

Access to genealogy data at NARA grows

The success of our fourth annual Genealogy Fair on April 23 was a reminder of NARA's role as an essential source of information for those trying to discover family histories. All the U.S. census records from 1790 to 1930 on microfilm can be found in our holdings. The long-awaited 1940 census will be opened in 2012. We also have ship passenger arrival lists, military pension files, passport applications, draft registration records, and Federal court records that can provide clues, if not answers, to genealogical questions.

During a visit to the National Archives' Public Vaults exhibit last year, Mr. Paul Chinn was amazed to see the citizenship application of an uncle who immigrated to the United States as a teenager in the 1920s and settled in Nebraska. He contacted relatives, and several came to Washington to see the exhibit. The citizenship application of Paul Chinn's uncle is among the holdings of NARA's Central Plains regional archives in Kansas City, just one part of the nationwide holdings of records that one can draw on to discover family histories.

It was only after I became Archivist that staff at our New York City facility found my late parents (pre-World War I Russian immigrants) on a passenger list and citizenship applications. I now cherish copies of these documents.

Many Americans have long had a keen interest in genealogy, but interest increased dramatically after Alex Haley's *Roots* aired on television in the mid-1970s. Today, more and more genealogical information is being digitized and placed on the Internet, making it much easier for genealogists and others to perform their research.

To speed more of our records onto the Internet, NARA has signed nonexclusive agreements with two nongovernmental parties to digitize important records in our holdings: iArchives (Footnote.com) and the Genealogical Society of Utah.

Under these agreements, partners pay all costs pertaining to the digitization of mutually-agreed-upon records. In return, partners will make the digitized images and indexes available through subscription or at no cost in NARA's research rooms. After a five-year period, there will be no restrictions



on NARA's use of the images created by the partners, including the right to post them on our web site.

To date, Footnote, Inc., has digitized more than 30

million pages of records from microfilm and made them available on its web site. These include investigative case files of the FBI from 1908 to 1922, a collection of Mathew Brady's Civil War photographs, and papers of the Continental Congress from 1774 to 1789.

The Genealogical Society of Utah will digitize case files of approved pension applications from Union soldiers in the Civil War. In a pilot project, they will make available 3,150 of the files, then later digitize more than a million Civil War period widows' files.

These partners are currently working with the National Archives to digitize and index some of the most frequently consulted records in our holdings. These include photographs of U.S. Army operations in Vietnam (approximately 11,500 items); death reports of American citizens abroad, 1835–1974 (approximately 800,000 pages); photographs by the U.S. Army Air Corps from World War II (approximately 50,000 images), and passenger arrival lists from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (approximately 400,000 pages).

The partners are also working with NARA staff to digitize most of our microfilm publications: to date, more than 30 million images are available online. Through these partnerships, we will provide extensive access to millions of pages of textual documents, still pictures, and motion films that up to now have been available only in our research rooms.

NARA's web site features the Archival Research Catalog (ARC) and Access to Archival Databases (AAD), both offering access to a stunning amount of information for all researchers.

We also offer assistance in a more traditional way. In Washington and at locations around the country, we sponsor

genealogy workshops that focus on how to best search traditional records and the Internet for genealogical projects.

In Washington, the "Know Your Records" outreach program includes a series of one-hour lectures focusing on particular records in the Archives; the annual Genealogy Fair; book groups; and the African-American Genealogy workshop, which focuses on Freedmen's Bureau records and others from the years immediately following the Civil War.

At the National Archives, a major mission for us is to provide a place where citizens can trace their ancestry—with the help of NARA's professional staff to put them on the right research path so time is spent wisely. Surveys of researchers show a high degree of satisfaction with their experience in Washington as well as with their research on the Archives' web site.

This year's Genealogy Fair drew a record 450 enthusiastic attendees (including me). I want thank all those 50 staff members, volunteers, and contractors for the work and long hours they put into making the Fair a success. Your continuous effort in helping people discover their own histories contributes greatly to the fulfillment of NARA's mission for the American people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein".

ALLEN WEINSTEIN
Archivist of the United States

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