

Guidelines for Developing Beginning Genealogical Collections and Services

Prepared by the Genealogy Committee of the History Section of the Reference and User Services Association 1991, Revised 1999. Approved by the RUSA Board of Directors June 1999.

Introduction

Public libraries have a responsibility to serve the needs of patrons interested in genealogical research by providing basic genealogical reference materials and how-to-do-it books in the library and by providing access to additional genealogical research materials through interlibrary loan or referral. Other libraries that wish to develop a genealogical collection and provide services may find these guidelines useful as well.

These guidelines address collection development, personnel, access, and fiscal considerations for genealogical services. They are intended to assist those who need to create a beginning genealogical collection and services in order to meet the above-mentioned responsibilities, the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, and the markedly increased public interest in genealogical research.

1.0 Services

1.1 Genealogical reference service should include, but may not be limited to, assisting and instructing genealogical patrons to determine what research materials may help them, evaluating the significance and validity of various types of information, locating research materials through print and digital data sources and services, and providing access through interlibrary loan, rental services, or referring genealogical patrons to other known libraries, institutions, agencies, and archives that have particular genealogical research materials that may be able to help them.

1.2 When necessary, genealogical patrons or their questions should be referred to system or network resource centers, or to archives, government agencies, or libraries where the referring librarian knows that the needed research material that cannot be provided by the library through its own collection or interlibrary loan is available.

If a specific genealogical reference service cannot be provided, the library's general reference service should include assistance for genealogical patrons.

2.0 Collection Development

2.1 Genealogical collections should include but not be limited to, manuals and handbooks of how to do genealogical research; family histories; pedigrees, originals or copies thereof, and published compilations of family group sheets; vital records; census schedules; probates and wills; land records; maps; cemetery and religious records; immigration and naturalization records; voter lists;

military records; newspapers; local history materials and indexes to the above materials of communities, counties, states, and countries other than the community which the library serves. These items may be available and provided in various formats, including microform, print, and digital.

2.2 A genealogical collection should be developed and maintained to support the basic research needs of the community served by the library. An assessment should be made concerning the ethnic background and countries of origin of the members of the community served by the library in order to determine the scope of the genealogical collection. The scope of the collection should represent, at least, the majority of the community but not be limited to it. The collection should include basic materials on genealogical research procedures. These materials should include the widest possible range of nationalities and ethnic groups represented in the community.

2.3 In communities where private genealogical collections are accessible, without charge, to the general public, libraries may wish to consider cooperative collection development.

2.4 Basic annotated bibliographies of genealogical sources, reviews in library and genealogical journals, and reviews provided in authoritative digital sources should be utilized in materials selection.

3.0 Personnel

3.1 All reference librarians serving genealogical patrons should be trained and periodically updated in genealogical research, which may include, but not be limited to, attendance at local, state, regional, and national genealogical or library conferences, seminars, or meetings where genealogical research procedures are presented, or through home study courses.

3.2 Reference librarians should be trained to assist genealogical patrons with evaluation, search techniques, protocol, and use of digital data sources and services related to genealogical research.

3.3 The responsibility of referring genealogical patrons to archives, government agencies, and libraries requires that the trained reference librarian also know about the centers where genealogical resources are maintained. The collections and holdings of local genealogical and historical societies should be familiar to library staff.

3.4 Knowledgeable genealogical research volunteers may be utilized to supplement reference service provided to genealogical patrons by the reference staff but should not replace it.

4.0 Access

4.1 Genealogical materials should circulate, including on interlibrary loan, unless the materials are rare, are considered to be reference, or are in great local daily demand.

4.2 Bibliographies or guides to reference, circulating and digitized genealogical materials and sources should be provided to enhance ease of access.

4.3 The acquisition and cataloging of genealogical materials should receive the same priority as other library materials.