survey conducted

for this thesis specifically asks what records genealogists would like to see on Ancestry.com

Conclusion

The works summarized in this literature review enable one to speculate about the

effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research and archives. Some genealogists view

Ancestry.com as another tool to help them locate ancestors. By using the Web site's records

databases, they are able to search some records held by distant repositories, thus saving them

time and money that would have otherwise been used to either contact a repository and pay

for its services or travel to it. As the works mentioned in the review suggest, genealogists

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[103] Ibid., 69, 73, and 86-7.

will use Ancestry.com as a research tool, however they will continue to research at repositories. Many genealogists will continue to visit repositories to verify the authenticity of records found online and to see in person records that document their families' pasts. Ancestry.com could aid archival repositories that want to place records online but do not have the required resources. Because Ancestry.com gives repositories the option of having their name or logo placed on their records provided on the Ancestry.com site, an agreement between them and the company could increase their online presence to those genealogists who pay attention to the physical location of records. One way to determine the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research and archives is to survey genealogists regarding their use of Ancestry.com and archives. Such study was conducted for this thesis, and the results of the survey are presented and analyzed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Survey Methodology

From August 11 to September 10, 2009, genealogical researchers at the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) were given the opportunity to complete a survey asking them about their research experience, preferences, and methodologies, including their use of records held by ADAH and their use of Ancestry.com. To draw attention to the survey, a sign advertising the study was placed in the Research Room lobby desk where all researchers must sign in before entering. The survey itself was located inside at the main Research Room desk. Interested researchers received an information letter to read over before deciding whether or not to complete the questionnaire. Those willing to participate received a survey to complete and then they returned it completed to a manila envelope at the Research Room desk. Initially, twenty-five surveys and information letters, the minimum set for this study, were printed. Twenty-five participants had completed the survey by August 21, so another fifteen surveys were printed to obtain a larger number of respondents for this study. Of the first set, twenty-three surveys were returned, while seven of the second group was completed. The Research Room staff noted that genealogists of all experience levels participated in the survey. Staff further remarked that some of the participants were regular users of ADAH, while others were there on their first visit.

Overview of the Alabama Department of Archives and History's Efforts to Digitize Records with Genealogical Value

This section includes a brief overview of ADAH's mission and digital work. This

information is included in this section to give readers background information about the site where the survey was conducted.

ADAH is the nation's oldest state archives. Founded in 1901, its mission is to "tell the story of the people of Alabama by preserving records and artifacts of historical value and promoting a better understanding of Alabama history."[104] Although the mission statement does not contain a specific reference to genealogy, ADAH actively promotes genealogical research through on- and off-site workshops, online tutorials, and presentations at genealogical association meetings.

In the late 1990s, ADAH began to digitize some of its collections and place them on the World Wide Web. One collection available on the ADAH website is the Civil War Database which is a transcribed collection of cards related to individual soldiers. From 1900 to 1982, staff created a card every time they came across information pertaining to a Civil War soldier. "Sources include muster rolls, governors' correspondence, veterans' censuses, manuscript collections, newspapers, and pension records." Although these cards are secondary sources, they can provide valuable information—such as battles a soldier participated in—to researchers. Many researchers simply enjoy finding their ancestors in the database. After nearly a decade of transcribing the cards—over 226,000—ADAH announced the completion of the project in August 2009. With transcriptions of all the cards now available online, the originals have been closed to researchers.[105]

In 2004, ADAH began work on another digitization project—the 1867 Voter Registration Database, which is the digitized and indexed collection of the volumes of loyalty

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[104] Alabama Department of Archives and History, Web site, www.archives.alabama.gov.
[105] Alabama Department of Archives and History, "Alabama Civil War Service Cards File," www.archives.alabama.gov/civilwar/index.cfm.

oaths to the United States that males twenty-one years and older had to take before they could vote. Many of the original volumes have become fragile due to time and use, thus placing them online will help preserve them. According to ADAH's Web site "[t]he volumes are significant genealogical records as this is one of the first statewide government documents that record African-American males living in Alabama." Although the pages in the volumes contained columns for information such as "Name, Race, County of residence, Precinct, Length of residence (in state, in county, in precinct). . . [and] Native county or state," registrars were not required to record this information when registering a voter. In some instances, only the name, location, and race are recorded. Currently, records for approximately half of the counties in Alabama—thirty-three—have been digitized and placed online.[106]

Although ADAH has created the two online databases and has placed over 6,300 images of photographs and documents from its collections on the Web, the vast majority of its materials with genealogical value remained on analog media. Genealogists interested in viewing these records must either physically visit the ADAH Research Room or request copies be sent to them. While these documents are limited by access, some, particularly those pertaining to Civil War ancestors, are often requested and, thus, are in danger of being lost due to use. ADAH does not have the money or staff to digitize or even microfilm these documents, so the only way for patrons to see them is in their original state. Consequently the ADAH staff faces a dilemma: protect fragile records by closing them to researchers and risk alienating patrons or allow research in the records and risk damage to or loss of the unique documents. In 2007, a solution to this dilemma surfaced when Ancestry.com

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[106] Alabama Department of Archives and History, "Alabama 1867 Voter Registration Records Database," www.archives.alabama.gov/voterreg/index.cfm.

approached ADAH and offered to digitize records with high genealogical value. Various

staff meetings were held to discuss the possibility of working with Ancestry.com. At a May

2007 meeting of the Digitization Committee, staff discussed procedures that were to be

followed if an agreement with Ancestry.com was made. These potential procedures included

on-site scanning of records at ADAH, scanning requirements, ADAH's onsite access to

Ancestry.com, and the length of Ancestry.com's exclusive user of the scanned images. Some

of the items suggested for scanning included "Civil War Muster Roles, Confederate pensions,

Civil War Regimental histories, Muster rolls from other wars, Service Cards . . . State

Censuses 1850, 1855, 1866…Surname files, Civil War Governors . . . Civil War Adjutant

General records, [and] Civil War Quartermaster General records," city directories, Auditor's

Roll of Pension Payment, and the 1907 and 1921 Confederate veterans census.[107]

On January 3, 2008, Ancestry.com and ADAH signed a contract to begin working

together. The contract only laid out basic guidelines. Following the signing of the

agreement, staff continued to fine tune the list of desired collections to be digitized. In

September of 2008, Ancestry.com agreed to digitize a few of the collections, including the

Confederation Pension Applications and Censuses of Confederate Soldiers. In April of 2009,

more collections were added to the agreed list including convict records and military records

relating to National Guard soldiers, World War II casualties, and Korea.[108] After the

completion of the scanning and uploading of these records to Ancestry.com, ADAH staff will

evaluate the quality of the scanned documents as well as the effects of placing records on the

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[107] E-mail from Al Viera (The Generations Network) to Ed Bridges (Alabama Department of Archives and History), Feb. 14, 2007 and Alden Monroe, "Ancestry.com Project 2007/03/08."
[108] Alabama Department of Archives and History and The Generations Network, Letter Agreement, 9 November 2007; Alabama Department of Archives and History and The Generations Network, Appendix A Part 2 to the Letter Agreement of 9 November 2007, 19 September 2008; and Alabama Department of Archives and History and The Generations Network, Appendix A Part 3 to the Letter Agreement of 9 November 2007, 15 April 2009.

Web site on the requests to see the originals and on onsite visitation. If the effects prove positive, another agreement may be made to digitize and place other ADAH records on Ancestry.com.

Why Study the Genealogical Researchers at the Alabama Department of Archives and History?

ADAH was chosen as the study site because genealogists make up a large portion of its users, thus providing potentially enough participants for a survey on genealogical research. Its agreement with Ancestry.com and free onsite access to the entire Web site increased the likelihood that genealogical patrons used both ADAH and Ancestry.com for their research. Because a goal of the survey was to understand genealogists' use of archival records and Ancestry.com resources, having responders who researched both at a repository and on the Web site was necessary. A third reason ADAH was chosen to host this survey is because its staff actively works to promote genealogical research both at its facility and in general. Staff members were receptive to doing a survey that would help them to better understand their patrons' needs and wishes as well as any effects Ancestry.com may have on the repository and genealogical research.

Creation of the Survey

The Survey Methods Workbook by Alan Buckingham and Peter Saunders served as a guide during the creation of this survey. Following the advice of the authors, as many questions as possible were written with multiple choice answers rather than asking respondents to fill in a blank. This approach was adopted in order to limit the number of possible answers to a manageable few for the purpose of analyzing the responses. Questions

were written as positive statements to prevent any confusion from arising from negative statements. Participants were not asked to supply personal information. Although the gender, age, and ethnicity or respondents might have proven useful in understanding their research methodologies and preferences, I decided against collecting this information because this is the first study of the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research, and I wanted to establish a baseline of information for future research. Future surveys may want to include such information as it may help to further analyze respondents' answers.

The Survey

This section examines the purpose of each question. The main focus of this study is to access the overall effects Ancestry.com is having on genealogical research and archives. A secondary focus goal is to understand how Ancestry.com affects ADAH.

Question 1: How many years have you been involved in genealogical research?

0-1, 2-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, or 20+

This question seeks to determine the experience level of the researcher. A person who has been researching for twenty years is most likely going to have different methodologies and preferences than someone who is just beginning. One of the differences in methodology and preference may be the use of the Internet and, therefore, Ancestry.com in their research. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Netscape revolutionized the Internet in 1995 and Ancestry.com went online in 1996; therefore those genealogists with more than fourteen years of experienced began researching in a paper-based world and may favor researching offline.

Question 2: Who do you research for?

> *Myself*
>
> *My family or friends*
>
> *I am a professional genealogist.*

Like the previous question, this question strives to learn more about the researcher's experience level. Professional genealogists may know more about methodologies and records than someone who is researching as a hobby. They may also have had experiences with a wider variety of records due to the different backgrounds of their clients.

> *Question 3: In addition to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, where have you conducted your research?*
>
> *Libraries*
>
> *Archives*
>
> *Courthouses*
>
> *Other places. List (open ended)*

The purpose of this question is to understand where participants look for records. Knowing where genealogists' research may indicate what records they use in their research and, thus, what records archives and Ancestry.com may want to collect to build genealogical collections. For example, some genealogists conduct research at courthouses to view marriage licenses. Although state and local laws may dictate where certain records must be housed, the locations of other records, such as those of churches, are not covered by the law. Therefore, those repositories wanting to collect genealogical records may want to consider working with non-governmental organizations that hold genealogical records to guarantee records are preserved and accessible. Unless these records of nongovernmental organizations

are collected by archives or Ancestry.com, genealogists who use them will continue to travel to those locations to do their research.

