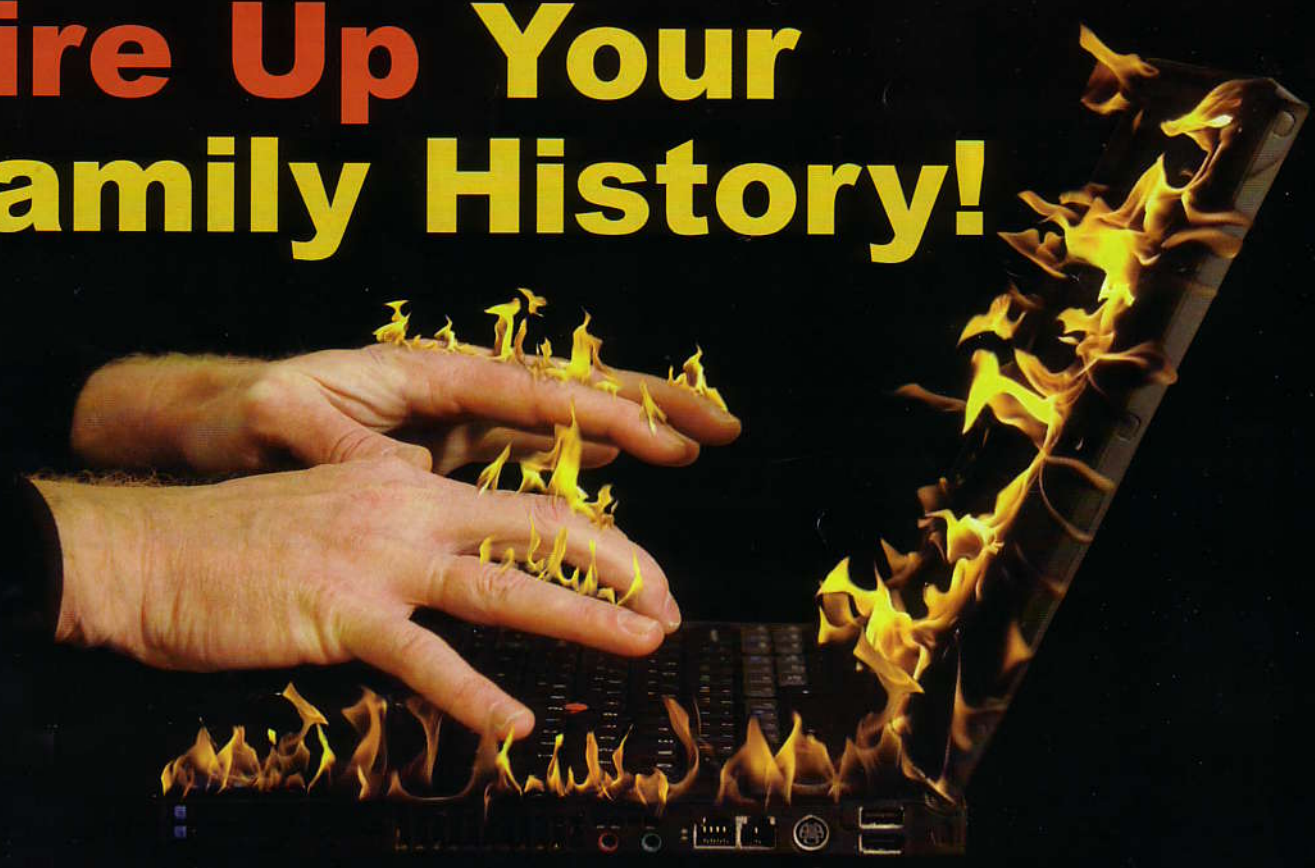
Researching Your Family Roots Online

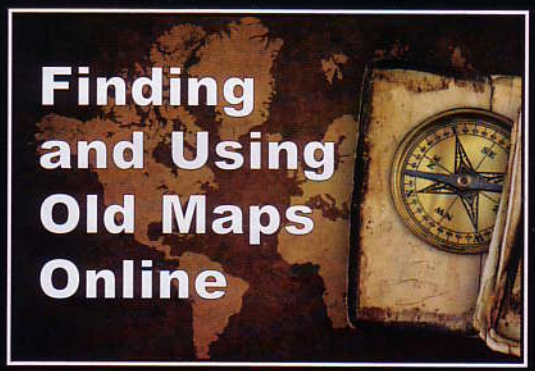
Internet GENEALOGY

March 2007

www.internet-genealogy.com

23 Websites To Fire Up Your Family History!





- Blogging Your Genealogy
- Deciphering Old Handwriting
- It's Not On the 'Net: Now What?

