

Tracing pasts: Free Webinars are a great way to go

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[By LINDA PAZICS KLEBACK](#)

Genealogist Linda Pazics Kleback formerly was a researcher at the Bay County Public Library. She now lives in Maryland. For an archive of her columns, go to <http://www.newsherald.com/search/?q=Kleback&fistype=site&x=23&y=5>

When I started my new job here at Towson University, one of my biggest challenges was mastering a lot of developing technologies. We had always stayed current at the Bay County Public Library as best we could, but Towson is bigger, has more funding and has 22,000 students, many of which come to the library to use our computers while bringing along their own laptops, Blackberries, iPods and cell phones that seem to perform every function imaginable.

The students create presentations using impressive multimedia tools that were new to me. Learning takes place in all sorts of ways from a classroom setting with a professor lecturing in person to online sessions coming from classrooms thousands of miles away. Everyone from freshman to staff and faculty is constantly learning new things using new methods.

Genealogy also requires ongoing learning. We learn where records are located. We learn how to best use these records to add to our knowledge of our families. We study new technologies that help us preserve and share our research.

Genealogists are tenacious in their research and will make use of whatever tool or information source will help them with their work. We embraced computers early on when we realized the potential help we could get from this developing technology.

Just as the Towson students and staff find themselves learning in a variety of ways, we, too, can further our knowledge using means that weren't available when many of us began our research. One tool we can use is free webinars.

Seminars on the Web have been around awhile, but they are becoming more popular as tools for genealogical instruction. Attending a genealogy conference is terrific, but in these days of expensive travel, taking a class at home can be a useful alternative.

There are webinars with fees, but there are also many free ones available. Ancestry.com is one site that offers a variety of free classes. These are nicely produced and full of useful information. You can register for new webinars when they are first presented or view others that have been archived. They are at <http://learn.ancestry.com/LearnMore/Webinars.aspx>.

If you would look to get more out of Ancestry.com, two webinars coming up would be helpful.

Military Records on Ancestry.com is scheduled for 7 p.m. CDT Tuesday May 19. According to the web site, "three U.S. content specialists from Ancestry.com will walk you through our collection of military records - the largest online collection of military records available on the Web.

"Besides showing you what records we have available for each of the major U.S. conflicts (e.g., Revolutionary War, Civil War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Korean War, etc.), they will show you some common record types, such as draft cards, muster rolls, and pension files, and teach you what information you can expect to glean about your veteran from each one."

Getting Started on Ancestry.com will be at 7 P.M. CDT Thursday, May 21. Some of the archived topics available include Making a Breakthrough in Your African-American Research, German Ancestry, Italian Ancestry and Saving Family Treasures.

We genealogists spend a lot of money on our research, so it's nice to be able to attend something free! Take advantage of these webinars and others you find. Learning something new can be a vital way to add a few more generations to your family tree.