Question 4: How did you learn about genealogical research at ADAH?

Internet search

Ancestry.com

Another genealogy website. List (open ended)

Other genealogists

Archivist/librarian

Other. List (open ended)

This question will help ADAH staff learn how researchers find out about the repository's genealogical reference services. Although this question is geared towards research at ADAH, the responses may provide insights into how genealogists learn about genealogical research at repositories in general.

Question 5: What records/collections have you used at ADAH or other archives/libraries?

Surname files

Newspapers

Censuses

Other government records. List (open ended)

Private collections

Other collections/records. List (open ended)

This question shows which records the researchers use most and, therefore, which are in danger of overuse. Hence, these records may have enough genealogical value to be

considered for digitization by Ancestry.com. As with the previous question, this question

asks specifically about records at ADAH. However, many archives have similar collections

and, therefore, this question may also offer generalizations for other archives who are

thinking about working with Ancestry.com.

Question 6: What genealogy websites do you use?   *Ancestry.com*   *RootsWeb.com*   *Genealogy.com*   *Others. List (open ended)*

This question helps archives know what Web sites their genealogical patrons use in

their research. By knowing the tools used, archivists can better serve their patrons.

Question 7: Do you use Ancestry.com

As this is a survey about Ancestry.com, it is useful to know that the person filling out

questions relating to Ancestry.com actually use it.

Question 8: What parts of Ancestry.com do you use?   *Records databases*   *Message boards*   *Family trees*   *Newspaper collections*   *Ancestry's library of articles*

As noted earlier, Ancestry.com is a vast website with numerous types of records.

Archivists wanting to help genealogists need to know what records they use, even if their

own repository does not hold them. Archivists can use the responses here to help direct those new to Ancestry.com to the databases experienced Ancestry.com users find the most helpful. Also, archivists considering working with Ancestry.com would benefit from knowing what parts of the Web site genealogists use. If an archive is considering working with Ancestry.com to digitize a fragile newspaper collection and the results of the survey indicate that genealogists do not often research in Ancestry.com's newspaper collections, then placing the newspaper collection on the site may not have much of an effect on reducing on-site use of this material.

Question 9: Do you have a personal subscription to Ancestry.com?

If they have a personal subscription to Ancestry.com, they are more likely to be at the ADAH to consult the repository's physical holdings. Their responses will also be useful for this study as they use both Ancestry.com and ADAH for their research.

Question 10: If you do not have an Ancestry.com subscription, do you go to ADAH or a local archives/library to use their free access to Ancestry.com?

Many archives that have a digitization agreement with Ancestry.com provide free access to Ancestry.com onsite. In the case of ADAH, its agreement includes free access to the entire Ancestry.com site on Research Room computers. Knowing if researchers take advantage of the free access would be helpful to both ADAH staff and other repositories. If researchers are coming to access the Web site, it is possible that they are researching other records held by the archives that are not online. It is also useful for archives to know what tools their patrons are using in order for them to best serve their clientele.

Question 11: How did you learn about Ancestry.com?

This question is designed to discover more about genealogists' research methodologies, such as how they discover genealogical tools like Ancestry.com. If the responses strongly favor genealogists, archivists, and genealogical publications, this question will show that researchers prefer trusted sources to help them locate reliable resources.

Question 12: When you find records on Ancestry.com, do you look to see who owns them?

As the owner of the records, ADAH—and archives in general—is naturally interested in knowing that the researchers are aware of who owns the documents. The matter of placing the ADAH logo on every one of its documents on Ancestry.com was a topic of discussion at staff meetings when considering an agreement with Ancestry.com. The staff was adamant that the logo appear on all its documents. As most archivists are concerned with authenticity and ownership of records, it can be assumed that other repositories' staffs would be just as concerned as ADAH's staff was in making sure Ancestry.com users know who owns the originals of the material they discover on the Web site.

Question 13: Have you visited a repository to see a document you saw on Ancestry.com?

There is a belief held by some genealogists and historians that the Internet will reduce the need for genealogists to conduct their research at archives.[109] This leads to worry amongst some and results in hesitance to work with Ancestry.com. How will the repository recoup the revenue made from distant research requests and copying? How will they be able to justify their existence if they have no patrons? While it is highly unlikely repositories would be able to digitize and place all their records online, it would be reassuring to them to know that placing their records on Ancestry.com will not have a negative effect on their patron numbers. In fact, responses to this question may show that the opposite is true that genealogists who use Ancestry.com may increase their onsite visits to archives.

Question 14: Why did you want to see the document?

To see the original, to verify it has not been altered.

To see the original, to have a personal connection to it.

Other reason. List (open ended)

As explained previously, genealogists have multiple reasons for consulting original documents they have already seen online, including ensuring they have not been tampered with and to have the experience of holding the document itself. It is helpful to archivists to know why researchers still want to view the original when a digital copy is available. As previously discussed, ADAH closed the Civil War Service files records once their information had been made available on the ADAH website. If the repository's motivation for placing items on Ancestry.com is to decrease physical access, but patrons continue to request the originals, the staff needs to know why so that they know how to address the patrons' wishes. If the genealogists want to verify that the digitized copy has not been

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[109] Donn Devine, "Making the Most of Your Research Time," *Ancestry Magazine* (2003), www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=7201.

altered, staff members may be able to offer a solution, such as showing the document without allowing the patron to touch it or providing a reliable photocopy. However, if the genealogists want to touch the document for the sake of touching it, there may be no workaround and access may have to be denied.

Question 15: Were you able to see the original or a copy?

As mentioned previously, one reason archives work with Ancestry.com is to digitize frequently requested or fragile records so that, once they are digitized and available on the Web site, the original records can be closed to the public. The aim of this question is to see if archivists continue to allow access to records available on Ancestry.com.

Question 16: Do you trust an archivist's copy of an original record more than a digital version online?

Some genealogists do not trust digital copies found online.[110] However, as archivists consider themselves to be neutral protectors of records,[111] the goal of this question is to see if genealogists consider archivists to be trustworthy enough to accept their copies in lieu of originals.

If no, why do you not trust the online version?

Archivists need to know whether or not the digital copies of records they are putting online meet the documentation requirements of genealogists. Especially in cases in which the repository pays for digitization, it is useful to know whether or not researchers will trust the online version.

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[110] Elizabeth Powell Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 7.
[111] Leon J. Stout, "Reimagining Archives: Two Tales for the Information Age," *American Archivist* 65, (2002), 12.

> *Question 17: Have you ever visited a repository to find out what other records they have besides what is shown on Ancestry.com?*

This question relates to Question 13 and is designed to determine if genealogical researchers use Ancestry.com as an entry point into a repository's entire vast collection. If genealogists do visit a repository after seeing some of its records online, the repository may be more motivated to work with Ancestry.com.

> *Question 18: How has Ancestry.com changed your genealogical research?*
>
> *Made it easier to locate records*
>
> *Able to make connections with distant relatives who research the same lines*
>
> *No change*
>
> *Other (open ended)*

This question helps to understand the effects Ancestry.com has had on genealogical research, a main goal of this project.

> *Question 19: Have you located records on Ancestry.com that helped you get past a brickwall[112] (person who you could not find any information on) in your research?*

With over four billion records online, Ancestry.com claims that Ancestry.com hosts the world's largest collection of online genealogical records.[113] Because most of its vast collections of records come from repositories around the world, Ancestry.com should be able to help genealogists locate elusive connections. This question asks if researchers have had success in finding hard to locate ancestors.

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[112] A brickwall is genealogical lingo for an ancestor for whom a genealogist cannot find information. For example, a person researching a line in 1700s Boston discover the parents of the ancestor he is currently working on to be Mr. and Mrs. John Smith. Research into wills and cemetery records may show her first name to be Mary but most likely would not include her maiden name. Thus, Mrs. Mary Smith is a brickwall until the researcher can find a marriage license or some other record that documents her maiden name.

[113] The Generations Network, "About Ancestry.com," corporate.ancestry.com/about-ancestry.

Question 20 (number 1): Has Ancestry.com impacted your use of archives?

Question 20 (number 2) Do you go more often or less often?

The questions are intended to go together. As with Question 18, a goal of this study to discover how Ancestry.com has affected genealogical research at archives. One way to determine if it has is by learning if researchers have increased or decreased how often they research at a repository.

Question 21: What records would you like ADAH to place on Ancestry.com?

As mentioned earlier, ADAH is working with Ancestry.com to choose which records to digitize and place on Ancestry.com. Knowing what patrons want to see and would use would be of use to both parties when making the decision. Although this question focuses mainly on ADAH, other archives can benefit from learning what records genealogists want ADAH to put online. Many of the records requested by genealogists at ADAH are similar to records held by other repositories—census, marriage, birth, and estate records—so responses to this question can guide all archives when they decide what records to place on Ancestry.com

Question 22: As you know, many of the records placed on Ancestry.com are government created, and therefore, in the public domain. Does it bother you that you have to pay to view public records?

This question seeks to discover what genealogists think about paying to view records that, by law, they are able to see in person for free. Does the convenience of Ancestry.com in allowing them to see records held by distant repositories compensate for the subscription fee? In addition to possible unease by genealogists, some archivists have problems with charging

the public to view records because they see it as going against the ethical standards of the profession of the profession regarding "open and equitable access."[114] Leon Stout pointed out that some repositories are not allowed to charge patrons to see the records and many others refuse to as it goes against archives' "independence and integrity as honest brokers of records."[115]

Question 23: What is the number one advantage of using Ancestry.com for genealogical research? (This question is open-ended).

By asking participants to give their top reason for using Ancestry.com, this question seeks to elicit information on the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research. The responses may show how the Web site helps genealogists in ways traditional research methodologies cannot. For example, a potential answer is the ability to instantaneously locate and access records held by distant repositories, which is only possible with a Web site like Ancestry.com.

Question 24: What is the number one advantage of going to a physical location, such as ADAH, to do genealogical research?

As with the previous question, this one seeks to elicit information on the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research at physical repositories. A possible answer is the availability of staff to answer questions, which is a service a Web site cannot provide.

Question 25: Where do you prefer to do your research?

Online

Physical location

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[114] Society of American Archivists, Code of Ethics for Archivists, http://archivists.org/governance/handbook.asp.
[115] Stout, "Reimagining Archives," 13.