Hobbies: Genealogy

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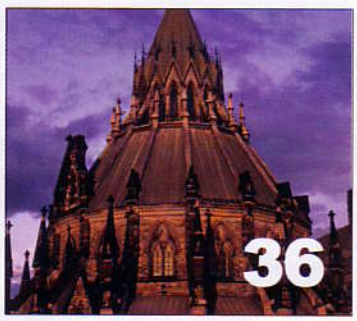

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23 Websites To *Fire Up* Your Family History

LISA A. ALZO LOOKS AT 23 WEBSITES GUARANTEED TO MAKE YOUR GENEALOGY RESEARCH SIZZLE!

NO HOBBY HAS CAUGHT fire in the past several years as much as genealogy. The Internet has been the catalyst with the proliferation of online databases, search tools, photobases, portals and other websites that have sparked the interest of novice researchers; and fueled the passion for those of us already addicted to the process of hunting for our ancestors.

And since the Internet is such a dynamic and ever-changing medium, new sites are starting up all the time, while updated content is constantly being added to the websites we've come to take for granted or have searched routinely. So whether you're a beginner or an expert, this article highlights some of the hottest places on the web to perform your research. Some of the sites are new; others have been around for years but, with recent upgrades, are worth a second look. Because of the wealth of genealogical information available on the web, it was difficult to decide which sites to include. But here are 23 sites that will make your research sizzle. Proceed with caution; if you get too many results, you could see smoke rising from your computer's monitor!

1. ABEBOOKS

www.abebooks.com

AbeBooks, the world's largest online marketplace for books, lists more than 100 million new, used, rare and out-of-print books from more than 13,500 booksellers. Use the search box on the homepage to find the book you want by author, title, keyword or ISBN. Advanced search allows you to look for books by other criteria such as price, publisher or attribute (e.g. first edition, signed). For queries resulting in too many books, you can use the "Narrow Your Results" tools to refine your search by more specific criteria. For example, by typing in the keyword "genealogy", you will get 155,643 results. You can narrow the results by searching for "New Books Only" (16,302 results), further narrow for example, by "Softcover" (3,210 results) and then by "Seller Location", "USA" and "NY" (295 results). Users can find rare books at bargain prices from this service. You can register for a book you're looking for and you'll receive an e-mail if it is ever listed anywhere on AbeBooks. Better yet, signing up is free! If your family is mentioned in any book, it is well worth registering.

2. ABOUT.COM/GENEALOGY

Guide Kimberly Powell offers tips to break down your genealogy brickwalls through how-to articles, free genealogy lessons, genealogy chat, the latest news,

and product and website reviews, as well as an extensive list of online genealogical resources.

3. ACCESS GENEALOGY
www.accessgenealogy.com
This free genealogy resource provides information on how and where to locate key genealogical records such as cemetery, census, military and vital records, among others. Free genealogy charts are also available, as well as family tree and surname searches, and sections on genealogy books for sale and genealogy books online. The site also has useful information on specialty records. For example: The African-American records section provides extensive listings of available free resources online for African-American ancestral research, the Bible records section contains a listing of the available online Bible records, listed by geographical area, a Native-American records section (the site claims to be "the premier resource online for Native American Records" including tribal histories, final rolls, census and an extensive collection of online books), a United States genealogy section organized by state and a world genealogy section organized by country. Two interesting links on this site are the "Biographies", organized by state, and a "Bundle of Old Letters", history and life as shown through historical letters in blog format.

4. ANCESTOR HUNT
www.ancestorhunt.com
The free genealogy search engines on Ancestor Hunt enable you to search for ancestors and locate your family surnames in some of the largest databases of genealogy records online. Their unique genealogy searches include the surname search portal and the obituary search portal. The site indicates that US genealogy searches for each state are being developed that will search vast amounts of data across the web simply by entering a surname; revealing obituaries and genealogy data from various genealogy databases and other genealogy and obituary sources. One of the most popular sections is the Bible records transcriptions and images. These Family Bibles are completely indexed by surname and there over 200 pages of transcriptions and scanned images, which they are adding to on a regular basis. One of the unique pages found on the site is genealogical prison records, where you can search for current prison/jail inmates or possibly locate a black sheep ancestor in older records. You can also browse past sheriffs of the US to see if any of your ancestors are included. To browse these and other search engines and free genealogy resources look in the genealogy search engines and contents menu, which is located on each page.

