

# SHARING FAMILY STORIES

**W**ith family history being one of the world's most popular hobbies, family and local history resources in public libraries fit well with meeting the needs of people wishing to learn about where they have come from. Liz Pidgeon is a recent winner of the Margery C. Ramsay scholarship, awarded each year by the Library Board of Victoria to foster professional development. Her project, *Local and Family History Services in the UK and USA* took her on a tour of some significant resources for genealogists and historians alike. Along the way, she found that storytelling is the central factor in the delivery of effective programs by leading international libraries and archives.

One of the aims of my project was to identify effective programs for the delivery of family and local history services. Storytelling was a recurring theme throughout my tour. As part of my scholarship project, I attended the world's two largest genealogy conferences: Who Do You Think You Are? Live 2013 in London and RootsTech 2013 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The scholarship also provided the opportunity to visit and learn from key institutions, including the British Library, Westminster City Archives, New York Public Library, Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana and the FamilySearch library in Salt Lake City.

The rate of digitisation of records is rapidly growing, and with it an increasing expectation of the community that libraries and archives provide their original records online. The digitisation studio of the British Library Newspapers, in conjunction with Bright Solid (now DC Thomson) have a ten year partnership to digitise 40 million newspaper pages, accessible via the subscription site, British Newspapers Archive. A library edition is available. *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674–1913* is an extensive collection of material relating to the Old Bailey Court held by the Guildhall Library, which concentrates its collection on London and has been indexing all surviving pages and transcripts of trials from the *Old Bailey Session Papers* between 1674 and 1913, making them fully searchable online. It is an ideal resource for researchers with convict ancestors.

Ancestry.com announced at RootsTech 2013 that more than \$100 million would be committed towards digitising content over the next three to five years. In partnership with FamilySearch they are well digitising and indexing over 140 million pages of US probate records, in addition to other projects.



Content curation supplements and complements unique physical local history collections, giving life and context to the stories they can tell. Westminster City Archives have generated significant interest with its blog, *The Life and Loves of a Victorian Clerk: The Diary of Nathaniel Bryceson*. Written by a 19 year old in 1846, this extraordinary detailed diary was serialised in blog form on the corresponding dates in 2010. *The Cookbook of Unknown Ladies: Curious Recipes and Hidden Histories* is another blog created by Westminster City Archives, based on a manuscript recipe book from their collection. It spans 150 years of British cookery, providing a fascinating insight into the culinary craft of the Georgian and Regency periods.

Ongoing and proactive collection building can also be facilitated through local community networks and commercial partnerships. For example, the Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center collects unpublished family histories. Individuals who do not wish to officially publish their genealogical work are invited to send an unbound master copy to the library. In exchange for making one photocopy for the collection, a complimentary bound photocopy is returned to the donor along with the original master.

Another example is FamilySearch, who harness the power of crowdsourcing and community engagement to improve access to its collections. This is achieved via community indexing and creating Facebook communities for areas of interest, enabling family history researchers to collaborate and assist each other with their research needs.

Public libraries need to continue to recognise and value their role in preserving and collecting local historical resources and stories. Online tools such as Historypin, Flickr and social media for content creation make this even more achievable.

There has never been a better time than now for people to research their family history. Public libraries are an excellent resource for people to conduct their research journey to discover their family and local history stories.

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