This question aims to determine if the Internet is taking genealogists away from repositories. Archivists need to know how genealogists prefer to conduct their research in order to meet their needs.

> *Question 26: Explain your preference from question 25.*

This question ask for more information from Question 25. Knowing why researchers prefer to research either online or at a physical location is key to archives' future goals.

Conclusion

This goal of this chapter was to explain why ADAH was chosen as a research location and to explain how the survey was conducted and the questions asked. As a genealogy-friendly archive with a digitization agreement with Ancestry.com, ADAH was a logical location because its patrons are likely to be familiar with both repository and online research. Because ADAH allowed for the survey to be conducted in its Research Room, some of the questions were written as if they were tailored to ADAH and its users' needs. However, responses will also be indicative of the needs of genealogical researchers at other archives. The main goals of the survey were to discover the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research and archives.

Chapter 5: Survey Results and Analysis

This chapter will both show and analyze the responses to the survey questions discussed in the previous chapter. Thirty participants completed the survey, however not all of them answered every question. Some participants skipped certain questions because they were told to do so. For example, participants who do not use Ancestry.com were directed to skip Question 8 which asked what sections of the Web site they used. Other participants did not answer questions, most likely due to time constraints. In some instances, participants wrote in answers to multiple choice questions instead of selecting one of the choices given.

It is necessary to state that this is not a scientific survey. Although participants were not directly recruited for the survey, conducting the survey in the ADAH Research Room made for a selective group of respondents. As with Duff's and Jackson's interviews with ten genealogists,[116] the small number of participants also limits the ability to make broad generalizations based on the responses. This survey, however, does have value. As the first study to examine Ancestry.com's effects on genealogical research or archives, this survey is a pilot project upon which others can build. Because this survey is the first of its kind, it does have its limitations, most notably some of the questions should have been worded differently. Their awkwardness may have caused confusion among some respondents. Future surveys would benefit from the lessons, both positive and negative, learned in this study.

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[116] See discussion of Wendy Duff and Catherine Johnson, "Where is the list with all the names? Information-seeking Behavior of Genealogists" on pp. 53-54 of this thesis.

The Results

   Following are the results of the survey. In addition to stating the results and the

reasons behind them, the participants' responses have been broken down to compare them by

years of experience as well as by nonprofessional and professional status to discover if there

are any trends related to experience level. Tables are included to help readers compare the

results between the different experience groups. Most questions have two tables, one

breaking the responses down by years of experience and the other by professional status.

Although the two tables could have been made into one for each question, I found it easier to

understand the results by using two tables. In many instances, years of experience and

professional status were reflected in participants' answers, in others they were not.

Question 1: How many years have you been involved in genealogical research?

0-1, 2-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, or 20+

Table 1: Number of Years of Experience

Number of Years	
0-1 (Beginner)	4
2-5 (Novice)	8
6-10 (Journeyman)	6
11-20 (Experienced)	3
20+ (Veteran)	9
Total	30

   This question was answered by all thirty participants. As the above table indicates,

the largest group of participants—nine—had over 20 years experience. This result was

expected because this group began their research before the rise of the Internet, and,

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therefore, they would be more likely to visit physical locations to view records. It is interesting that those with eleven to twenty years experience[117] constitute the smallest group because they too began genealogical research before the Internet became so popular. The results of the survey show that researchers with all levels of experience use resources available at ADAH. Although it is difficult to generalize the research habits of all genealogists based on the responses of thirty participants, the results are supported by the genealogical literature reviewed for this study which states genealogists of all experience levels benefit from researching at archival institutions.[118]

To aid readers, each experience group has been assigned a title that describes its experience level and will be used for the remainder of the chapter. As the table indicates, the groups are: Beginner, 0-1 year experience; Novice, 2-5 years; Journeyman, 6-10 years; Experienced, 11-20 years; and Veteran over 20 years.

Question 2: Who do you research for?

Myself

My family or friends

I am a professional genealogist.

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[117] Although separate groups on the survey, participants with 11-15 years experience and those with 16-20 years were combined into one group due to the small number of responses. Two participants indicated they had 11-15 years, while one checked 16-20.

[118] Kovacs, *Genealogical Research on the Web*, 7 and Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 19.

Table 2: For whom Participants Research

For whom Research	
Self	12
Family/Friends	3
Self and Family/Friends	11
Professional	2
Self, Family/Friends, and Professional	2
Total	30

As indicated in the table, all participants answered this question. Overwhelmingly, participants are not professionals. Of the four who are professionals, two are Journeymen and two are Veterans. These figures are not surprising as genealogists must be extremely knowledgeable of records and have established research skills before becoming a professional. It is also not surprising that of the thirty participants, only four are professionals. In large part, genealogy remains a pastime that people want to pursue for themselves; most genealogists want to experience the joy of discovering their ancestors themselves rather than pay a professional researcher to do the work for them. A goal of this survey was to compare the responses of professionals with nonprofessionals. Because of the small number of professionals who responded, however, it is difficult to make assumptions based on their responses. Although their answers will be compared, analysis of professional versus nonprofessional responses to this survey cannot be considered indicative of all professional or nonprofessional genealogists.

Question 3: In addition to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, where have you conducted your research?

Libraries

Archives

Courthouses

Other places. List (open ended)

Table 3a: Other Research Locations by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Libraries	1	6	4	3	9	23
Archives	1	3	4	3	7	18
Courthouses	0	5	6	2	8	21
Other Locations	1	4	0	0	7	12
None	1	1	0	0	0	2

All thirty participants responded to this question. Of the two that conduct their research only at ADAH, one wrote "none" beside the choices and the other selected "other" and wrote "Internet." [119] Because this question asked about physical locations, not online research, the respondents that selected "other" and listed the Internet were counted as "none" responses. The physical locations listed by responders who selected "other places" include: cemeteries (6); The Church of Latter-day Saints' Family History Center (3); Library of Congress (2); colleges or universities (2); private homes (2); and churches (1). It is unclear

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[119] Participant 20.

whether those who conducted research at private homes searched for documents, interviewed residents, or both. In addition, seven participants wrote that they interview family members at their homes and during family reunions. One participant wrote "family history (oral)," which is unclear, but could mean information acquired through family stories or in interviews with relatives and is most likely acquired during interactions with family members throughout their lifetime.[120]

As the table indicates, Beginners conduct research at the fewest places while Veterans the most, an expected result. The more experienced genealogists are more likely to be aware of the variety of records and records holders that can aid them in their research. Beginners may also research at fewer locations because they are just beginning to do their research and thus, focus on a few locations to gather as much information from those places before expanding their research horizons. Novice genealogists are both more knowledgeable about records and may be further along in their research than Beginners, thus they may need to travel to a wider variety of locations to find the records they need. Journeymen, Experienced, and Veteran participants continued the trend of researching at multiple locations. Despite these predictable trends, however a few unexpected results were noted in the responses to this question. One in particular stands out; none of the respondents in the Journeymen and Experience categories indicated that they conduct research at locations other than archives, libraries, and courthouses. As seasoned researchers, genealogists in these categories should know more about records and be further along in their research than the less experienced respondents, so it was expected that they would be more likely to conduct research at other locations. Perhaps, they have already researched these locations, but that

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[120] Participant 26.

scenario does not seem likely as there are always other records to search to document ancestors.

Table 3b: Other Research Locations by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Libraries	19	4	23
Archives	14	4	18
Courthouses	17	4	21
Other Locations	11	1	12
None	2	0	2

As the table indicates, all professional participants visit libraries, archives, and courthouses. The one who visits other locations uses they special collections department at a university. The responses to this question are not too surprising. Professionals work at places that have the records they need, such as libraries, archives, and courthouses. However, it is surprising that all of the professionals do not visit other locations, but that may be because they get enough information from the places they do go. Some of the non-professionals interview family members and use family history which makes sense as family members are a key source for genealogists but they may be less willing to share their stories with professionals they do not know.

Question 4: How did you learn about genealogical research at ADAH?

Internet search

Ancestry.com

Another genealogy website. List (open ended)		
Other genealogists		
Archivist/librarian		
Other. List (open ended)		

Table 4a: How Learned about Genealogical Research at ADAH by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Internet Search	2	3	1	2	2	10
Ancestry.com	1	0	0	1	0	2
Another Genealogy Web site	0	1	0	0	0	1
Other Genealogists	0	1	4	0	3	8
Archivist/librarian	1	2	2	1	2	8
Other	2	5	2	0	4	13

All thirty participants answered this question. Some responders indicated they had learned about ADAH from more than one source, which is why the responses do not add up to thirty.

As the table shows, participants learned about ADAH's genealogical resources from a variety of sources. It is no surprise that eight genealogists each learned about ADAH from other genealogists and from archivists/librarians as both are knowledgeable and trusted sources. Although it is not surprising that less experienced genealogists discovered ADAH via an Internet search, it was a little unexpected that two of the three Experienced

genealogists and two of the nine Veterans discovered ADAH by the same means. With more than twenty years experience, Veterans started their genealogical research before use of the Internet became widespread and, although the Internet was more widely available when the Experienced group began their genealogical research, it had yet to become common in homes. Thus, one would think that these two groups would turn to more traditional sources for research advice, such as where to research. It is no surprise that only two indicated Ancestry.com was how they discovered ADAH. ADAH is only beginning to work with Ancestry.com. A few years from now, it is likely that the number of genealogists who discover ADAH via Ancestry.com will increase once more of the repository's records are placed on the Web site. Thus a future survey may want to include this question to discover whether the responses change over time.

Thirteen participants responded that they learned of research at ADAH from other sources besides those listed. One participant each from the Beginner, Novice, and Journeymen groups listed friends as their source, while one Beginner and one Veteran listed family members. It is unclear if the friends and family members are fellow genealogists. Two other respondents, a Novice and a Veteran, learned about ADAH after visiting the facility. One had come to ADAH as a fourth grade student on tour and recalled its resources when he or she began genealogical research. The other participant did not list the reason for the initial visit to the location. The other Novices who answered other source included while touring Tuskegee University, newspaper, and lecture. It is unknown how the tour at Tuskegee led the researcher to the archives nor what newspaper item or lecture led the others. The other Journeyman gave a vague response to this question stating he or she found out

about the archives while researching his or her Alabama ancestors. The two other Veterans

listed a genealogical publication and an employee. Employee may mean an ADAH

employee or a personal employee of the researcher who may or may not be an experienced

genealogist.

