

Spending Your Genealogy Dollars Wisely

By Howard Maynard Faulkner

Most amateur genealogists have a finite amount of funds to spend on this enjoyable pastime. Many are retired, on a fixed income and pinch the genealogy pennies to get the biggest bang for the buck. We expend modest sums for association memberships, computer software, internet access, travel, local and state conferences, books, copies of vital records, etc. Some of us spring for *expensive annual fees** for internet access to huge databases like *Ancestry.com*. or *Footnote*. We may even take a trip to the Salt Lake City or a research tour to Ireland, Scotland, France, or Italy. However, many simply can't afford *Ancestry.com*, *Footnote* or even a trip to Boston.

Consider this scenario. You live in Maine but need to locate death information for an ancestor who died in Virginia about 1870-80. You have had no luck clearing this *brick wall* using the many **free online** services. At first you may consider a trip to Virginia for this purpose. It might cost you \$1,000 to fly to Virginia from Maine, spend two nights in a modest hotel, rent a car and drive to a county courthouse only to find there are no such records there. Several other choices should be considered that might give excellent results at much lower cost. One or more of these resources might yield the desired result at considerable savings, although it may not be as exciting a venture.

Using Free or Low Cost Services

Several possible Free or Low Cost Services that an experienced genealogist will use include:

1. Local, Regional or State Libraries (Contact the Reference Librarian by letter or Email)
2. Local, Regional or State Historical Societies (by Email or letter)
3. Online Message Boards (Query Boards) This might take a while but still a good resource
4. Friends or Relatives living in the area you are researching.
5. Local Newspapers (they may have an archivist who would do a 'look-up' for you)
6. Local, Regional or State Genealogical Societies (send a letter asking for assistance)
7. Contact Town or City Clerk by email or letter
8. Local Funeral Services (send a letter)
9. Cemeteries in the area of interest (Send letter directly to Cemetery Administrator)
10. Court Houses (Send a letter asking if they have a will index or probate records for the period you desire. If so they may copy the records you need for a nominal fee.
11. Use your local major library that has *Ancestry.com* and/or *Heritage Quest* available FREE
12. *Ancestry.com*, *Footnote.com* and others offer a free trial periods. Worth a try!!
13. Ask a friend that has *Ancestry.com* if you could use their computer some evening, in exchange for a few brownies or one of your special apple pies.
14. Some libraries allow research of certain databases (*Ancestry.com*, *Heritage Quest*, etc) from home with a library card.
15. Most all libraries provide *free* Inter Library Loans (ILL's) whereby you can obtain historical books, published genealogies, and in some cases microfilms from other libraries.
16. *Google Books* (free online books). Check out local histories, vital records or published genealogies (of the surname you desire) for the geographical areas you require.

Hiring Professional Genealogists

If the challenge of solving a *brick wall* is important to you consider hiring a professional genealogist who services the geographical area of interest to you. For a couple hundred dollars you might get exactly what you have been looking for.

* *Now back to the expensive online database services such as Ancestry.com. These may not really be that expensive when you learn that the 'pro' you just hired did the research for your **brick wall** from home using the same service you could have had for \$19.95 for a whole month or \$155 for a year!!* Most certainly there will be occasions when the professional genealogist will find what is *not* online. Their services can be invaluable and there are times when the cost of a professional genealogist is worth every penny...(or Dollar). *Happy Hunting!!*