

The Amateur Genealogist

by Celia Lewis, MA, Genealogy consultant

To Pay or Not to Pay: Online Memberships

TIP: Take a look at where your ancestors came from, before you join any of the online fee-based companies. You may find that one company will have the most possibilities – for you.

There are many online fee-based companies these days – some have been around for about 10 years and more, others for less than 2 years. All companies have numerous databases that they offer to the public for a variety of fees: \$per view or image, \$per month, \$per year. Some offer free family tree software to organize your information with a one-year membership, or offer other useful items such as CDs of particular areas or topics such as Parish Registers, Military Service, and so on.

If you have taken the time to gather as much information as possible from any of your relatives (grandparents, elderly aunts/uncles, cousins), then you will know your ancestors' birthplaces or residences. Write down those states, provinces, counties, and countries on a piece of paper.

Next, search through www.cyndislist.com/database.htm for common commercial sites, to see which relevant databases they can offer. Note that databases are being added literally daily on almost all commercial sites – check carefully. Don't hesitate to take advantage of the phone toll-free lines for more information – tell them you'll make a decision later – don't be talked into buying a membership before you've done the research. Remember that on some sites, you may be able to search free for 14 days or 7 days, before your credit card will be billed. Keep track of the date!



Looking in the USA? Several fee-based sites for beginners to examine could include several of the following: www.Ancestry.com which also covers other world areas, the New England Historic Genealogical Society www.newenglandancestors.org, www.Genealogy.com, www.GenealogyBank.com, www.worldvitalrecords.com The USGenWeb collection of sites can also be very helpful but highly variable, state by state, <http://usgwarchives.net/>.

Looking in the UK? <http://freeBMD.rootsweb.com> will let you search throughout England and Wales for Births, Marriages, Deaths. Finally, the LDS Church site www.familysearch.org provides free access to the largest database in the world and can be very helpful. Don't forget to read their Help section first!

Questions? More sites? Email Celia@RootsBasic.com

TIP: Even on commercial pay sites, specific databases may be free– check!