Table 4b: How Learned about Genealogical Research at ADAH by

Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Internet Search	9	1	10
Ancestry.com	2	0	2
Another Genealogy Web site	1	0	1
Other Genealogists	5	3	8
Archivist/librarian	7	1	8
Other	12	1	13

As shown in the table, three of the four professional genealogists learned about

ADAH's resources from other genealogists and archivists/librarians—the one professional

who selected Internet search also checked other genealogists and archivists/librarians. The

results are expected because, like genealogists who have more years of experience,

professional genealogists are more likely to learn of research places from fellow researchers

and from librarians and archivists. The one professional who chose other is the one who

wrote employee. The nonprofessionals in this survey learned about ADAH from a wider

variety of sources.   These responses indicate that nonprofessionals also turn to trusted

individuals, such as fellow researchers and archivists/librarians, for suggestions on where to research. Because genealogy is one of the most popular uses of the Internet, it is no surprise that nine participants discovered ADAH while searching online.

Question 5: What records/collections have you used at ADAH or other archives/libraries?

Surname files

Newspapers

Censuses

Other government records. List (open ended)

Private collections

Other collections/records. List (open ended)

Table 5a: Records Used at Archives by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Surname Files	1	3	6	2	9	21
Newspapers	2	5	3	0	8	18
Censuses	2	7	6	3	9	27
Other	3	6	6	0	6	21
Private Collections[121]	0	3	2	0	5	10

All survey participants answered this question. Not surprisingly, the most popular records with genealogists are census and surname files. Census records can provide names, ages, places of birth, occupations, and military service for multiple generations and, thus, are

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[121] Private collections are non-governmental collections. They

popular sources for genealogists. As most, if not all, government archives have census records, it can, most likely, be assumed that genealogists visit government archives to research census records.

As one can see by looking at the above table, there is a discrepancy between the survey and the results. The survey included responses for "Other government records" and "Other collections/records." Because the open-ended responses for these two categories contained many similar records, they were combined into one category in the table. The records listed in these open-ended responses include: military records (6); land records (5); court records (3); death records (2); marriage records **(2)**; state agency records (2); county and local government records (2); *The Alabama Home Journal* (1); tax records (1); maps (1); high school yearbooks (1); The Church of Latter-day Saints records (1); and church records (1). Two participants wrote there were too many different types of records to list them all.

As with question three the experience level of participants was reflected in the records they use in their research. Those with the least amount of experience rely on records that provide basic information: censuses, newspapers, and other government records that provide vital data, such as marriage information. Only one of the four Beginners looked in the surname files. Responses of Novice researchers indicate that they look at more records than those with less experience, but still rely on the basic records. With the exception of the Experienced group, the other two groups show increases in the use of other types of records, while continuing to use those traditionally associated with genealogical work, such as censuses. As with the answers to question three, there appears to be a direct relationship between experience and the number and variety of sources. Knowledge about records and

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their sources is a likely reason for this increase as is the likelihood that they those with more years of experience are further along in their research than those who started genealogy at a later date and, thus, these seasoned researchers may be trying to locate information about their ancestors beyond the basic facts of their lives. As previously mentioned, the exception to this is Experienced group. None of these participants use newspapers, other records, or private collections. All use census materials and two use the surname files. Because this group is so small, only three, it is difficult to generalize about what records genealogists with the same experience use.

Table 5b: Records Used at Archives By Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Surname Files	17	4	21
Newspapers	14	4	18
Censuses	23	4	27
Other Collections	17	4	21
Private Collections	7	3	10

Professional genealogists in this survey use a wider variety of records in their research than nonprofessionals. These results suggest the professionals may be more knowledgeable of how to use a wider variety of records in genealogical research. Both groups rely on census records because of the vital information they provide. Professionals may use surname files more often than nonprofessional genealogists because those who are researching their own families may already know the information contained in those files,

such as newspaper clippings reporting on a father's or grandfather's military training in World War II.

Question 6: What genealogy websites do you use?

Ancestry.com

RootsWeb.com

Genealogy.com

Others. List (open ended)

Table 6a: Genealogy Web Sites Used by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Ancestry.com	3	7	5	2	7	24
RootsWeb.com	0	4	2	0	1	7
Genealogy.com	0	1	1	1	2	5
FamilySearch.org	1	2	1	0	1	5
Others	1	1	1	0	1	4
Blank	1	0	1	1	1	4

This question, answered by twenty-six participants, shows that Ancestry.com is, by far, the most popular genealogy Web site among survey participants of every experience level. Participants use its sister Web sites—RootsWeb.com and Genealogy.com— significantly less. One anomaly with this question relates to a typographical error on the

survey form: instead of the URL "RootsWeb.com" the form showed "Roots.com", which is

a Canadian apparel company. The seven participants shown in the table as users of

RootsWeb.com were figured by adding those who checked "Roots.com" on the survey (on

the assumption that they understood the choice to mean RootsWeb.com) with those who

listed "RootsWeb.com" in the open-ended part of the question. Although FamilySearch.org

was not one of the options on the survey, five respondents listed it as another Web site used.

Other Web sites used by participants included Heritage Online, BML (Land Records),

GenealogyBank, Cyndi's List, and an online database from Sweden. All of the preceding

Web sites were listed once. In addition, one participant stated there were too many to list in

the "other" category.[122]

Table 6b: Genealogy Web Sites Used By Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Ancestry.com	20	4	24
RootsWeb.com	6	1	7
Genealogy.com	3	2	5
FamilySearch.org	4	1	5
Others	3	1	4
Blank	4	0	4

Ancestry.com is used by all four professionals. Ancestry.com's vast collection of

records may be the reason for its popularity with professionals. Depending on when their

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[122] Participant 21.

clients' families arrived in Alabama and how far back they want their family trees to extend, professionals may have to search other locations for records to obtain information for their clients. Many probably prefer to locate the records online rather than traveling to various locations or if they do travel, online research can help them determine the repositories most likely to yield helpful records. The majority of nonprofessional participants also use Ancestry.com, although not all of them as in the case of the professionals.

Question 7: Do you use Ancestry.com

Table 7a: Use of Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experience	Veteran	Total
Yes	3	7	4	2	7	23
No	1	1	1	0	2	5
Blank	0	0	1	1	0	2

As the previous question and the table above show, Ancestry.com is popular with this survey's participants. One anomaly occurred in the response to this question compared to that of the previous one, one who had checked Ancestry.com as a Web site used is his/her research in the previous question said no here. The reason for this discrepancy is unknown, as perhaps the participant believed that he or she did not need to answer "yes" to this question because he or he had done so in question 6. Use of Ancestry.com is consistent amongst all experience levels. With the exception of those in the Veterans group, only one participant from each of the remaining four groups does not use the Web site. The use of

Ancestry.com by twenty-three—twenty-four if the person who checked Ancestry.com in the previous question is included—participants across all levels of experience indicates the Web site is seen by a majority of genealogists as a helpful tool in their research. It is not unexpected that the Veterans group contains more than one nonuser of Ancestry.com because they began their research long before Ancestry.com was online and most likely had established their research habits in a pre-Internet era.

Table 7b: Use of Ancestry.com by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	19	4	23
No	5	0	5
Blank	2	0	2

As indicated in the previous question, the seven participants who do not use Ancestry.com are nonprofessionals.

Question 8: What parts of Ancestry.com do you use?
Records databases
Message boards
Family trees
Newspaper collections
Ancestry's library of articles

Table 8a: Parts of Ancestry.com Used by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Records Databases	2	7	5	2	5	21
Message Boards	0	5	3	1	3	12
Family Trees	1	5	4	2	6	18
Newspaper Collections	0	1	3	1	3	8
Library of Articles	1	1	2	2	3	9
Blank	1	0	1	1	2	5

Twenty-five of the participants answered this question. One anomaly occurred in the responses to this question. A participant who did not check Ancestry.com as a Web site used to research genealogy and answered "no" to question seven answered this question by selecting records database and message boards.[123] Because this participant answered the majority of the questions, it is possible that he or she answered the questions based on how he or she saw them relating to genealogical research in general.

When the answers were examined by experience level, little variation existed. The only group that differed somewhat from the others was the Beginners which was the only one to not use all types of records. The results indicate that the respondents consider all parts of Ancestry.com included as responses in this survey to be useful. The records and newspaper sections offer genealogists access to items they would have trouble locating otherwise because not all repositories have Web sites listing their collections not online. Even if they are listed online, it is highly unlikely a researcher would find the exact record, such as a

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[123] Participant 16.

specific marriage license, or article that they needed listed because collections are usually

listed by collection or series title and do not provide item-level information. To find out if a

location holds the record, the researcher would have to call or travel to the location. Message

boards and family trees are helpful in connecting genealogists to others who may have

already researched the person for whom they are looking. The library articles provide

research and other genealogy tools and tips to all levels of genealogists.

Table 8b: Parts of Ancestry.com Used by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Records Databases	17	4	21
Message Boards	9	3	12
Family Trees	15	3	18
Newspaper Collections	5	3	8
Library of Articles	9	2	11
Blank	5	0	5

Of the five areas of Ancestry.com listed in this question, the records database is the

only one used by all four professional participants. This is to be expected because the

databases directly provide access to the records professionals need and the location of the

original records. Although most professionals do use the message boards, family trees, and

newspaper collections, these three sections are less likely to provide the information sought

by professionals. Message boards and family trees do not always contained sourced

information and the newspaper collections contain mostly twentieth century newspapers,

which possibly provide little information beyond what genealogists already know. The library of articles on tools and tips for genealogists is the least useful to the professionals, presumably because they already know most of what the articles discuss. The records databases are also the most heavily used section by nonprofessionals. The second and third most frequented sections by nonprofessionals are the family trees and message boards. While the number of participants make it difficult to ascertain, it is likely message boards would be used more by nonprofessionals than professionals because message boards are often used to connect with distant relatives, something professionals would not be interested in doing. The library of articles is more popular with nonprofessionals who have less experience than professionals and, thus, are still learning about genealogical research.

Question 9: Do you have a personal subscription to Ancestry.com?