5. ANCESTRY.COM
www.ancestry.com
Family history sleuths have been flocking to Ancestry.com for years to view its subscription-based databases for online access to US census records (1790-1920) with its especially useful "every name index". In addition, the collection contains many censuses for individual American states and Canadian provinces. Ancestry's Immigration Collection was recently updated to include 100 million names on all readily available US passenger lists from 1820-1960, including Ellis Island, as well as records from more than 100 other US ports of arrival. Be sure to check out the other extensive resources here, such as: Military Records (including WWI Draft Registration Cards, Civil War Service Records, WWII Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946), Directories and Member Lists, Court, Land and Probate Records, Newspapers and Periodicals, Family and Local Histories, Old Postcards, Yearbooks, as well as other databases. In addition, there are some freebies available such as the Learning Center and Family History Circle and downloadable charts and forms.

6. ARCHIVES.GOV/GENEALOGY
www.archives.gov/genealogy
The National Archives and Records Administration's site contains a wealth of information for genealogists and family historians, including links for: Forms, tools and aids; tips on how to start your genealogy research and care for your family archives; essays and links to assist with using NARA's records for research; an online guide to NARA publications; guides to records at NARA and much, much more! This site is a "must-stop" for any avid family history researcher!

7. CANADIAN GENEALOGY DIRECTORY
www.cangenealogy.com
CanGenealogy.com is a site designed to be a source of genealogical links with a difference. The links on this site are ranked with the most important ones at the top. There are links to big Canadian research websites such as Library and Archives Canada, *www.collectionscanada.com*, and inGeneas, *www.ingeneas.com*, as well as lesser-known, but useful, online resources. The site provides a digest so that you don't have to click through thousands of links to get to what you want. Links are categorized Genealogy by Region; Genealogy by Category; Resources, etc., with subcategories underneath. On CanGenealogy, you won't have to dig deep to find the ones that matter the most — they will be at the top of the page. The site states openly that "By choice, we don't list every site of interest to family historians working in Canada. Our goal is to help you get to the key sites as quickly as possible. There are other sites that have thousands of genealogical links — and yes, we have links to those sites. If CanGenealogy doesn't help you, with luck we will guide you to sites that do." With its well-organized links, this site is crucial for those seeking their roots in the Great White North.

8. CENTER FOR RESEARCH LIBRARIES
www.crl.edu
CRL is a consortium of North American universities, colleges and independent research libraries. The consortium acquires and preserves traditional and digi-

tal resources for research and teaching and makes them available to member institutions through interlibrary loan and electronic delivery. CRL holds more than four million newspapers, journals, dissertations, archives, government publications and other traditional and digital resources for research and teaching. Searchable online is their "Special Collections Databases", which includes well-known research collections of college and university catalogs, primary and secondary textbooks and WWII war crimes tribunals, as well as lesser-known collections of railroad publications, courses of study and international central bank publications. Of special note are the "Foreign Newspapers" — more than 6,000 newspaper titles published outside the US and the "US Ethnic Newspapers" — more than 2,000 titles of periodicals and newspapers published by various ethnic groups in North America. The CRL's Reading Room is located in Chicago, Illinois and use of the room is free to students, faculty and scholars from CRL member institutions (see their website for a list). There is a daily request fee for individuals who are not faculty, students or staff at a member institution. CRL lends to other libraries, not individuals. Requests must come from the non-member library's interlibrary loan department and fees will apply.

9. Dead Fred

www.deadfred.com

Dead Fred's Genealogy Photo Archive is a free, photo genealogy research website (or photobase) devoted to helping you visualize your heritage. Search for images by name, date, location, photographer and other criteria. You can also post your own photos to the archive. The site also has an extensive collection of mystery photos, which are interesting to browse. Its huge, searchable database currently contains 13,589 surnames and 65,172 records. To date, the site boasts of 1,032 reunions of photographs with their rightful owners. Sign up for the free newsletter to learn about recent updates or developments to the site. For more information, read the article on DeadFred in the October/November 2006 issue of *Internet Genealogy*.

Since its inception, DeadFred.com has reunited more than 1,000 "lost" photos, like the one shown above right, with their rightful owners.

10. eBay

www.ebay.com

Although not officially dubbed a genealogy or family history website, eBay should be on your list of "underused sources". Whether you are trying to track down a long-lost family Bible, a collection of old photographs or postcards, a yearbook from your ancestor's high school or perhaps a rare book or map, keep an eye on eBay. As of this writing, there were some 3,900 items found for genealogy listed in the "Everything Else", "Books" and "Computers & Networking" categories. Don't have time to routinely check if an item you desire has been listed on the site? Then, let eBay do the work for you. Once you sign up for a eBay user ID (it's free), and type in a search term such as "genealogy", you will see the link "Add to my Favorite Searches". From there you can type in key words and specify other search criteria, tell eBay to notify you when new items with your designated key words are listed and for how long you want the notifications to be sent. Then, click "Save Search", sit back, relax and wait for eBay's e-mail!

