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Genealogy class offered on May 28

By KAY JOHNSON johnson@hutchinsonleader.com May 20, 2015



Staff photo by Kay Johnson

Molly Schweinfurt was ready to present her beginner's genealogy workshop Saturday at the Glencoe Public Library. She will : expertise at a workshop May 28 at the Hutchinson Public Library.

Interested in researching your family tree? Genealogist Molly Schweinfurter can help. The Redwood Falls native will teach a Beginner's Genealogy Workshop at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 28, at the Hutchinson Public Library. The class is free and the public is welcome.

Schweinfurter credited her last college course, a history elective at St. Cloud State University, for her interest in researching her roots. The professor encouraged students to learn more about their families.

“Once you get the curiosity bug, you’re hooked for life,” she said.

The self-taught researcher is president of the German-Bohemian Heritage Society in New Ulm and has been a member of the Renville Genealogical Society for many years.

“You learn from other people,” she said.

Schweinfurter began hunting her family roots about 20 years ago.

She described her passion as “challenging, frustrating and rewarding — all at the same time.”

“A couple of cousins were researching the family before I was born,” she said. “They were very helpful.”

Back then, Schweinfurter said she had to rely on paper records because those were the days before the Internet.

“My relatives were in Renville and Redwood counties, so I could go to the courthouses for information,” she said. “People come to me and ask about research in other states. I use what I’ve found as examples.”

When Schweinfurter needed to access family records in the Czech Republic, she used a professional researcher.

“At that time, the records were not online. People had to go to the archives and do the research. I couldn’t read Czech, so I hired someone to go and do that,” she said.

So far, she has traced her paternal side to the 1600s. With that much research, it begs the question, what do you do with it all?

Write a book.

So far, Schweinfurter has written three books about different branches of her family tree.

What's next?

"There's always another branch to research," she said.

GETTING STARTED

The May 28 genealogy class in Hutchinson is one of several beginner classes Schweinfurter will teach this year.

Where does she tell students to begin?

"Start with what you know," she said. "Start with yourself. If you have your parents, surviving uncles, aunts, go to them and visit with them. Let people know you're interested. Eventually people will seek you out to share things."

Among the more interesting questions Schweinfurter said she gets asked are from people who are researching adoptions.

"That gets challenging," she said. "Most are researching European relatives, sometimes Vietnamese or Native American roots."

Schweinfurter described teaching as "really rewarding to do."

"People come back and say 'thank you' and give me credit," she said. "I'm so pleased to be inspiring them and getting them started."

INTERNET RESEARCH

With the arrival of the Internet, everything changed including how genealogy research is conducted.

"It's made records so much more accessible," Schweinfurter said. "More resources are available every year."

While that's true, she cautioned not everything is online.

"You may still need to do some old-fashioned digging," Schweinfurter said.

Top research sites online include Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org and FindaGrave.com. Among Schweinfurter's favorites are the Minnesota Historical Society website at www.mnhs.org. It offers a birth certificates index, death certificates index, Minnesota state census index and more. Another website she uses is known as "moms." It stands for Minnesota Official Marriage System.

To illustrate how popular family research has become, Ancestry.com reported 2,140,000 subscribers as of Dec. 31, 2013. The No. 1 genealogy website also reported that year its user-generated content had totaled 3.1 billion records, including 191 million uploaded photographs and more than 16 million uploaded stories.

That's a lot of family togetherness.

To help navigate Internet genealogical sites, Schweinfurter also teaches a hands-on computer research class.

One of the tricks, she said, is learning what to ask. It's possible to ask too little or too much.

For instance, if you research a full name such as Nicholas, you might also need to search for Nick. It depends on the search engine and how flexible it is.

The genesis for this explosive growth in genealogy has been credited to Alex Haley, who wrote the 1976 bestselling book, "Roots: The Saga of an American Family." The book was adapted into a popular miniseries in 1977. The last several chapters were adapted into a second miniseries in 1979, "Roots: The Next Generation."

SPARE TIME

Schweinfurter grew up on a farm just outside Redwood Falls in Beaver Falls Township in Renville County. She graduated from Redwood Falls-Morton High School in 1990 and St. Cloud State University with a major in English with an emphasis on writing and a minor in film studies in 1994.

Although she didn't plan on returning to Redwood after college, her family ties were strong and they drew her back.

Schweinfurter's career? Working full time as a library clerk at the Redwood Public Library — a job she has had since 1998. It's not surprising she is in charge of the library's genealogy and local history department.

When it comes to free time, Schweinfurter's hobbies range from flower and vegetable gardening to movies. Among her favorite films — "The Wizard of Oz," starring Judy Garland; "The More the Merrier" starring Jean Arthur; and "Remember the Night," starring Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck.

In addition to genealogy, Schweinfurter is passionate about photography. Her subject matter — the Minnesota River Valley.

"I think it's important to know where you come from," she said. "It helps to give you a sense of being."

Beginner's Genealogy Workshop

When: 7 p.m. Thursday, May 28

Where: Hutchinson Public Library, 50 Hassan St. S.E.

About the program: The 90-minute program will take place on the main floor of the library. Following Schweinfurter's presentation, attendees are welcome to view a demonstration of the library's new microfilm reader/printer/scanner.

Admission: Free and the public is welcome

Call: Pam Dille, head librarian, at 320-587-2368

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