Table 9a: Personal Subscriptions to Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	0	1	4	1	3	9
No	3	7	1	1	5	17
Blank	1	0	1	1	1	4

Twenty-six participants answered this question: the four who did not had previously stated they did not use Ancestry.com and followed the instructions to skip this question. No participant in the Beginner group has a subscription which may be a result of their newness to genealogy. They might not be willing to make a financial commitment—a monthly

subscription to all United States databases costs $13 each month, while access to all records

databases is $25 per month—to something they are only starting to do.[124] Only one

participant in the Novice group has a subscription, perhaps participants in this group are also

unwilling to pay out the subscription fees, especially when they can freely access the entire

Ancestry.com database at ADAH. The Journeymen group had the highest percentage of

subscribers. This group may be more willing than those with less experience to spend the

money because genealogy is no longer a recently acquired hobby for them. Those in the

Experienced and Veteran groups may not be as willing as Journeymen to subscribe to the

Web site because they began their genealogy research before Ancestry.com was well

established and therefore, may rely on more traditional forms of research.

Table 9b: Personal Subscriptions to Ancestry.com by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	6	3	9
No	16	1	17
Blank	4	0	4

Three of the professionals and six of the nonprofessionals have subscriptions. The

three professionals may view Ancestry.com as a necessary tool for their profession—similar

to how other professionals have subscriptions to tools of their trade. Again, many

nonprofessionals may not be willing to pay the subscription fee for something that is a

pastime to them.

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[124] Ian Lamont, "Ancestry.com says TV, online advertising helped grow revenue 18% in 2008," *The Industry Standard* (2009), www.thestandard.com/news/2009/04/01/ancestry-com-says-tv-online-advertising-helped-grow-revenue-18-2008.

Question 10: If you do not have an Ancestry.com subscription, do you go to ADAH or a local archives/library to use their free access to Ancestry.com?

Table 10a: Use of Archival Institutions' Free Access to Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	2	6	4	1	5	18
No	1	0	1	0	0	2
Blank	1	2	1	2	4	10

Twenty participants answered this question. Although the question asked if those who do not have subscriptions to Ancestry.com use the free access available at ADAH, some who have personal subscriptions responded that they accessed the Web site at ADAH, while other personal subscribers skipped the question. Other nonresponders include those who do not use Ancestry.com. The question could have been worded better by asking if participants use Ancestry.com while at ADAH, which may have led to less confusion.

Those who take advantage of ADAH's free subscription are those with the least amount of experience, Beginners and Novices, and those with the most, Veterans. These results relate somewhat back to the responses to the previous question as these groups had the fewest participants with personal subscriptions. The Journeyman group, however, had the highest percentage of personal subscriptions yet most of this group also accesses Ancestry.com while at ADAH. It is impossible to understand why Journeymen with personal

subscriptions access Ancestry.com at ADAH because no question asked for this information, however a few possible reasons may explain their use of Ancestry.com at home and ADAH. One reason may be that they may not have a full subscription to Ancestry.com and while at ADAH, they access those parts they cannot view with their subscriptions. Another reason is that they might discover information at ADAH that leads them to Ancestry.com databases and they want to access those databases immediately. Finally, they may have their family trees stored on the Web site and use the computers available at ADAH access them while they conduct on-site research. All of these reasons are theoretical, future studies may wish to address this issue.

Table 10b: Use of Archival Institutions' Free Access to Ancestry.com by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	17	1	18
No	1	1	2
Blank	8	2	10

The one professional who does not have a personal subscription to Ancestry.com accesses the Web site from ADAH, as does one of the professionals with a personal subscription.

Question 11: How did you learn about Ancestry.com?

Searching online

Table 11a: How Participants Learned about Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Searching Online	1	3	4	1	2	11
Link from Another Web Site	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Genealogists	1	1	1	0	3	6
Archivist/librarian	0	3	2	1	2	8
Genealogy Publication	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other	1	3	0	0	0	4
Blank	1	0	1	2	2	6

Twenty-four participants responded to this question which corresponds with the

twenty-four participants who answered that they use Ancestry.com in question six. Some

participants indicated they had learned about Ancestry.com from more than one source,

which explains why the answers in the total column do not add up to thirty. Searching online

was the way most participants learned about Ancestry.com. As none of them discovered it

via a link from another Web site, participants most likely completed a search with a

genealogy term and Ancestry.com came up as a hit on the search results list. The second

most selected source was archivist/librarian indicating the professionals, at least the ones

these participants interact with, believe the Web site is a useful genealogical resource. The

other responses included family, listed by two participants, and one participant each listing a

history professor at Huntingdon College (a small college located in Montgomery) and Family

Tree Maker, which, like Ancestry.com, is owned by The Generations Network.

Table 11b: How Participants Learned about Ancestry.com by Professional/NonProfessional
Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Searching Online	9	2	11
Link from Another Web Site	0	0	0
Other Genealogists	4	2	6
Archivist/librarian	7	1	8
Genealogy Publication	1	0	1
Other	4	0	4
Blank	6	0	6

Three of the professionals learned about Ancestry.com from other genealogists and

archivists/librarians indicating they may rely on individuals knowledgeable about

genealogical research to learn about other research sources.

These results indicate genealogists of all levels of experience use a variety of

resources to discover genealogy tools.

Table 12a: Checking Ownership of Records on Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	0	3	4	1	4	12
No	3	4	1	1	4	13
Blank	1	1	1	1	1	5

Twenty-five participants answered this question. As the table indicates, those responded were almost evenly split between those participants who check to see who owns the originals and those who do not. The participants were nearly divided on this question. These results are somewhat surprising. It was expected that those with more experience would look to see where the records come from to decide if the source can be considered valid or to include the source in their citations. Yet, as the results show, there is consistency at all levels, except the Beginners, as to how many check and how many do not check. Thus, perhaps experience is not what leads one to check the source but their research methodology. The Beginners may not check sources because they are too early in their genealogical research to have established routines for documenting sources.

Table 12b: Checking Ownership of Records on Ancestry.com by

Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	9	3	12
No	12	1	13
Blank	5	0	5

Three of the professionals check the sources, while nine of the nonprofessionals do. The professionals are more likely to check sources due to their training and the fact they are working for someone else who expects professionalism.

Future studies may want to clarify this question by asking if participants check the source of the original records instead of who owns them as there could be confusion between who has the records and who owns the originals.

Question 13: Have you visited a repository to see a document you saw on Ancestry.com?

Table 13a: Visiting Repositories to See Original Documents by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	0	1	2	1	4	8
No	2	2	2	1	1	8
Blank	2	5	2	1	4	14

Sixteen participants answered this question. The fourteen respondents who did not

answer include those who do not use Ancestry.com and most of those who said they do not

check to see who holds the originals (they were directed to skip this question). Of those who

answered, the responses where split, eight have visited the repository which holds the

originals and eight have not. Unlike the previous question, the results were a bit more

predictable. It was assumed that the more experienced researchers would visit the repository

to check on the authenticity of a document because they would not trust anything online.

The results, as shown in the table, indicate that the desire to see records increases with years

of experience.

Table 13b: Visiting Repositories to See Original Documents by

Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	6	2	8
No	7	1	8
Blank	13	1	14

Two professionals and six nonprofessionals have visited a repository to see the

documents they saw online. Because of the small number of professionals it is difficult to

make a generalization on whether or not professionals visit repositories to view the originals

more than nonprofessionals.

Question 14: Why did you want to see the document?

To see the original, to verify it has not been altered.

To see the original, to have a personal connection to it.

Other reason. List (open ended)		

Table 14a: Reasons for Participants to See Documents by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Verify original is unaltered.	0	0	1	1	4	6
To have a personal connection.	1	1	2	0	3	7
Other Reason	0	0	0	0	3	3
Blank	3	7	4	2	4	20

Only ten participants answered this question, including two who said that they have

not visited a repository to view records. No explanation is readily available as to why they

answered this question when they said they do not visit repositories to see originals. The

nonresponders include those who do not use Ancestry.com, do not check to see the source of

the originals, and do not visit repositories to see documents firsthand. Three participants

listed other reasons including "poor digital image mandated I see the original", "to see

whether addition[al] information was available from the sources. ADAH can provide a

superior copy and far clear[er] and perhaps larger than I could print from the Internet." and

"various." [125]   As the table indicates, the more experienced genealogists tend to be more

concerned about the possibility of alteration of an online document than those with less

experience. However, no matter how long they had been researching, participants of all

levels want to have the physical connection to a document and, therefore, their ancestors.

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[125] Participants 21, 28, and 1.

The desire to handle original documents is also supported by Frazier's study which indicated genealogists will continue to visit physical repositories to touch the records that document their ancestors' lives.[126]

Table 14b: Reasons for Participants to See Documents by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Verify original is unaltered.	4	2	6
To have a personal connection.	6	1	7
Other Reason	2	1	3
Blank	18	2	20

Two professionals wanted to make sure the document had not been altered, one to have a personal experience with it, and one because the digital quality was too poor. Four of the nonprofessionals looked at the original to ensure it had not been altered, six to make a connection to the document, and two for other reasons. These results were predictable as they indicate the professionals want to confirm that the document is a reliable source, while those who are researching their own families want to touch a document because it served as a tangible connection to their ancestors. It is a little surprising that a professional would want to make a connection to a document but this person may have been researching his or her own family or may simply like handling old documents.

Question 15: Were you able to see the original or a copy?

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[126] For discussion of Frazier's study, "Genealogy Research, Internet Research, and Genealogy Tourism," see page 56 of this thesis.

Table 15a: Ability to See Original or a Copy by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	1	1	2	1	4	9
No	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Response	0	0	0	0	1	1
Blank	3	7	4	2	4	20

The ten participants who previously indicated they have visited repositories to see the originals answered this question. The one participant listed in the table as "other response" did not check either yes or no, but wrote "sometimes" next to the question.[127]

Table 15b: Ability to See Original or a Copy by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	7	2	9
No	0	0	0
Other Response	1	0	1
Blank	18	2	20

The two professionals who indicated they visit repositories to view originals responded that they have been able to view the document. Perhaps this is due to their professional status as archivists may consider them more knowledgeable about protecting older records than "hobbyists" may be. A future survey with more participants would be able to further study whether or not professionals have more access to originals than

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[127] Participant 1.

nonprofessionals. Future studies may wish to reword the question so that it can be

determined if participants see originals or copies of the originals.

> *Question 16: Do you trust an archivist's copy of an original record more than a digital*
>
> *version online?*

Table 16a: Participants' Trust of Archival Copies by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	3	5	3	2	4	17
No	0	2	2	0	0	4
Other Response	0	0	0	0	2	2
Blank	1	1	1	1	3	7

Twenty-three participants answered this question. The seven who did not answer

either do not use Ancestry.com or skipped this question for unknown reasons. One reason

may have been due to the wording of the question. The intent of the question was to discover

if genealogists trusted digitized records available online which list a repository as a source or

ones that have no source or the source is not an archival institution. One of the participants

answered no to this question because it was unclear.[128] The two "other responses" were

"most of the time" and "some of the time."

