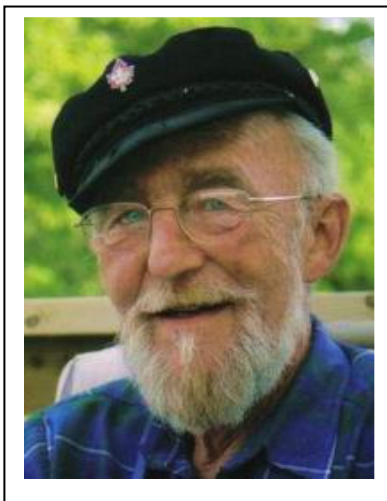


The Family Historian

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Column #86

Online Learning



From time to time I have mentioned free online courses on topics such as Preservation and Palaeography but I recently read an article by Lisa Alzo about online Genealogy courses and decided to check out this phenomenon.

I have taken one fee-based online course and was very happy with it. I felt that I certainly got my money's worth. I was unprepared, however, for the vast range of courses available. Obviously their quality is very uneven but there is a surprising number of excellent ones. It takes more than a knowledge of genealogy to prepare such a course. Content expertise must be supported with outstanding communication skills and expertise in web-based learning design. Usually this means that a team is required to produce a good course.

The easiest way to cut through this large subject is to separate the fee-based and free offerings. In this column we will only look at the free learning opportunities.

Some of those I checked out were too basic, broad, or vague to be of much use to us. Some of them were interesting, even fun, but

definitely 'soft'.

Genealogy.com is a subscription site but their Learning Centre is accessible at no cost and it really is worthwhile going there. They have a series of 'How To' sheets that cover 31 different genealogical topics but the heart of their Learning Centre is really their free genealogy classes.

These are grouped into 'Beginning Genealogy', 'Internet Genealogy', 'Tracing Immigrant Origins', and 'Researching With Genealogy.com'. Each of these is divided into sub-topics and each of them comprises several lessons.

I went to 'Tracing Immigrant Origins', selected 'Part 5-European Sources', and went to 'Lesson 4-Departure Lists'. I was glad I did. I learned a number of things that I had not been aware of and was so excited that I printed out the lesson. It came to 16 pages. The lesson includes a suggested voluntary assignment applying the content of the lesson to your own Family History research.

The authors of the courses are clearly identified along with their credentials. If you would like to take a look at this resource, go to: www.genealogy.com/genehelp.html.

The ubiquitous Rootsweb, which provides so many resources to the researcher also has a series of 31 'Rootsweb Guides' that deal with both the wide variety of documents that we work with and with various countries and ethnic groups. In addition to good content, they usually include useful links and other references. The authors of these are also identified. There is an index to these guides at: <http://rwguide.rootsweb.com/>.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) provides a lot more than just microfilms of records. If you select 'Research Guidance' from the menu at the top of their home page, you will be taken to a list of 102 geographically oriented 'Research Guides'.

Each item is a hot link that will take you to an outline of vital data for that area. Clicking on one of those will take you to appropriate research strategies and background information.

There is another category called 'Research helps'. It too is organized on a geographical basis and, when you find the area you want, it will provide a word list of terms you will encounter in that language, a guide to writing letters for documents or information in that language, as well as research strategies for that area. Their URL is: www.familysearch.org.

Brigham Young University offers 26 free online genealogy courses. They cover basic genealogy, family, vital, and military records and series of courses on France, Germany and Scandinavia. I recently had a query from a reader about research in Alsace-Lorraine, so I took the course on that place.

This course consisted of 1 lesson in 14 parts. It is programmed learning with a vengeance. Each part is virtually single concept and has a self-test that can be auto-corrected. It is very well done but I found it all somewhat simplistic and a little annoying. I have no idea if the other courses are like this, but I expect they are.

You can find a list of courses at: www.ce.byu.edu/is/site/courses/freecourses.cfm. You have to register for the first one you take but there is no charge.