

Out and About . . .

A New Library in Independence, Missouri Dedicated to Genealogy

By Peggy Baldwin

I was planning a trip to the Kansas City area and had some free time, and as I usually do, I checked to see what genealogy research resources there might be in the area. To my amazement, I discovered that a new library had just opened, with its grand opening on June 21, 2008. The picture I saw of the Midwest Genealogy Center on the Internet was of a two story, large (52,000 square foot) modern building. Rarely do you see a library of this size dedicated to genealogy. The Midwest Genealogy Center is a branch library in the Mid-Continent Public Library system, and is located in Independence, Missouri. The Mid-Continent Public Library serves three Missouri counties: Platte, Jackson, and Clay. As they say on their web site: "MCPL has a long history of providing outstanding genealogy resources. The new center is simply the next step in the growth of the system."

I drove my rental car with anticipation that hot, steamy July 28th Monday, only subdued by the fact that I got lost trying to find the place, taking 2 hours to make what I would learn should have only been a 20 minute drive. Road signs are a rarity in Missouri, I observed. I still had two hours that day and several more afternoons to explore the resources. As I came down the road and over a hill the library loomed large on the left side of the road, in a dip of the land. The library had that new building, not quite landscaped look. The large parking lot, with lots of waiting parking places, made getting into the library a quick process.

If you were to make a list of all of the features of the perfect library I doubt anything you could come up with would be missing from this library. I would guess that they sat down with genealogists and asked them what they would want; because there isn't anything I can think of missing here.

This is a very friendly place. Large windows and a two-story atrium make for an open and airy feeling. The people who work at the reference desks really do know what they are talking about and can give library users valuable help. I heard numerous people asking

for guidance at the desk on the second floor. A woman guided a library staff member over to her husband, so he could discuss his "brick wall" immigrant ancestor. There are consultation rooms where you can sit down and hash out genealogy questions with staff members. A large room that must seat at least 50 people offers genealogy classes. As you come in the door, volunteers ask you if you need any help and offer hourly tours of the library. Quickly it becomes apparent that this is a "safe" place to ask your questions.

The first floor has genealogy journals and magazines and the microfilm collection, as well as electric microfilm reader/printers (no need to worry about over-use injuries from cranking microfilm). You can purchase copy cards to print microfilm copies, at 10 cents a copy. Photocopies can be made on the first or second floor; delivering 8 1/2 x 11" or 11" x 17" copies for 10 cents each.

The second floor has an extensive book collection, covering all parts of the United States, but particularly strong in Midwest and the places people living in the Midwest would have immigrated from. Having ancestors who migrated the typical Virginia, Tennessee, Missouri route (and then out on the Oregon Trail), this library is a Mecca for me! There are many books here that aren't even available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Librarian Janice Schultz says, "...We collect heavily for Missouri, our border states, and the states that drew into Missouri: North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia. But we also collect for other US states and for Canada and its provinces. Guides to research in other countries, passenger lists, military records, and slave genealogy are also given emphasis."

Technology is a strong suit of this library. Every table has a plug in for your laptop. Free wireless allows library users to check the library holdings, or even to see if you have the same books back home, to avoid misusing your time. Personal scanners and cameras are allowed. A flat computer screen is attached to the end of every few shelving units, allowing users to double

check the card catalog. There is a digitization station library users can access after some training. Library patrons use this equipment to read microfilm and or microfiche, scan, edit, print or save to a flash drive. They can also scan slides, 8MM movie films and use a flat bed scanner in this center.

There are special comfort items in this library. On the second floor there are typical tables for library users, but recognizing that genealogists need lots of space to spread out, there are only two chairs at each table, situated diagonally from each other. There are small 2-level carts and carrying baskets, like the ones at grocery stores, so you can “load up” on all the books you need, and visit the shelves only once or twice. There are even 5 or 6 L-shaped desks where I found I could have a pile of books to consult, a pile of books I’m done with, the book I was working on, my flatbed scanner, and my laptop. All the comforts of home!

There are restaurants and hotels a short drive away, and a restaurant at the golf course across the street that is within walking distance. The Library provides a handout with information with about places to eat and stay, available at the circulation desk.

When I’m researching and know that I won’t be able to get back to a library in a long time or ever, one thing I don’t want to take much time for is meals. They

have a lounge for library users, with 4 or 5 round tables, a vending machine with sandwiches and microwavable food, another one with drinks, and a microwave. In this same area are lockers, where you can store some of your “stuff” if the need arises. Fifteen minutes for a quick chicken wrap and a Coke, and I am ready to get back to work.

There is so much here that you will want to plan your trip carefully, for ultimate efficiency. Visit the Midwest Genealogy Center web site — www.midwestgenealogycenter.org for more information. Access the Public Library catalog, using the guest login, and limit your search to the “Genealogy and Local History” branch. If you are not able to visit this wonderful library, the library catalog indicates which books in their collection you can request via interlibrary loan from your own local public library.

I found this library to be one of the most pleasant places I have ever researched. The Midwest Genealogy Center was user friendly and allowed me to get right in there and research. You get the feeling that the staff members love working here and helping you do the best job of finding your family.

Comments and suggestions should be sent to the Column Editor: Peggy Baldwin, peggy.baldwin@family-passages.com

Oregon Trail Books — In the Words of Oregon Trail Contemporaries

(Books available in the Genealogical Forum Library are marked with an asterisk “*”)

Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2002) – one of many editions of this book.

Francis Parkman left his comfortable home in Boston in 1846 to embark on an overland journey to the West. This book offers a colorful description of the people he met, as seen through the eyes of a person of his time.

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David Klausmeyer, editor, *Oregon Trail Stories: True Accounts of Life in a Covered Wagon* (Guilford, Connecticut: TwoDot, 2004)

Tales from the Oregon Trail, mostly excerpts from diaries and memoirs, including

the devastating experience of the Donner Party.

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*Kenneth L. Holmes, editor and compiler, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) – GFO, 979 A000 Trail

(v 1, 1840-1849; v 2, 1850; v 3, 1851; v 4, California Trail, 1852; v 5, 1852; v 6, 1853-4; v 7, 1854 – 1860; v 8, 1862-1865, v 9, 1864-8; v 10, 1875 – 1883; and v 11 1879-1903)

Women’s diaries invite us to be a part of their Oregon Trail travels, as they lay out their day to day existence in the sometimes quirky prose of the day.