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[128] Participant 1.

Table 16b: Participants' Trust of Archival Copies by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	14	3	17
No	3	1	4
Other Response	2	0	2
Blank	7	0	7

Three of the professionals said they trust the archivist's copy over an online version, as did fourteen of the nonprofessionals. The responses agree with the literature that many genealogists do not take online documents as being authentic without a reason to believe they are.[129] One way for Ancestry.com avoids the authenticity question is to include source information with digital images.

If no, why do you not trust the online version?

Two participants stated the original is easier to read, another transcription errors, and one "believe[s] what's online is a copy of what's at the Archive."[130] Additionally, one participant who answered **"yes"** to the first part of this question cited online records have a lack of source information, as not all Web sites nor all parts of Ancestry.com require source information.

Question 17: Have you ever visited a repository to find out what other records they have besides what is shown on Ancestry.com?

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[129] Crowe, *Genealogy Online*, 359.
[130] Participant 9.

Table 17a: Visiting Repositories to See Other Records Held by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	2	3	3	1	5	14
No	1	3	2	1	2	9
Blank	1	2	1	1	2	7

Twenty-three participants answered this question, which corresponds to the number of participants who said they use Ancestry.com in question seven. Those who had visited to discover other records were spread out fairly consistently amongst the different experience groups. Therefore it appears genealogists of all levels of experience use Ancestry.com as a tool to discover physical repositories with potentially useful records that they might not have otherwise considered as research venues.

Table 17b: Visiting Repositories to See Other Records Held by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	10	4	14
No	9	0	9
Blank	7	0	7

All four professionals and ten of the nonprofessionals have visited a repository to determine other sources held by a facility. Professionals may be more likely to visit repositories to locate records not available online because learning more about the sources

held by various repositories presumably would help them with their work.

> *Question 18: How has Ancestry.com changed your genealogical research?*
>
> *Made it easier to locate records*
>
> *Able to make connections with distant relatives who research the same lines*
>
> *No change*
>
> *Other (open ended)*

Table 18a: Ancestry.com's Effects on Participants' Research by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Easier to locate records.	2	5	5	2	6	20
Make connections.	0	1	1	1	5	8
No change.	1	1	0	0	0	2
Other	0	1	0	0	1	2
Blank	1	0	1	1	2	5

Twenty-five of the respondents answered this question. The two who selected "other" wrote the Web site "helps [me] to know what needs to be pursued at onsite repositor[ies]"[131] and "using Ancestry.com at the Archives has made my research easier" but provided no explanation.[132]

Locating records was a consistent response across all levels of experience, with half or over half of each group's participants choosing this answer. Making connections was not

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[131] Participant 21.
[132] Participant 22.

a goal of the Beginner group, perhaps because they are too early in their research to be looking beyond their immediate ancestors and, thus, past the family they already know. One participant each from the next three groups made connections via Ancestry.com. The Veteran group used the Web site to make connections more than any other. This is not a surprise as they are further along in their research than others and are more likely to be seeking out others after having exhausted all other means to locate people. They also may make connections to help those with less experience get past brickwalls in their research.

Table 18b: Ancestry.com's Effects on Participants' Research by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessionals	Professionals	Total
Easier to locate records.	16	4	20
Make connections.	6	2	8
No change.	2	0	2
Other	1	1	2
Blank	5	0	5

The four professionals stated Ancestry.com makes it easier to locate records, while two say it is easier to make connections as well and one says it helps to locate records before visiting a physical location.[133] The professionals are, presumably, less interested in making connections than with locating records because the records databases are more likely to have the information they need to discover their clients' ancestors. The two professionals who stated Ancestry.com helps them to connect to distant relatives also research their own

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[133] Participant 21.

families' ancestors. Thus, they most likely make connections to those who are related to them, not their clients. The nonprofessionals are also interested in locating records, but they apparently want to make connections to distant relatives, some who may have information they need.

> *Question 19: Have you located records on Ancestry.com that helped you get past a brickwall (person who you could not find any information on) in your research?*

Table 19a: Success in Finding Information on Hard-to-Locate Ancestors by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	2	6	3	1	6	18
No	1	2	2	1	2	8
Blank	1	0	1	1	1	4

Twenty-six participants answered this question. Again some of those who do not use Ancestry.com answered this question by selecting no, the Web site has not helped them break through a brickwall. As the table shows, participants at all levels responded positively to this question. Therefore, with the exception of the Experienced group, Ancestry.com has helped at least half of the participants from the other four groups locate the information they needed to get past a troublesome point in their research. If it was not for Ancestry.com, these researchers may have found themselves at a standstill on an ancestor, not knowing where to look.

Table 19b: Success in Finding Information on Hard-to-Locate Ancestors by
Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	15	3	18
No	7	1	8
Blank	4	0	4

As the table indicates non-professionals and professionals have located hard-to-find
ancestors on Ancestry.com. These results agree with the ones broken down by years of
experience by showing, for the most part, survey participants of all levels of experience have
had success in locating information on difficult ancestors.

Question 20 (number 1): Has Ancestry.com impacted your use of archives?

Table 20-1a: Ancestry.com's Effect on Use of Archives by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	2	4	3	1	7	17
No	1	3	2	1	1	8
Blank	1	1	1	1	1	5

Twenty-five participants answered this question. As the table shows, participants at
all levels answered yes, Ancestry.com has affected their use of archives. The answers are
nearly identical to those of question nineteen with the exceptions of one more participant in

the Novice group and one less in the Journeyman group answering yes.

Table 20-1b: Ancestry.com's Effect on Use of Archives by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	14	3	17
No	7	1	8
Blank	5	0	5

As the table indicates, a majority of both professionals and nonprofessionals stated Ancestry.com has affected their use of archives.

Question 20 (number 2) Do you go more often or less often?

Table 20-2a: Increase or Decrease in Use of Physical Repositories by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
More	2	5	0	2	7	16
Less	0	0	2	0	1	3
Other Response	0	0	1	0	0	1
Blank	2	3	3	1	1	10

The goal of this question was to better understand the effects of Ancestry.com on onsite visitation at archival institutions. Twenty participants answered this question, including the five who did not answer the previous question and five others. As one

participant indicated this question was confusing, the wording of the question may have led some of the other five to not answer. However, some of those that did not respond to this question answered "no" to the previous questions and, therefore, may have skipped this question. Another anomaly of these responses is that some of the respondents who said Ancestry.com had not affected their use of archives indicated that they go more often. Again, the wording of this question may have affected their answer.

As sixteen participants, a little over half of those surveyed, said they visit archives more as a result of Ancestry.com, these responses may indicate that Ancestry.com has a positive effect on onsite visitation at archival institutions. A larger study with participants from other archival institutions and online would help verify this claim. Knowing how Ancestry.com affects onsite visitation is important for archives deciding whether or not to work with Ancestry.com. If having some of their collections placed on the Web site increases patronage, archives may be more willing to work with the company. Conversely, if patronage decreased after placing records on Ancestry.com, archival institutions might be less willing to enter into an agreement.

It is important to note that one of the participants who stated they visit less wrote that it was due to hours. Due to budget cuts, ADAH ended its Saturday hours in January, making it difficult for researchers who work during the week to visit.

Table 20-2b: Increase or Decrease in Use of Physical Repositories by

Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
More	15	1	16
Less	2	1	3
Other Response	0	1	1
Blank	9	1	10

Nonprofessionals' use of ADAH due to Ancestry.com appears to have a more

positive relation than that of the professionals. Because only four professionals participated

in this survey and each responded to the question differently—"more," "less," "same," and

blank—it is impossible to make a generalization based on their responses.

Question 21: What records would you like ADAH to place on Ancestry.com?

Table 21a: Records Participants Would Like on Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Census	1	1	0	0	1	3
Vital Records	1	1	1	0	1	4
Estate/Wills	0	1	1	0	0	2
Newspaper	1	1	1	0	1	4
Confederate Pension	0	0	1	0	2	3
Land	0	0	1	0	0	1
Family history/Surname	1	0	0	0	1	2
City/County Records	0	0	0	0	2	2
Any	0	1	1	0	0	2
None	0	1	0	0	0	1
Not sure	0	0	0	0	1	1
Blank	2	3	2	3	3	13

Seventeen participants answered this question. Many of those who answered desired more than one type of record to be placed on Ancestry.com, which accounts for the total number of responses being greater than seventeen. As the table shows, participants desire a variety of records, yet no record type was overwhelmingly listed by participants. If this survey had listed types of records, there may have been more of a consensus because participants would have been given options that they might not have thought of when

answering this question.

Since many census records, both Alabama and federal, are already on Ancestry.com it is difficult to know what census records participants want added. One participant, however, did specify indexed state census records, which are not available. Vital records include any records relating to birth, marriage, and death and are grouped together in the table because they contain basic genealogical information.

Table 21b: Records Participants Would Like on Ancestry.com by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Census	3	0	3
Vital Records	4	0	4
Estate/Wills	2	0	2
Newspaper	3	1	4
Confederate Pension	1	2	3
Land	1	0	1
Family history/Surname	2	0	2
City/County Records	1	1	2
Any	1	1	2
None	1	0	1
Not sure	1	0	1
Blank	11	2	13

The breakdown between nonprofessional and professional responses of what ADAH records survey participants would like to see online is interesting. One might expect professionals to be interested in vital and census records, the records considered core sources in genealogical research. However, none of the four included them in their responses, although the one who said "any" may have considered vital records to be included in his or her broad answer. Perhaps the reason none of the professionals listed vital or census records was due to the wording of the question. If the question had asked what types of records participants would like to search on Ancestry.com, the responses may have been different. All federal censuses, some Alabama state censuses (though not indexed), and a few vital records from Alabama are already on Ancestry.com. The site does not, however, include state censuses and vital records from all states, so if the question had not been limited to ADAH, professionals might have been more inclined mention these types of records in their responses.

Question 22: As you know, many of the records placed on Ancestry.com are government created, and therefore, in the public domain. Does it bother you that you have to pay to view public records?

