

Genealogy Giants Part 2

[Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)

Hello everybody and welcome back to Family Digging. We're going to continue our series today on the Genealogical Giants (Part 2), and what this is going to be on is [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). So I'm here today with Carolyn Lancaster, and again, I am Paul Hendee. Carolyn, take it away.

Ancestry is the largest of the three commercial Genealogical Giants. It's a premium subscription site with various layers of participation available. What makes ancestry unique, Paul?

Well one unique thing about Ancestry.com is they have a Library Edition that is free to access at your own local library, making it free at almost every public computer on their premises. This is a great way to save money. The Library Edition is not as complete as their other levels, but plenty good to start out with. This past year with the pandemic upon us, Ancestry went so far as to allow access to their Library Edition from the library for all cardholders. So any library cardholder basically could have Ancestry.com at home. This was a very, very generous thing for them to do indeed. Contact your local library to see when this "at home" program expires. (Sooner or later, the pandemic will expire, hopefully, and so too will this program. (Then you would have to go to the library.)

Their next level of subscription covers most of North America's domestic records. Then their "world" subscription covers

domestic and foreign records. And finally, their "all access" subscription covers domestic and foreign records as well as the records from some of their subsidiary companies. Currently that includes Fold3.com, one of the premier military records providers in the country, covering from the American Revolution through World War II. And there are also other types of records at Fold3. It also covers Newspapers.com, one of the largest online historic newspaper sites in America. Both of these sites have their own subscription fees unless you are using Ancestry's, "all access" level. Each level of subscription is at an increasing cost. But if you exhaust each level before going on to the next, then you are only paying top dollar for a short time rather than paying for all these things separately for a higher cost.

Ancestry.com has a ginormous records database and is the other major digitizing partner, along with [Family Search](#), for [The National Archives](#). Ancestry works with NARA similarly to FamilySearch. Sometimes they work well together, and other times not so much. Sometimes they have joint projects, but more often they work independently. This results in there having some similar record sets, but often they have unique sets of information available. If the image for a document you want is not available out of one, try the other.

Ancestry.com differs from familysearch.org in a number of ways, particularly in motivation. They are a **“for-profit”** company. In other words, they like to make money. (Wow.) FamilySearch is a non-profit organization. Over the years,

Ancestry has grown by leaps and bounds, often by purchasing other companies in the genealogical field. Some of those companies provide additional or unique records to add to Ancestry's database, at which time the acquired company becomes redundant and is closed down. Other times, a company is acquired and kept as an affiliate company with a separate database, such as Findagrave.com, which is the largest cemetery site in the USA, and large elsewhere as well. Like other people's trees, [Findagrave.com](https://www.findagrave.com) should only be used for hints, not facts. Anyone can set up a memorial and say anything they want on that memorial, and very few memorials provide any sourcing at all.

Also, be careful about copying photos. The person who took the photo is the owner and copyright holder of that photo. There can be pretty large fines for misuse, especially of photos. Instead, contact the person who is in charge of that memorial site to find out how to get a photo. He or she might surprise you and just send you what you need for free. It always pays to ask; and always get a second source for the information on the memorial site. (And, Paul, I have to apologize fully: I used the word "free" instead of letting you do that. Paul: Well, I know, but you know how much I like the word "free".)

In the case of Rootsweb.com, which had always been a free site, and an extremely popular one at that, the company was acquired by Ancestry. There was a large and loud protest when Ancestry started shutting down parts of the company, putting what had been free and often unique, behind a paywall,

(That means they wanted money.) and doing away with many of the popular ways that the company had been used in the past. There were thousands and thousands of family tree sites, message centers and forums, etc. for instance; they were all in jeopardy. It was not a good time had by all, trust me. To complicate matters, a number of years ago Ancestry had a very large computer failure and to this day it has not entirely been restored. And recently Ancestry has gone back to eliminating some of the features in Rootsweb. Rootsweb is still free and it is still a very good resource to see what has been done in the past on your family history - well worth exploring for records and stories, but we would encourage anyone wanting to use it to put that near the top of your To Do List rather than at the end.

