

Genealogists: Get a Second Life

By DearMYRTLE



This past week I've been busy genealogically speaking, but Ol' Myrt here didn't get up from her computer keyboard in Salt Lake City to get these things done. In fact, I rarely use my keyboard, but opt instead to use my computer's headset to facilitate online conversations such as these:

- I spoke with a researcher from Ohio who has Quaker roots in Chester County, Pennsylvania, where my Welsh Quakers participated in the Radnor Meeting.
- Heard from another researcher about her experiences using Google's Patent Search.
- Consoled a friend after the death of her mother. The family is now facing closing up their mother's home and parceling out the family heirlooms.
- Attended a meeting at the local Family History Centre, where we held a roundtable discussion about the first principle of the Genealogical Proof Standard.

And Ol' Myrt here did all this in Second Life, a free online service where you create an avatar and use that persona to interact with others in real-time.

Why should genealogists care about Second Life?

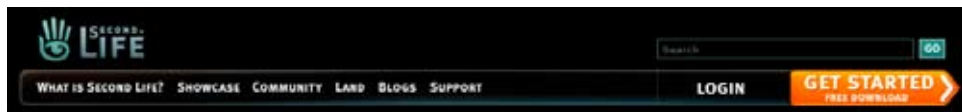
In an increasingly impersonal world, with declining genealogical society membership and high transportation costs, we tend to do much of our document research online sitting in our pajamas at our home computers. It is high time we ventured "out" and mingled with other genealogists to learn some tricks of the trade and learn how others are making progress climbing their family trees.

Motivated professional and intermediate genealogists have created a mix of scheduled discussions and research display centers using the Second Life virtual tools. For instance, Craig Scott, real life owner of HeritageBooks.com, founded the Second Life area known as Just Genealogy where my avatar, Clarise Beaumont, is shown to the left.

Note the colorful covers of Heritage Books' top twenty bestselling book titles hovering to the right of Just Genealogy's PowerPoint viewing screen. By clicking on a book cover, one can order the title in question directly through Craig's Web site. Note that I chose to create my Second Life avatar Clarise as a svelte long-haired blonde!

What is Second Life?

[Second Life](http://SecondLife.com) (SL) is more than a real-time game to play. It is a place on the Web to visit. Once you've logged in, you'll discover that even university professors are holding classes



in SL. SL's Web site says:

Linden Lab launched Second Life, an acclaimed 3D online world, in 2003. Inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people from across the globe, the Second Life virtual world has a fully functioning economy and empowers its users to create content, interact with others, launch businesses, collaborate, and educate. A single Basic account is FREE. You must be 18 years or older to join the Second Life virtual world. When you register and become a Resident of Second Life, you choose a unique name for your new digital persona (i.e. avatar). Other Residents will only know your real identity if you choose to tell them. To get started, you will need to download the Second Life viewer.

A few definitions

- **Avatar**—The virtual reality personage you create for yourself after signing up for a free account with Second Life.
- **In-world**—when signed in to SL, you are said to be “in-world.”
- **Lindens**—Optional SL dollars, only necessary if you wish to purchase items, such as land, to build upon within the SL environment.
- **RL**—Real life.
- **SL**—Second Life.
- **Teleport**—A quick method of flying from one place to another in SL, as from the Just Genealogy fire pit to the front porch of the Family History Centre.
- **Union of Genealogy Groups (UGG)**—designed to cross-promote genealogy and history activities and display areas in the SL environment.
- **Voice Chat**—Turn on your computer speakers to listen to the genealogy discussion in-world. If you have a headset, you may contribute to the conversation verbally. Those without microphones merely pose questions by typing to the SL screen like the old-fashioned chat rooms of the previous century.

How does one sign up for Second Life?

- Go to [Second Life](#), click the Getting Started button, and follow the screen prompts to create an account, confirm your e-mail address, and download the software.
- Create a starting look by clicking on one of the default avatar images. The hair, clothing, even height and weight can be modified later.
- Create a first name.
- Get an available last name. (That is how I chose “DearMYRTLE Writer” and “Clarise Beaumont” for my two avatar names.)
- Install the software, as directed on the SL Web site.

What do you do when you sign in to Second Life?

Get oriented

Initially, Second Life will guide your avatar through some simple steps so you can learn how to use your mouse and keyboard to walk, sit, stand, and touch objects to move them, etc. Take a good fifteen to thirty minutes to get acquainted with maneuvering your avatar. Don't worry! The other online genealogists will be happy to assist you with navigation, once you make your presence known.

Search for people, places, and groups

There is a “search” button on the bottom middle of the Second Life screen that shows up when you've signed in to Second Life. See Figure 1 for a screen shot showing my recent search for the word genealogy. Clicking on the first item “JUST GENEALOGY” teleports your avatar to the Just Genealogy area in Second Life. If someone is close by, or you happen to do this when we meet on Tuesdays at 6 PM SL time (same as Pacific U.S. time), you'll be able to talk with others. If not, be sure to wander around the castle and participate in the interactive genealogy displays.

Attend a genealogy chat

The [UGG – Union of Genealogy Groups in Second Life Google calendar](#) provides the dates and times of upcoming events.