Table 22a: Participants' Views on Placement of Public Records on a Subscription-Based Web site by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Yes	3	5	2	2	5	17
No	1	3	4	1	4	13

All thirty participants answered this question. Like some of the other questions in this study, this question should have been worded differently. As it is worded in the study, the question may be taken to mean that researchers have to pay to view all records in the public domain, including those at ADAH and other archives. Keeping the question of clarity in mind, participants' responses indicate the less experienced users have more of a problem with paying to see public records. Eleven of the thirteen who answered "no" did not answer the previous question, which could indicate they do not wish ADAH to place any records on Ancestry.com. One respondent wrote next to his or her "no" answer that genealogists are "paying for the convenience."[134]

Table 22b: Participants' Views on the Placement of Public Records on a Subscription-Based Web site by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Yes	16	1	17
No	10	3	13

A larger proportion of nonprofessionals than professionals have concerns about paying for access to public records. Although sixteen nonprofessionals do not like paying for something that they believe should be free, only one professional does. The other three professionals all indicated they had no problem, with one being the participant who said they are paying for the convenience. One possible reason behind this result is that professionals need access to these records to do their work. Paying Ancestry.com's subscription fee is

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[134] Participant 11.

easier, faster, and cheaper than trying to locate records held by different archives throughout the nation and either writing or traveling to the locations to obtain copies of or the originals.

Question 23: What is the number one advantage of using Ancestry.com for genealogical research?

Table 23a: Top Reasons for Researching Genealogy on Ancestry.com by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Convenience	1	1	2	1	2	7
Ease of Use	1	3	0	0	3	7
Speed	2	2	1	1	2	8
Variety of Records	2	2	1	1	3	9
Leads to Other Records	0	1	1	0	1	3
Find Location of Original Records	0	1	0	0	0	1
None	0	0	0	0	1	1
Blank	0	0	1	1	0	2

Twenty-eight participants answered this question. Again, some of those who answered this question do not use Ancestry.com. Perhaps the answers of these respondents were in reference to the top advantage of Ancestry.com on genealogical research in general. Of those that did respond, some listed more than one advantage. Thus, the number of responses is more than the number of participants who answered.

Overall participants noted convenience, speed, and ease of use. In particular, participants noted the power of search engines for locating relevant records and the speed of searches. Specifically, multiple participants noted census records as being easier to access via the Web due to search engines. One participant noted that census searching is much faster than the old approach of laboriously reading through multiple reels of microfilm.[135] As noted by one respondent, Ancestry.com is available via the Internet, so researchers can search it at any time they choose, which is a great advantage for employed researchers whose work schedules coincide with the hours the Reference Room is open to the public.[136] Some respondents indicated that they use Ancestry.com because they can print documents, while others use it locate records, whether where they are online or available at a physical location. A final advantage cited by some respondents is that Ancestry.com's database contains more records with genealogical value than ADAH.

The Beginners tended to focus on the convenience, speed, and ease of access of Ancestry.com. Novices also appreciated the speed and easy access but some in this group also noted that they use what they find on the Web site to locate the originals or other records that may be of use. Participants in the Journeymen group were divided between convenience and the information found in the records. The most experienced researchers, the Veterans group, focused largely on how Ancestry.com serves as a research tool. There were too few participants in the Experienced group to accurately examine their responses as being reflective of the larger genealogy community with the same amount of years of experience.

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[135] Participant 15.
[136] Participant 9.

Table 23b: Top Reasons for Researching Genealogy on Ancestry.com Professionals and

Nonprofessionals

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Convenience	5	2	7
Ease of Use	7	0	7
Speed	6	2	8
Variety of Records	9	0	9
Leads to Other Records	3	0	3
Find Location of Original Records	1	0	1
None	1	0	1
Blank	2	0	2

As indicated by the table, professionals find the convenience and speed of

Ancestry.com to be its biggest advantages. It is interesting that professionals did not list the

ability to access records held at distant repositories as being an advantage of using

Ancestry.com. One would assume that they would use Ancestry.com to help them locate

records necessary to their work that are held by distant locations, thus saving them the time

and money they would have spent on traveling to or corresponding with the distant

repository. Perhaps the answer of convenience includes locating records at distant archives.

Question 24: What is the number one advantage of going to a physical location, such as

ADAH, to do genealogical research?

Table 24a: Top Reason for Researching Genealogy at Physical Locations by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Variety of Records	2	2	2	0	3	9
Uniqueness of Records	0	0	1	0	0	1
Access to Original Records	2	2	2	0	4	10
Access to Records not online	0	0	0	0	2	2
Assistance of Archival Staff	2	4	1	3	2	12
Atmosphere	0	0	1	0	1	2
Convenience	1	3	0	0	0	4
Free	0	0	0	0	1	1
Blank	0	0	0	1	0	1

Twenty-nine participants answered this question, with some listing more than one advantage. The one participant who did not answer this question did not answer any of the open-ended questions at the end of the survey, perhaps due to time constraints.

The most mentioned advantage was the availability of staff and the amount of experience participants appears to be reflected in their answers. As the table shows, half of the Beginners and over half of the Novices wrote the ADAH staff—their knowledge and assistance—was the top advantage, while only one of the six Journeymen and two of the Veterans mentioned staff. Thus, the trend appears to be that those with less experience rely

more on repository staff for help. This comes as no surprise. Those with more experience

are more knowledgeable about records and how to use archival holdings and would therefore

be less dependent on repository staff for research assistance. As in the previous question,

however, the Experienced group went against the trend and all of them responded that the top

reason was staff assistance. Again, because this group was made up of only three

participants, it is impossible to make any generalizations based on their answers. Perhaps

they require staff assistance to locate information in specialized records not typically used in

genealogical research; or perhaps they are new visitors to ADAH and need staff help to learn

about this particular repository.

When grouped together, the responses relating to records—variety, uniqueness,

availability of originals, and access to those not online—number twenty-two making the

availability of records at repositories the top reason for researching at physical locations. It is

no surprise that records were often mentioned as an advantage. Although Ancestry.com has

millions of records available on its Web site, the many records in archival repositories with

genealogical value remain off line and some may never be online. There are just too many

records that can be feasibly considered as having genealogical value to put them all online.

Nor can online records satisfy the desire of genealogists who want to view original records,

whether to confirm their digital counterparts have not been altered or just to see them first

hand.

Table 24b: Top Reasons for Researching Genealogy at Physical Locations by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Variety of Records	9	0	9
Uniqueness of Records	1	0	1
Access to Original Records	8	2	10
Access to Records not online	0	2	2
Assistance of Archival Staff	12	0	12
Atmosphere	2	0	2
Convenience	4	0	4
Free	1	0	1
Blank	1	0	1

With one exception, as indicated in the table, participant responses to this question reflect their status as professional or nonprofessional. The professionals view the top advantage of researching at physical locations as access to originals of records online and access to records not online. Although access to originals was a leading response of nonprofessionals, their other responses were different from the professionals. While a survey of thirty people cannot be used to make generalizations, it is interesting that the responses to this question can be so easily divided between professional and nonprofessional.

Question 25: Where do you prefer to do your research?

Online

Table 25a: Genealogical Research Location Preference by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Physical Location	2	5	5	3	8	23
Online	1	3	1	0	0	5
Blank	1	0	0	0	1	2

Twenty-eight participants answered this question. As the table indicates, participants in the two most experienced groups—those with over ten years of experience—all prefer to conduct their research at physical locations. Their responses were expected. Veteran users—those with over twenty years of experience—began researching before the Internet had become common in homes. Therefore, they may be more comfortable conducting research as they always have—in an actual repository. The Internet increasing found its way into homes in the past ten to twenty years, the time when participants in the Experienced group began their research. Thus, it is possible that participants in this group did not have Internet access at home when they started their genealogical research and, therefore, might, like the Veterans, prefer to research at physical locations. Conversely, participants in the Beginner, Novice, and Journeyman groups all began conducting genealogical research after the Internet became commonplace in homes. Hence, it was expected that some of these participants would prefer to search online. However, because a repository served as the location for this survey—especially one that welcomes and encourages genealogical

research—it was predictable that participants would strongly favor researching at physical locations. An online survey on a genealogical Web site, in particular Ancestry.com, or a survey conducted at a less genealogy-friendly archives may have yielded different results. Thus, a future survey to determine where genealogists prefer to research would ideally be conducted both online and at a variety of physical repositories.

Table 25b: Genealogical Research Location Preference by Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Physical Location	21	3	23
Online	4	1	5
Blank	2	0	2

As the table indicates, this survey's nonprofessional and professional researchers prefer to research at physical locations. The result of this breakdown between professionals and nonprofessionals is not surprising given that this survey was at a physical location.

Question 26: Explain your preference from question 25.

Table 26a: Explanation of Preference for Researching at Physical Locations or Online by Years of Experience

	Beginner	Novice	Journeyman	Experienced	Veteran	Total
Physical: See Original Records	1	3	2	0	0	6
Physical: Prefer Traditional Research Methods	0	0	0	0	2	2
Physical: Assistance of Archival Staff	2	2	1	2	1	8
Physical: Problems Locating Records on Ancestry.com	0	0	0	0	2	2
Physical: Not all Records Online	0	0	2	1	1	4
Physical: Atmosphere	0	2	1	0	1	4
Online: Convenience	1	2	1	0	0	4
No Preference	1	0	0	0	0	1
Blank	0	1	0	1	6	8

Twenty-two participants answered this question. There are a few possible reasons the other eight did not. Some may have seen the question as redundant given that they had already stated what they viewed the top reasons for researching at a physical location or online and may have thought their previous answers worked for this question as well. Also some those who completed this survey during the initial run may not have realized there was

a twenty-sixth question because it was on the back on the second page. The first run of surveys was printed on two pages, front and back; the second run was printed on four one-sided pages.

The answers given in response to this question reflect the three previous questions. The majority of researchers favor researching at physical locations because of the types of records available and because the staff is ready to help. Those who prefer online research like its convenience. It is interesting to note the four that prefer researching online all began after the Internet became commonplace in homes. Thus, they may be more Internet-savvy than those who began researching before the Internet and, thus, who prefer traditional research methods.

The two Veterans who stated they prefer to research in physical locations found the search engine on Ancestry.com does not always locate search terms. These researchers know specific individual records are on Ancestry.com but, for some reason, the search engine cannot locate them. Thus they prefer physical repositories where they do not have to rely on search engines as much and have staff available to help them when their searches prove fruitless.

The Beginner who has no preference stated the means for finding records does not matter "as long as the information is found."[137]

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[137] Participants 4 and 26.

