

Tracing pasts: Member Connect eases collaboration

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Roots Television is a great place to learn about trends in genealogy. Experts such as Dick Eastman of Eastman's Genealogy Online Newsletter frequently interview leaders in the field and post these interviews at the Roots Television Web site.

At the recent Southern California Genealogy Jamboree, Eastman interviewed Andrew Wait, senior vice president of Ancestry.com, about Expert Connect and Member Connect. (You can link to the interview at http://www.rootstelevision.com/players/player_conferences3.php?bctid=28430987001&bclid=27965007001). I've already shared information with all of you on the Expert Connect service; today we'll take a look at Member Connect.

If you've done genealogy for awhile, you will have realized that collaboration enriches family history research. Other researchers and family members are some of your best sources for information. Of course we want to locate all the primary records that we possibly can. But to find these resources we need to know where to look.

People who are part of a family or who have already researched a family can certainly point us in the right direction. Even when their memories may be a little cloudy or their family narratives a bit exaggerated, we have much to learn from these individuals.

You can treat genealogy as a solitary pursuit, but it's a lot more fun when it's shared with others. I often find that the only tiny bit of information I need is common knowledge to another researcher. Sometimes they have a photograph, too.

Ancestry.com has come a long way since it first appeared more than 30 years ago. Over the years they have tried various methods to put researchers in touch with one another. Not every method was successful or well received by the genealogy community, but Ancestry continues to try new things. The new Member Connect service may be the best way yet that the company has created to encourage collaboration.

Member Connect lets you choose how much information you want to share. The service will update you when those with whom you've connected updates information on your shared ancestor. You can add content from the trees of others to your own, but you get to choose exactly what you add.

Besides establishing contact with others researching your shared ancestors, I see Member Connect as a great time saver. I know that my research time has diminished since I took on a full-time job with a long commute. I certainly don't have the time to monitor a lot of family trees posted by others. A service that lets me know about updates and gives me the flexibility to add new content from someone else's work to mine only when I feel it is accurate sounds good to me.

Some of us who began our genealogical research "back in the day" may hesitate to take on all these new electronic ways to get in touch with other researchers. As someone who works in a university library awash with new technology that we are encouraged to use (I just signed up for Twitter this week), I can see that if we want to reach as many other people working on the same families as we can, we need to take advantage of whatever tools come our way. Member Connect is a good service to try.