Make Use of Ancestry for Free
By Robbin Degeratu

In the world of genealogical research, Ancestry.com is one of the biggest players in the game, boasting billions of historical records and more than three million paying subscribers. It is undoubtedly a useful resource... and it is one that you can use for free at your library. When you visit any Centre County Library & Historical Museum branch (including the Pennsylvania Room!) or Schlow Centre Region Library, you can use Ancestry Library Edition on a library computer or your own laptop free of charge (Not in Centre County? Read on — we have a tip for you at the end).

What is Ancestry Library Edition (ALE)? It is a search tool that is powered by Ancestry.com, and it makes the largest online family history resource in the United States available to library visitors. ALE's databases contain a wealth of indexed and searchable genealogical records, including everything from immigration and vital records, to the United States Census and family histories, to court records, military records, photographs, and more. Moreover, in addition to United States records, ALE provides records from destinations around the world, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, Eastern Europe, Russia, and beyond.

For users who are already familiar with Ancestry.com through either a free trial or a subscription, using ALE is simple and easy: the search features are identical, as is the interface. The primary difference between ALE and Ancestry.com is that the latter is designed for individuals, with a number of options to build your own family tree, connect with relatives, and collaborate online. While some records are not available to view in ALE, many of the historic records that our users are most interested in are, making this search tools an invaluable asset to genealogical research.

Are you new to Ancestry entirely? You're in luck! Searching ALE's databases is intuitive and user-friendly for people who are comfortable with computers: searches are simple, and results can be quickly narrowed down with "facets" on the results page, allowing users to winnow down results based on location, time period, and other parameters.

Are you already an ALE Power User? Take a look at the tips below to see if you learn anything new:

- What's new? Ancestry adds new records and databases constantly; you can see what new resources are available in ALE by selecting "New Collections" on the navigation bar at the top of your browsing window.
- Want to determine what resources are available for a country outside of the United States? Select Search > All Categories, then "Explore by Location" to assess the resources that are available for the country whose records you would like to search.
- Card Catalog? When you click on "Search" in the navigation bar, you'll see this topic. If you click on "Card Catalog," you will note major collection areas appear on the left-hand side of your screen. When you select a subject area, such as "Military," you will open a list of specific resource databases related to that subject. You can continue to filter this search by selecting a facet on that left-hand bar. It is appropriately named; using it will remind you of using a card catalog for subject research at a library in the past.
- Is searching for multiple spellings of a name getting tiresome? Try using a wildcard search. Add a question mark (?) to stand in for a single letter, or an asterisk (*) to replace anywhere from 1-5 letters in a name to search for multiple spellings. For example, a search for "Sto?er" would find Stober, Stover, and more, while "Jos*" would find names listed as Jos, Joseph, Josephine, and beyond.

- The "Learning Center," found by clicking on those words in the navigation bar, is a great resource for learning how to conduct research beyond basics on ALE. These guides are comprehensive, and include helpful examples and screenshots to assist you.
- You can print off records that you find when searching ALE, or you can save the paper and "Send a Document" to yourself via email for when you get home. That record can then be quickly and easily attached to your genealogy software program as a PDF file.

All considered, trying out ALE is beneficial for both new and experienced genealogists. Whether you are just starting out and looking for low-hanging fruit, or you are trying to round out your family history and overcome roadblocks, it is worthwhile to spend a few hours at your local library searching its databases to see if a new or new to you record is available. If you live outside of Central Pennsylvania, simply call your local public library or university library and ask whether Ancestry Library Edition is something to which it subscribes; if you are fortunate enough to have a library near you that provides ALE to you, be sure to use it! While these resources are free for patrons to use, libraries pay a subscription fee, and will only continue to do so if the resources are being used.

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Some Gems from Past Newsletters

by Ferret

Have you visited the *Publications* page on the CCGS website lately? Item No. 5 on the list is *CCGS Newsletters, 1978-2007*, a CD-ROM containing all the old newsletters except surname files and member lists, fully indexed and searchable. If you are researching Centre County ancestors, you need to be aware that the old newsletters hold many clues and hints for researchers and some unique transcribed record sets, as well as more general content. Ferret was browsing recently and came up with a few interesting items, one of which might be just what you need to knock down your brick wall:

— The Charles T. Snyder maps show outlines of the county and township boundaries in each census year up to 1870. Also shown are the dates of formation of any new township or change in county boundaries that occurred between census years. If you are puzzled about where Centre Township was, or why a property that was in Halfmoon Township is now in Rush, you need to consult these maps! They appear, two maps per issue, in *Roots* volume 25 (2000) (They are also available on Publication No. 8, *Warrant Map of Centre County*.)

— Also published in five parts in volumes 25 and 26 is an index of names from a ledger of Neff Funeral Home, 1853 to 1939. These pertain mainly to the Bald Eagle - Nittany Valley area. This index refers to a transcription of the ledger, a copy of which resides in the Pennsylvania Room at the Centre County Library and Historical Museum in Bellefonte. As the introduction to this series state in the March 2000 issue of *Roots*, "[w]hile there is not any significant depth of material of genealogical value in any single entry in the funeral home records, just the very documentation of dates of death and/or purchases of caskets has created a treasure trove of helpful material to persons seeking ancestors in the northeastern area of the county."

— A very important abstract of entries in *Centre County Orphans Court, Docket A* (1802-1815) appears in the newsletter (it wasn't called *Roots* until 2000), over many issues beginning in 1996 and ending in 2003.