Ancestry also has a substantial presence in education for genealogy, with [Ancestry Academy](#) offering a free education for all, not just for their subscribers. All of the Genealogy Giants have YouTube channels, blogs, websites, webinars, podcasts and Facebook groups. So if you don't know something, no one can say there are no places to go for the answers. That is for sure!

Well, another thing unique to Ancestry.com is the size of it's database for DNA testing, with over 18 million people being tested. Amazing. They only provide one type of test, the Autosomal, which is designed to reveal your ethnic background. The larger the database, the more accurate the test results should be, a claim that has a way to go to be fulfilled. One thing

to look out for with Ancestry.com, it has informed consent as part of its agreement for DNA testing. It allows them to use your information for genetic research. You can opt out of this part, but it is easy to miss how and where to do that, so look carefully. If you object to this use of your DNA results, you must opt out at the time you sign up for the test.

We believe that if you want your DNA tested, you should look at all the types of tests that are available and who provides them to see who meets your needs. Further, you need to read the fine print in each of these agreements before signing up for the test. Choose carefully.

DNA testing has been on fire on growth charts. The industry expects to double in size in 2021, with similar growth rates over the past several years. This kind of growth has attracted the attention of many investors, and in December 2020, a majority of Ancestry was acquired by [Blackstone](#) (a New York Stock Exchange Company), a high quality private equities funds manager. Blackstone appears eager to take Ancestry.com to the next level by helping them to expand their product offerings and create technologically innovative ways, so even more people can discover more about their family histories and themselves. GIC, the global investment firm established in 1981 to manage Singapore's foreign reserves, has been a partial owner of Ancestry.com for some time and will continue their minority investment in Ancestry. Both GIC and Blackstone have histories of working with world class companies for the good of all concerned. Ancestry is already the largest for-profit

genealogy company in the world. It will be interesting to see over the next several years how the company develops under its new ownership.

There's been much controversy about sharing DNA data by various companies with other companies or organizations over the last several years. While Blackstone denies that it will use DNA information from AncestryDNA, a recent survey of bio-ethicists asked if they believe that to be true; the answer was an overwhelming "no". So time will tell.

A good way to see how Ancestry.com ticks is to read the Wikipedia.com article on Ancestry.com's history. Also, there was an article in the Los Angeles Times on April 13th of this year by David Lazarus in the business section that you may want to read. If you Google "Los Angeles Times, April 13th, 2021. Blackstone Purchase of Ancestry.com" the title of the article is "Why spend billions for Ancestry's DNA data if you don't plan to use it?" It gives both sides of the issue.

So, four things that make Ancestry.com unique are:

1. They are the largest records database provider for genealogy and family history too.
2. They have the largest DNA database because they have had the largest number of testers on which to draw. This should provide good ethnicity results from the autosomal DNA test they offer, (which we are guessing, are useful

going back 6-8 generations, after which you need a different kind of test.

3. They have acquired a number of companies that complement their basic business of records database provider, such as Fold3.com and Findagrave.com
4. They have various access plans that go from the totally free Library Edition to All Access, which covers not only the whole world, but some of their satellite companies as well.

So I think that pretty much wraps it up for this week. What do you say? I think so too. OK, good deal.

So again, if you have any questions, you can basically email us at familydigging@gmail.com. (Yeah, I guess that's about it.)

(Well, we have to tell them where to go to find the transcription.) Oh yeah, so basically you can go our website, at <http://www.familydigging.com>, and there you'll find our podcast file; you'll also find the transcription for this podcast, so that if you want, you can go to the various sites mentioned in here just by a click on any of the links on the transcript. You can also make comments there. If you'd like to do that, please subscribe at our website (always a good idea).

Thank you very much and have a good rest of the week and we'll see you next week with Part 3 which is going to be on

MyHeritage.com. I'm looking forward to that one too; I am a MyHeritage user, so let's see how we do. Till then, have a good weekend. Bye. Bye now.

Paul Hendee and
Carolyn Lancaster