11. Family Search

www.familysearch.org

This free site sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been an "old faithful" to genealogists for years. Updates and changes to the site have greatly improved searches on its Family History Library catalog section. In recent months, the site has been expanding its collection of birth, marriage, death, census and other records. It has also begun a massive project to digitize billions of records previously available only on microfilm, (e.g. civil, church and local records). It plans to make those available online beginning early next year. The site has some great freebies such as the Social Security Death Index, International Genealogy Index, Personal Ancestral File and more. Those new to genealogy should click on the "Library" tab, then "Education" and "Research Guidance". Here you can choose a place name (country, state or province) and be shown a list of subjects and records to help get

you started. And whether you're a novice or more experienced researcher, check out the "Research Helps" tab which will give you a list of links, and sometimes downloadable PDF files of documents sorted by place, title, subject or document type. Document types include forms, letter-writing guides (for foreign research correspondence), maps, reference documents, research outlines, resource guides, step-by-step guides and word lists (for document translation).

12. FIND MY PAST

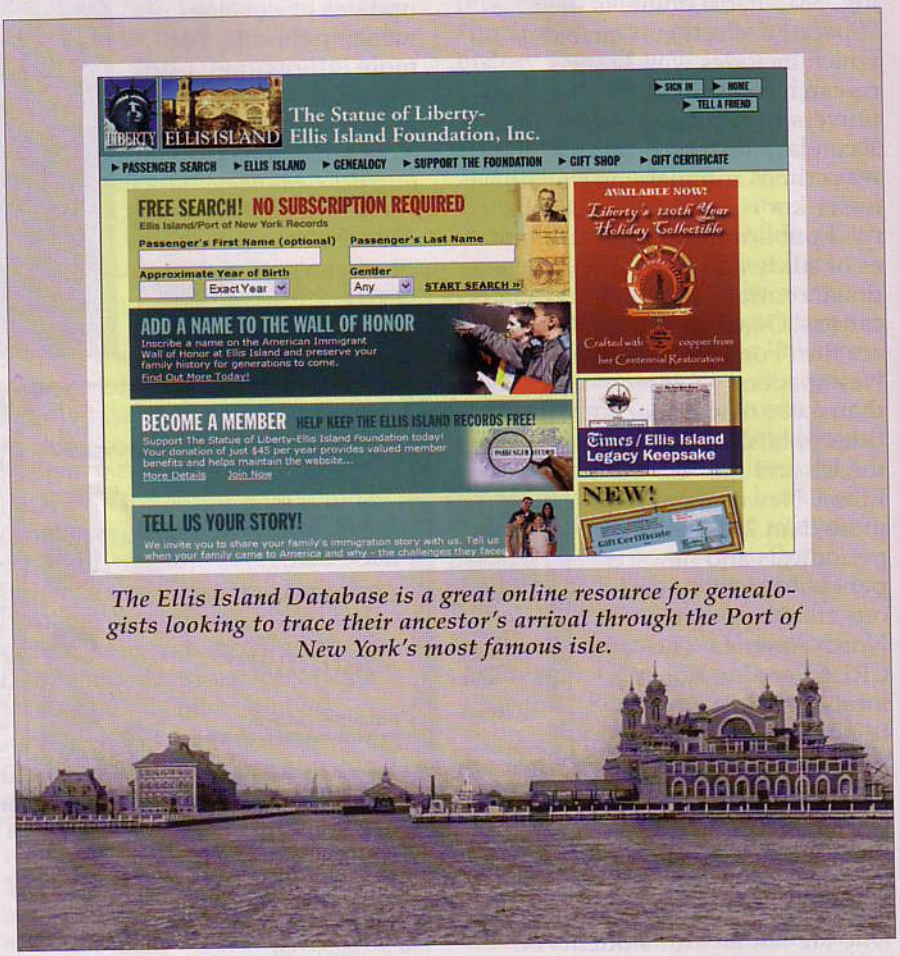
www.findmypast.com

FindMyPast is the new name for 1837online.com. Family historians can search for ancestors from England and Wales among the comprehensive collections of military records, census, migration, occupation directories and current electoral roll data, as well as the complete birth, marriage and death indexes. Registered users can purchase "units" to view search results, and there are six pricing plans to choose from. To see these, click the "pay per view website" link on the main page.

