

Family Search Offers a Vast Repository of Records

by Dee Gibson-Roles

This month we will discuss a very valuable resource for family history researchers: the library and resources of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or LDS), better known to many as the Mormon Church and their online presence as Family Search.

The main library of the church is located in Salt Lake City, Utah and there are more than 4600 “branches” known as Family History Centers worldwide where one can research the church’s resources closer to one’s home. These centers are often located in the local church meeting house. In addition, many public libraries have become Family Search affiliate libraries.

Once a researcher has discovered this vast collection, the first question that comes to mind is, “Why does the LDS church collect this material and what is the purpose of it?” We all know how much fun and how addictive genealogical research can be, but this is not the reason for the collection. The Mormon doctrine teaches that marriage and families can continue beyond this life, but to achieve this, families must be sealed together in one of the holy temples around the world to be united for eternity. What about those family members who are already deceased? The ordinances such as baptism, etc. can be received by a living person for deceased kindred. The deceased ancestors then are taught the gospel in the spirit world and have the choice to accept or reject the work performed for them by the living person (usually a descendant or collateral family member.)

Very few researchers can identify their ancestors beyond great-grandparents when first beginning to research their family history. The purpose of the vast collection of the LDS church is to enable church members to identify ancestors so that they can receive the ordinances for these ancestors and hopefully be sealed as family throughout eternity.

According to the Family History page at the website www.mormon.org, “Genealogical or family history research is the essential forerunner of temple work for our deceased ancestors. We do it to obtain names and other genealogical information so these temple ordinances can be performed for our kindred dead.”

In 1894, the LDS church organized the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU), which has expanded to become Family Search. Over 100 years have been spent collecting records of genealogical and historic importance from all over the world. In 1938 the GSU began microfilming records from all over the world and the records now cover more than 110 countries. The collections include documents such as civil registration records; church records; and probate, census, land, tax, and military records. The collection also contains compiled sources such as family histories, clan and lineage genealogies, oral pedigrees, and local histories, covering everything from 14th century English church records to African oral histories. The records are stored in a state-of-the-art, climate controlled storage facility known as the “Granite Mountain Records Vault.” There are now more than 2.4 million rolls of microfilm of records.

The wonderful advantage of this is that non-members of the LDS church also benefit from this collection. Again, according to the website, “Even though our reasons for doing family history may be different than most, we’re happy to share our collections of microfilmed and digitized records free of charge with anyone sharing our passion.” Yes, that’s right – free!

The Family History Library maintains an online catalog of their holdings, both books/publications and microform. This can be found at <https://familysearch.org/#form=catalog&catSearchType=subject>. Although there is a notice that the new catalog is still in beta testing, it is available and fully functional.

The microfilm and microfiche may be loaned to a local Family History Center or an affiliate library. (Many public libraries have become affiliate libraries with the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, including Pack Library locally. The local Family History Center is located at the LDS church in Arden.) There is no charge for the loan of the film itself but there is a small shipping and handling fee. The film can be ordered online and will be sent to the Family

History Center or affiliate library specified by the researcher, who will be contacted by the facility when the film arrives. There are presently two lengths of time for the loan: 90 days with option to renew for another 60 days, and an extended loan in which the film will remain with the facility indefinitely. Books, CDs and other publications are not included in the loan program, but many have been digitized and are online at www.familysearch.org.

Speaking of digitization of records, Family Search is certainly at the forefront in the use of technology and processes for image capture and digital conversion. This technology is now the method of choice for obtaining new records, capturing more than 80 million digital images each year. In addition, the Granite Mountain has been opened, so to speak, with the records stored there being digitized. The goal is to digitize all microfilmed records and place them online for researchers all over the world. A Family Search presentation at a recent national genealogical conference exhibited the impressive automated system in use to achieve this goal. The system operates 24/7, resulting in more and more record images appearing online on the Family Search website (www.familysearch.org) constantly. How exciting to be able to sit in front of a computer and see actual images of records of an ancestor from the 1500s or 1600s!