Table 26b: Explanation of Preference for Researching at Physical Locations or Online by

Professional/NonProfessional Status

	Nonprofessional	Professional	Total
Physical: See Original Records	5	0	6
Physical: Prefer Traditional Research Methods	2	0	2
Physical: Assistance of Archival Staff	6	2	8
Physical: Problems Locating Records on Ancestry.com	2	0	2
Physical: Not all Records Online	2	2	4
Physical: Atmosphere	4	0	4
Online: Convenience	3	1	4
No Preference	1	0	1
Blank	7	1	8

As shown in the above table, the professional participants found the assistance of staff

and the availability of records to be their top reasons for researching at physical repositories.

It is interesting that, as professionals, they still rely on archival staff to help them locate

records. Nevertheless, genealogy, like any profession, involves continual learning, which

may account for the professionals' reliance on staff. A larger survey is needed to know if

these results are indicative of professional genealogists as a whole.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the survey conducted for this thesis

cannot be used to make generalizations about genealogical research as a whole but it does

serve as a pilot project to begin learning about the practice. The survey has its limitations

due to awkward wording of some questions, the small number of participants, and by being

conducted at only one location. Future surveys studying Ancestry.com's effects on

genealogical research and archival repositories should pay close attention to the wording of

questions, obtain more participants, and recruit both online researchers and those at a variety

of physical locations. Future surveys may also wish to restructure the questionnaire so that

the questions regarding use of Ancestry.com are at the end of the survey so that those

participants who do not use this Web site will finish the survey with the question asking if

they use Ancestry.com instead of being told to skip ahead. This may prevent the confusion

of people who claim to not use the Web site from answering questions regarding use of it.

Future studies may also want to make sure the questions are not repository-specific. While

ADAH will benefit from this study, it would have been more useful for the questions to have

focused on repositories in general.

The limitations of this survey aside, some useful information was learned from this

study. Archivists interested in working with Ancestry.com to place their fragile and

frequently-requested records on the company's Web site may find the results of this survey

reassuring. If the participants in this survey are indicative of genealogists in general,

Ancestry.com will not decrease onsite genealogical research at archives and, in fact, may

increase it. Genealogists at ADAH, and most likely at other repositories, see Ancestry.com

as another tool to help them in their research. A more comprehensive study of genealogists

is needed to determine if this is indeed the case as well as to determine the effects of

Ancestry.com on genealogists' visits to physical repositories. In this survey, a little over

half, of the participants (seventeen of thirty) noted that Ancestry.com has affected their use of archives. It is impossible to know how Ancestry.com has affected their use of archives because this question was not asked, but sixteen participants stated they research at archives more often. Participants noted that Ancestry.com if convenient because it provides access to a variety of records, is easy of use, and is fast. Participants indicated that the advantages of researching at a physical repository are access to unique records and original records and the helpfulness of knowledgeable staff. Although more than half of the participants take issue with paying to see public records, the convenience of access to records from distant repositories helps some to accept paying subscription fees to view public records. One way for genealogists to get around paying the subscription fees while still accessing the Web site is to use the free access provided at many repositories, thus Ancestry.com may help to bring genealogical patrons into repositories.

Although additional studies are needed to improve our understanding of how Ancestry.com has affected genealogical research and archives, this study has hinted that the Web site may have had a positive effect on both, increasing access to records at distant locations and leading genealogists to archives to consult the originals of records displayed online and to use records not presented online.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Genealogy has been an increasingly popular pursuit in the United States for over one and a half centuries. In its early days, genealogists sought mainly to trace their families back to the founders of the nation, including the Pilgrims, early settlers, and Revolutionary War soldiers and, thus, tying them to historical figures. As the practice evolved genealogists increasingly wanted to know about all of their ancestors—where they came from and who they were. Genealogical research has also evolved and become more open and less elite. The increased interest in all ancestors, famous or not, and the growing interest of minorities in genealogy has resulted in modern genealogists researching a wider variety of locations to discover their ancestors. In addition to these changes, genealogical organizations have made attempts to create research and documentation standards, which may or may not be followed. Those researchers that follow the standards require more proof and documentation than previous generations of genealogists. Among genealogists' popular places to research are archives and Ancestry.com.

Archives have long been a popular research location of genealogists. They contain a variety of vital, land, census, and newspaper records—the basic records for genealogical research. Many contain private collections of individuals, already researched family histories, and other records valued by genealogists. Until the Internet became a fixture in American homes, genealogists had to travel to archival repositories or correspond with archivists to locate records in the repository's holdings. Both research methods required time

and money. Computer technology helped improve some aspects of research, especially when for-profit companies provided facsimile copies of records on CDs, which eliminated some of the need to consult original records in the repository. However, it was impossible for all records with genealogical data to be burned to CDs nor could researchers be guaranteed the records they needed would be on the CD they ordered. More computer technological innovation was needed to have a significant impact on genealogical research. That innovation came with widespread use of the Internet beginning in the early 1990s. While the first Internet service providers were proprietary, the Internet's potential was quickly evident. Genealogists were able to communicate with those who subscribed to the same online service providers, thus making connections with distant family members who could share their research. Early genealogical forays on the Internet included record transcriptions and GEDCOM files. However, technological improvements quickly increased the Internet's usefulness to genealogists, particularly when the Netscape browser appeared in 1995. The browser revolutionized the Internet in many ways: for genealogical research, in particular, it allowed for facsimiles of original records to be posted online which further increased genealogical research on the Web. Netscape also simplified Web browsing—no longer did searchers have to type commands to access Web sites. As the Internet's capabilities mushroomed in the 1990s, the quality of online genealogical material greatly improved. Individuals began creating their own Web sites and genealogy-focused Web sites appeared.

In 1996, a major change in online genealogical research occurred when Ancestry.com went online. As with most genealogical research tools, Ancestry.com has its origins in the years before the Internet became commonplace in American homes. Ancestry Inc., the

predecessor to Ancestry.com, was founded in 1983 as a publications company that, over the next fifteen years, also took on a research component. The company's mangers saw the vast potential of the Internet early on and worked with online service providers so it had an early presence online. Following the innovations to the Internet in the 1995, most notably those by Netscape which made the Web more navigational by non-technical people, Ancestry.com was launched. In the thirteen years since it went online, Ancestry.com has became the largest and most popular genealogy Web site. Subscribers have access to tens of thousands of record databases, family trees, message boards, and genealogy-related articles. Many genealogists view the Web site as a necessary tool in their research.

How does the rise of Ancestry.com affect research at archives and genealogical research in general? In the thirteen years since the Web site's launch, no study has been conducted to see how it has affected genealogical research in general and the effects it has had on traditional genealogical research locations, such as archives. Thus, the goals of the survey of genealogical researchers at the Alabama Department of Archives and History was to discover the Web site's effects on genealogical research and archives and to hopefully encourage further research on the effects of Ancestry.com's on genealogical and historical research. The majority of participants' responses supported the discussions of the works in the literature review, however some responses were unexpected.

As mentioned in the discussion of the survey methodology, only thirty genealogists participated in this study, thus making generalizations about the effects of Ancestry.com on genealogical research and archives would be premature based solely on this study. However, this study is a pilot project and, thus, its importance lies in being the first of its kind. Any

time studies examine new topics, they are limited but they are no less important as they serve to bring attention to topics that should be studied. Although this survey does not intend to be the last word on the relationship between Ancestry.com, genealogical research, and archives, it is possible that future surveys may show that the results in this survey are reflective of genealogists as a whole.

The survey showed that researchers of all levels of experience visit archives to conduct genealogical research. They do so largely because of the helpfulness of the staff and the access to unique and original documents. They realize that, despite the vast number of records available on Ancestry.com and the Internet in general, the majority of records held by the Archives and similar locations are not online and most likely never will be. They also want to see the originals, both to make sure their digitized versions have not been altered and to experience the thrill of holding records relating to their ancestors. The participants look at a wide variety of records at the Archives, including censuses, newspapers, government records, private records, surname files, and books with genealogical data in them. As expected of a survey held at a physical location, most participants indicated they prefer to research at repositories.

Although participants use Ancestry.com more than any other genealogy Web site, only a few actually have subscriptions with the company. The cost of the subscription may be too much for many to spend on a hobby, especially when they can use the access the entire Web site at a local repository for free. In general, researchers liked Ancestry.com's ease of use, speed, and numerous collections, which have helped nearly half of the participants to locate ancestors who they were previously at an impasse on. The most

utilized portion of Ancestry.com is its records databases. This is to be expected as genealogists' main goal is to locate official records that document their ancestors' lives. While they may use the message boards to locate and exchange information with distant relatives who have already completed research on a particular family branch, they still want to consult the records to verify information and ensure accuracy. In using the records databases, about half of the participants said they checked to see the source of the document and half of those actually visited the physical repository to see the original. It was a little unexpected that those with more experience did not look at the source information. One would think they would want to know a record's origins to ensure that the location could be considered trustworthy. However, it comes as no surprise that when they did visit a repository to see documents they viewed online, they were more interested than less experienced researchers in whether or not the online version was an exact copy.

Despite the benefits of Ancestry.com, participants' responses suggest that the Web site will never eliminate the need to visit physical repositories. Many of the survey's participants indicated they considered the sources found in Ancestry.com as a suggestion to visit a repository to discover if it had other records, not online, to help them in their research. While many see Ancestry.com as a research tool, it cannot replace the need to visit the places that hold original documents and those that will never be available online. Only two participants indicated they visit the Archives less because of Ancestry.com and sixteen said they actually visit it more. Therefore, archives should not worry about losing patrons to Ancestry.com. In fact, further digitization collaborations between Ancestry.com and repositories should be sought. The more records are available online, the more likely

genealogists will learn about and visit physical repositories. The only drawback to working with a for-profit company like Ancestry.com is that thirteen of the thirty participants, nearly half, stated they take issue with having to pay to view public records online. However some on both sides of this issue stated that the convenience of having access to so many records outweighs their desire to have free access. In the end this argument will come down to archivists who must decide which is the worst scenario—angering patrons by placing records on subscription-based Web sites or losing records due to overuse. The decision is not an easy one.

Future researchers interested in understanding the link between Ancestry.com, genealogical research, and archives can build on the project. The first suggestion is to conduct the survey at a variety of physical and online locations to ensure genealogists who research only offline and those who research only online are studied. Second, future studies will want to avoid open-ended responses and instead rely on closed answers, which will simplify analysis. Third, researchers will also want to make sure the questions are clearly worded. Finally, future studies will want to ask for information not gathered in this study, such as directly asking how Ancestry.com has affected genealogical research.

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