

Location, location, location

Suzanne Shay

Bay County Genealogical Society

If you were lucky enough to see Judy Bennett's presentation at the Sept. 17, 2011, meeting of the BCGS, you know how important "location, location, location" is to your genealogical research.

On Nov. 5, 2011, the West Florida Genealogical Society conducted an all day seminar featuring Elizabeth Powell from Samford University, where she holds the position of special collections expert.

Elizabeth emphasized that one important way to succeed in your genealogical research efforts is to know the history of where your ancestors lived. That includes collecting and studying maps of the places where your ancestors lived. The University of Alabama has an extensive collection of over 100,000 maps that can be purchased for a reasonable price. You can get more information by going to their website: alabamamaps.ua.edu/.

For those doing research in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, or Louisiana, these maps will prove to be an extremely valuable asset. Elizabeth showed the group one map of North America during the Colonial Wars between the years of 1689-1748. You are immediately struck by how different the configuration of the states as we know them now are. The Spanish, British and the French, who were in a constant tug of war over lands, settled much of the south. Who was in possession of the area

where your ancestors lived will dictate where vital and other types of records will be found. In 1711 Mobile, Ala., was the capital of the French lands. By 1723 the capital had shifted to New Orleans. You may actually have to look for records in Spain, Britain or France. State and county boundaries were constantly changing as America grew. If you don't know that from 1763-1787 South Carolina claimed an area that is now part of Alabama, or that portions of Florida were ceded to Alabama, you may never find the records you are seeking, as records are usually retained in the country, state or county of origin.

Another thing to consider is that passports were once necessary to travel through the Creek lands. You may find information on your ancestors by researching these records. For example, from 1785 through 1820, individuals from Georgia or traveling through Georgia from other states who desired to travel to or through Indian Territory were required to obtain a passport from the governor. Elizabeth recommended one source to check, a book by Potter, Dorothy Williams. *Passports of Southeastern Pioneers, 1770-1823: Indian, Spanish and other Land Passports for Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, Virginia, North and South Carolina.*

One last word from Elizabeth: "Don't be afraid to look in places you don't think your ancestors will be!"