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Title

Discovering the hidden riches in public libraries: Fostering family history in Local Studies Collections

Summary

Countless people the world over are in the process of exploring their family history. Not only is research undertaken on specific individuals and also families but also on the localities and communities these people belonged to. There is little doubt in the 21st century, our public library resources are underrated by family historians but there is much to be appreciated.

Abstract

As family history research strategies advance into the 21st century, researchers are interested in much more than names and dates. Some researchers are undertaking more sophisticated and methodical research, placing local families into a historical context.

Local Studies Collections exist in the majority of Public libraries in Australia and New Zealand with these collections exceedingly accessible to the local community and the general public with generous opening hours, extensive facilities with ongoing financial support. In the 1980s with the lead up to the 1988 Bicentenary and the massive increase in genealogy, local libraries were a fundamental stop off for researchers, along with the popular repositories such as State Library and archives and family history societies.

Fast forward several decades and a whole new generation have embarked on family history research, many of whom do the majority of their research online. In this period of rapid change local studies collections are meeting the challenges of the 21st century by embracing new technologies, digitising collections and improving access. These are unique and extraordinary collections focussing on local communities which support family history research. Collections may comprise local government records, photographs, church and cemetery records, maps, newspapers, local histories, directories, family histories, local business records, community archives and the list goes on. Collections can also include online databases and generic genealogical tools. Not enough researchers realise the full potential of what these collections have to offer the family historian. There is a vast assortment of material relating to specific communities and the families who lived in them. Many libraries have also fostered relationships with local groups and partnerships with like-minded organisations, using to the best advantage, the resources and facilities. This presentation is to encourage researchers to consider the potential of Local Studies Collection in their own community and the area they are researching.

Audience

Intermediate