Genealogy Sharing

We genealogist tend to be a trusting group. We, more than many others, need to be careful who we share our family histories with.

When I started doing my research, I was ignorant to the importance of documenting my sources. I trusted what I found on the genealogy sites and merged them within my own families. As I merged these files from other genealogists, not only did I merge my ancestor, but everyone else on that particular submitter's files (names, notes, dates, etc.).

This posed two problems I would like to address. First, some of the data proved to be incorrect. In good faith, a lot of researchers post their family genealogy on sites, such as Ancestry, Familysearch or Rootsweb. Even if they realize their errors and corrected them, who knows how many researchers, beforehand, downloaded and merged this incorrect information. Not all of those will realize the corrections that were made years later. They then post their information (which includes this incorrect research they merged) and it becomes a cycle repeated for the next researcher who comes across the information!

How can we as researchers not fall into this trap? When we find someone's genealogy ALWAYS look to see if they list their sources. If not, then we must research and document, using their information as a guide. If we discover errors, politely email the researcher who posted the wrong information, providing him the sources to show the mistake. Only after verifying the data, then we can safely merge this research within our own and share with our family. Always be mindful of posting someone else's research by getting permission from them beforehand. Always give them credit for their hard work.

Unfortunately, some people will submit anything online. They enjoy throwing researchers off the track. There are those who want so badly to descend from someone famous they will fix their pedigrees to show this. This again is why it is so important to document our sources! While it is so exciting to descend from a king or president, we want it to be true.

The second issue I would like to address is privacy within the genealogy community. I have seen the Social Security Death Index list individuals who have only been dead under a year. Their names, locations and social security

numbers are posted. Some researchers will even copy this and post it in the note section of their family member. Thus, when submitted to genealogy sites, this information is also submitted (unless the notes are blocked). Identity theft is so common now, that we as genealogist must beware.

When researchers are getting their information ready to submit, consider who is going to be receiving the data. If it is family then all of the data could be sent. But, if it is being submitted to a genealogy site, then you should block information on living, private notes and any other information that you feel is not meant for the public.

So, in summary, please document all your sources, especially before sharing. Then, make sure private information on the living or recently dead are blocked to the public.

Sharing our genealogy is what has helped researchers discover their families and assist others. It is a very important part of genealogy and has guided many researchers to discover their families and break down many brick walls. By being aware of the issues discussed, we can continue to safely submit and share our families. We can feel confident that we are contributing correctly to other families and preventing false research from being submitted.

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