

# Tracing pasts: Connect with an experienced researcher

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Last week, Dick Eastman shared some interesting news in his online newsletter. Ancestry.com has just launched a new service called Expert Connect which makes it possible to find an experienced researcher to help with your research challenges.

According to the service's Web site at <http://expertconnect.ancestry.com/Home.aspx>, "This innovative online tool will link you to hundreds of experienced genealogists who can assist you with your research goals. Hire a researcher for a simple task like snapping a photo of an ancestor's grave, or recruit a professional to tackle a complex project like completing an entire section of your family tree." As someone who has worked as a professional genealogist, I can appreciate what this service offers to both the expert and the researcher.

I was fortunate enough to receive a great deal of first-class training as a professional genealogist by attending the Institute for Genealogical and Historical Research at Samford University for several years as well as attending many local, state and national conferences. I maintained memberships in many genealogy societies and professional organizations. I was able to travel extensively in the Florida Panhandle to become familiar with repositories and their holdings. Because of all this, I was able to offer a high standard of research to my clients. But not all professionals are alike, and there are no laws requiring that those advertising themselves as professional genealogists have any sort of expertise. Anyone who decides to hire a professional needs to be as careful as they would be when hiring anyone to do professional work for them.

What Expert Connect offers is the chance to make a research request in any of five areas: Record Pickup, Local Photo, Ask an Expert, Record Lookup and Custom Research. Genealogists, who can be a credentialed professional or a dedicated amateur, have registered with Expert Connect and met certain standards. When you select the type of help you need, you make a proposal. Genealogists bid on the job. You can examine their profiles to see what kind of experience they have. When you select someone to fulfill your request, you pay [Ancestry.com](#) which holds your payment in escrow until the work is completed to your satisfaction. They then pay the expert. Negotiations and discussions about your project are only between you and the expert. [Ancestry.com](#) will not receive or have any contact with documents you obtain. The researcher pays no fees for this service, and you don't have to have a subscription to [Ancestry.com](#) to use Expert Connect. There is more information in the How It Works section at <http://expertconnect.ancestry.com/HowItWorks.aspx?>

If you need an expert to go to a courthouse or other repository to get a specific record or to photograph a tombstone, it shouldn't be very expensive. A dedicated amateur could do this easily. If you want an expert to do Custom Research, expect a much higher cost since you will probably want a professional with extensive expertise in your ethnic group or geographical location. In any case you will be able to choose the person you feel is most qualified to handle your project. There is also going to be a rating system that should be very helpful in the future. No one has any ratings yet because the service is brand new.

It would be wise to read the FAQs at <http://expertconnect.ancestry.com/Faq.aspx> before posting a project. I also would make a personal recommendation. If you need research in a specific area, hire someone who lives nearby or who is able to travel to the area. I would never hire someone in California to do Florida research because I want my expert to have access to actual records instead of only online resources. Those we can check ourselves. There are more than 400 experts listed covering the United States and eight foreign countries.

Sometimes we need someone to do leg work for us or who has experience in solving our brick wall problems. Expert Connect will make it easier to locate a qualified person to help with our research needs. I'm putting together a proposal for some record retrieval myself and glad to have such an organized way to go about it.