

Tracing **PASTS****Conferences provide learning opportunities for pros, neophytes**By **WILLIAM J. ZEHNER, CGSM**

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Last month, I attended the Federation of Genealogical Society's annual conference in Knoxville, Tenn. The crème de la crème of national genealogical conferences, it always draws a large number of attendees who come to see and hear the nation's top genealogists present a variety of timely topics. I savor the opportunity to ask specific questions and even chat with these experienced practitioners in person — something I can't get from any book or the Internet.

For those who have not already done so, I highly recommend attending at least one of the national or regional conferences because they are a great way to get up-to-date information dealing with specific problems that might have your family research stymied. As an example, the FGS conference this year featured 183 different lectures by 75 speakers. Each and every hour during the four-day event offered a choice of at least seven different topics. In fact, the only complaint I have about FGS conferences is there are too many topics to choose from. It's akin to the frustration of being

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locked in the candy store overnight: there is just no way you can eat everything.

Unfortunately, I cannot afford to attend a national conference every year since they are usually too far away. But the good news is there are many seminars and conferences offering great learning and networking opportunities closer to home that often feature local, state, regional, and nationally-recognized experts.

The Florida State Genealogical Society annual conference is set for Nov. 12-13 in Sarasota this year, for example, and the Atlanta Family History Expo in Duluth, Ga., occurs on the same days.

The West Florida Genealogical Society will hold an all-day seminar on Nov. 6 in Pensacola featuring Elizabeth Shown Mills, who is

possibly the most accomplished and best known genealogical speaker in the nation. If your travel horizon is 100 miles or less, this is a lifetime opportunity.

And even closer to home, right here in Panama City, the Bay County Genealogical Society will produce an all-day seminar for beginners (and those needing a little tune-up) on Oct. 9. Attendance is limited to 60, so register early. Current information about local, regional, and national conferences can be checked throughout the year at the BCGS website: www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~flbcgs/programs.html.

Beginning this month, the Bay County Genealogical Society will be writing this column. Since Linda Kleback no longer lives in the area she feels that someone local would be better able to serve Bay County residents. We hope to continue her tradition by bringing fresh, informative, educational, and entertaining articles of interest to northwest Florida genealogists and family historians.

Her very popular articles have been appearing regularly in this newspaper for more than two decades, and her shoes will be hard to fill. Comments, queries, and suggestions for interesting topics are welcome and may be sent to my e-mail address above.