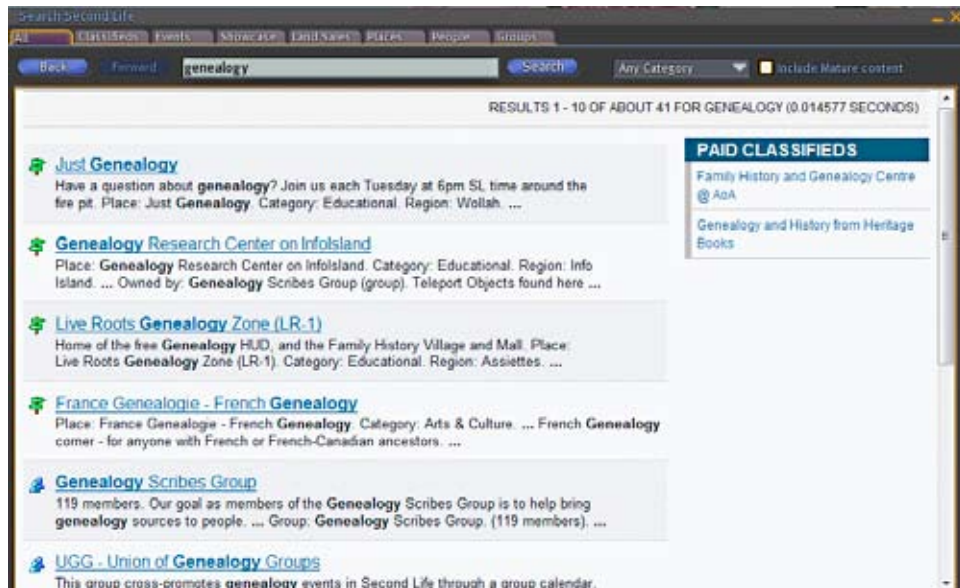


Figure 1. Second Life search for genealogy.

Use the Genealogy Tour HUD

Genealogy sites exist in diverse places within the Second Life environment. To quickly get from one place to the next, you can turn on the Genealogy Tour HUD, designed by Barbara Collazo. (See Figure 2.)

Find groups

- **Aussie Roots.** Research assistance from a resident of Australia. Meetings: 10 PM, second Saturday at the fire pit in Just Genealogy. Contact: Angelica Herrington.
- **Caledon Genealogical Society.** A comfortable place, stocked with lots of ideas to help you get in the hunt. Contact: Mavromichali Szondi.
- **Danish Roots.** Developed by a Danish history, genealogy, and folklore specialist with experience in Norwegian and Swedish records; multi-lingual. Display: Historiens Hus (House of History). Meetings: By appointment. Contact and builder: Charlotta Jenkins.
- **Family History Centre,** in the LDS region. Meetings: 5:15 PM Sundays on the front porch, voice chat mode. Group: LDS Friends

of Second Life, though all are welcome. Contact: Clarise Beaumont. Builder: Mavromichali Szondi.

- **France Genealogie.** French-Canadian and early French genealogy links and assistance. Meetings: By appointment. Group: Genealogie Francophone, though all are welcome. Contact: Savard Horchier.
- **General Genealogy,** at the Genealogy Research Center on Info Island. Genealogy displays, links, and monthly chats. Meetings: Usually the third Wednesday, 6 PM. Group: Genealogy Scribes, though all are welcome. Contact: Kilandra Yeuxdoux, Abbey Zenith, or Cindy Elkhart. Builder: Varies, depending on the display.
- **General Genealogy,** at Just Genealogy, sponsored by Heritage Books. Displayed tartans provide clickable links to useful general genealogy sites, blogs, podcasts, classes, and maps in addition to an inventory of links to purchase essential genealogy how-to books for RL libraries. Meetings: Tuesdays: Lots of general genealogy links, voice chats 6 PM SL time. Thursdays: UK-Ireland, 11 AM SL time; drop in hour. Group: Just Genealogy. Contact and builder: Krag Mariner, Clarise Beaumont, Barbara Collazo.



Figure 2. Genealogy Tour HUD helps you navigate through Second Life.

- **Ireland.** Irish research assistance by appointment and links to important sources on the net. Meetings: Monthly chats, fourth Monday, 7 PM held in the West of Ireland Library. Group: TheGenealogySource. Contact and builder: Jaylynn Sinatra.
- **Live Roots.** Free Genealogy HUD, interactive Family History Village, and a schoolhouse for beginners. Meetings: Schedule varies, consult the UGG Calendar. Group: Life Roots Friends, all are welcome. Contact and builder: Constatine Kyomoon.
- **Norwegian Roots.** Research assistance from a U.S. resident with experience in Norwegian records research. See the display at the brown house with lots of links for Norwegian ancestral research. Display at Just Genealogy. Contact and builder: Barbara Collazo.
- **Swedish Roots.** Research assistance from a resident of Sweden who also speaks Norwegian. See the display at the red house with lots of links for Swedish ancestral research. Meetings: Second Saturday, 10 PM SL time at the fire pit in Just Genealogy. Display: Clarise Beaumont. Contact: AnnaKarin Landau. Builder: Clarise Beaumont

Any one of the builders and contact people listed above will be more than happy to assist with your transition to Second Life. Remember, these are the names of their avatars, and the names may have no relation to their real-life names.

Hey, jump in! The SL weather's just fine! Have some fun while learning about family history research methodology.



Pat Richley is the author of [DearMYRTLE's Genealogy Blog](#), the [Teach Genealogy Blog](#), *DearMYRTLE's Joy of Genealogy* (2005), and *The Everything Online Genealogy Book* (2001); hostess of [DearMYRTLE's Family History Hour genealogy podcast](#); and coordinator of the Union

of Genealogy Groups in [Second Life](#). She currently supports a small, grass-roots study group in Salt Lake City with strategy meetings held two weeks prior to monthly field trips to regional genealogical facilities. Find her on the Web at [DearMYRTLE.com](#) and via [e-mail](#).

