Getting Involved

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Library Guides Those Looking for Their Roots

By REBECCA BRYANT
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Ever wonder where your family tree is rooted? About great-great-great-Aunt Mildred who gave you your middle name? Whether your ancestors were pilgrims, princes or pirates?

A team of sleuths in Burbank is used to these types of inquiries.

The volunteers at the Southern California Genealogical Society Library consider themselves more detectives than librarians.

Peggy Schultz, who has volunteered at the library for nearly a dozen years, became interested in genealogy 15 years ago, after looking through scrapbooks of her grandmother and great-grandmother on her mother's side. She also decided to explore her father's ancestry after learning that he never knew his grandparents.

Peggy Schultz

"Once I got going, it kind of took on a life of its own," said Schultz, 58, of Sherman Oaks.

She traced both her mother's and father's roots to the 1600s in England and Scotland. She also debunked a family myth.

"My grandmother was convinced we were related to Robert E. Lee," she said. "So much so she named her son Robert Lee."

Schultz, a member of the genealogy society, volunteered at the library so she could keep in contact with other amateur genealogists. Now she spends one evening a week answering phones, indexing books and helping visitors to the private library find clues.

Marva Grove, 60, volunteers once a month. Also an avid genealogist, Grove has found soldiers from the Civil War in her family's past.

A friend doing research informed Grove that Grove's family included three Mayflower passengers.

"I was almost disappointed she found that," Grove said. "I would have liked to have found it myself."

Most library visitors are amateurs like Grove and Schultz and need a little guidance. Some expect to walk in the library, open a book and find their heritage laid out in front of them.

"It really isn't that easy," Grove said. "It's a lot of detective work."

Some genealogical gumshoes come up with ideas about their ancestry that couldn't possibly be verified, she said.

Years ago, someone brought a two-page diagram of their family tree "tracing their ancestry from themselves back to Adam. We just laughed hysterically," Grove said. "How they decided that, we didn't know."

Schultz keeps hoping to find some juicy tidbits about her ancestors, but all she finds are farming tales.

"I keep looking to see if someone was accused of murder or of being a witch. Something exciting," she said. "The most I ever found was somebody in my family being sued for trespassing or their animals going onto someone else's land."

For more information about volunteering at the library, call Beverly Truesdale, who coordinates the 50 current volunteers, at (818) 843-7247.

Other volunteer opportunities:

Women Helping Women Services is taking applications for the spring paraprofessional volunteer training class. The 10-week intensive class trains volunteers who work on the Women Helping Women Talkline. Deadline for applications is Feb. 15. Training begins in March. Classes are held at the Women's Center at Council House in Los Angeles. The nonprofit organization helps women cope with challenges such as poverty, divorce, domestic violence and depression. To receive an application, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Women Helping Women Services, 543 N. Fairfax Ave., Los Angeles 90036. For more information about the program, call (213) 655-3807.

BASE—Basic Adult Spanish Education—needs volunteers to teach English as a second language in its nine centers in the San Fernando Valley. For more information, call (818) 348-4771.

The Encino-Tarzana Regional Medical Center is looking for volunteers to escort patients and work in the volunteer office and at the information desk. Call Geri Klanfer, director of volunteer services, at (818) 995-5036.

Getting Involved is a weekly listing of volunteering opportunities. Please address prospective listings to Getting Involved, Los Angeles Times, 20000 Prairie St., Chatsworth 91311. Or fax them to (818-772-3338).

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