13. ELLIS ISLAND

www.ellisisland.org

The Ellis Island Database (EIDB) contains the records of the more than 22 million immigrants that entered the US through Ellis Island and the Port of New York between 1892 and 1924. The site can be searched for free, but registration with a username and password is required. If you haven't searched this online database for some time, you may want to take another look. Not long ago, this site received a makeover and they've added a Genealogy Learning Center on the site with downloadable pedigree charts, family group sheets, passenger arrival logs and more. Another point of interest is the site's List of Famous Arrivals which allows you to see the arrival records of those who became successful in America. Did your ancestors arrive before 1892? They may have been among the more than 10 million immigrants who came through Castle Garden, New York between 1830 and 1892 (the year Ellis Island opened). A searchable database is available free of charge at *www.castlegarden.org*. Search years are for 1820 to 1913. Results are displayed in tabular format, but take note, there is no link to manifest images on this site. To view the original manifest, you will have to either use Ancestry.com's subscription-based immigration collection or order a microfilm copy from the Family History Library (see #11).



The Ellis Island Database is a great online resource for genealogists looking to trace their ancestor's arrival through the Port of New York's most famous isle.

14. GENEALOGY BANK

wwwgenealogybank.com

This new online resource contains data that is only available through Newsbank and its library subscription service, as well as some data not currently available elsewhere. The data is available via subscription only ($19.95 US per month). Some of the databases include: Historical Newspapers (1690-1977); Historical Documents (1789-1930); America's Obituaries (1977 to present, from more than 800 US newspapers); as well as the Social Security Death Index. The version of the SSDI on this site provides the actual day of the week the person was born on or died on, as well as "estimated age at death" (in years, months and days). The site's administrators believe they are the only SSDI site to update weekly. (A review of GenealogyBank can be found in the December/January 2007 issue of *Internet Genealogy*). Because of its centralized collection of a wide variety of resources available through a single subscription service, GenealogyBank should catch on quickly with users and establish itself as a major player in the online genealogy field.

15. JEWISHGEN

www.jewishgen.org

JewishGen is the primary Internet source connecting researchers of Jewish genealogy worldwide. The site is incredibly helpful for novice roots seekers or those researching

outside the realm of Jewish genealogy. A couple of the site's most popular components are the ShtetlSeeker — for searching for towns in Central and Eastern Europe by name or location, and Jewish communities by various criteria — and ShtetLinks for more than 200 communities. Other useful features include JewishGen Discussion Group, the JewishGen Family Finder (a database of 400,000 surnames and towns), the comprehensive directory of InfoFiles and Yizkor Book translations. JewishGen offers its resources at no charge but provides "value-added" services as a thank-you to those who contribute $100 US or more to the JewishGen General Fund (see site for more details). Want to know more? Consult the December/January 2007 issue of *Internet Genealogy* for a complete article on JewishGen and its online resources and services.

16. Google and Google Books

www.google.com, books.google.com.

Did you know you can use Google to search on surnames and places? If you've got an unusual last name, you'll be amazed at the results! Also, don't forget to try the international versions of Google — simply click on the "Language Tools" link on the first page of Google and then select from one of two drop-down menus to search pages written in a selection of languages or countries. While some sites do have a tab to click to get an English version of the page, note that translation in many instances will be necessary. You can also use Google Book Search using an ancestor's name, spouse's name, a location or profession, among other criteria. You simply input a search request and if a match is found, a link is added to the search results. Click the link to get a "snippet view" where you will find key information such as book title, author, publisher and snippets showing your search term in context within the book. You will only see the book in "full book view" if the book is copyright free or the publisher has granted permission to Google to display the entire copy. For more information, consult the April/May 2006 issue of *Internet Genealogy*.

17. MyHeritage.com

www.myheritage.com

The brainchild of Gilad Japhet, word about MyHeritage is spreading like wildfire. The site started attracting users last summer by enabling them to upload their own photos and compare them with images of various celebrities included in the database (see the December/January 2007 issue of *Internet Genealogy* for more information). Further development of the facial recognition feature, which is free to use, allows users to upload family photos and sort them into family trees through facial-recognition software that clusters faces based on bone structure and unique eye characteristics. According to Japhet, consumers will, for an extra fee, be able to run a world-wide genealogy search covering all members of their family tree and receive updates when there are new search results for entries in their network. The site is also making it easier for family history aficionados to search for their ancestors on the Internet. Through something called "Megadex", users can type in an ancestor's name and then search simultaneously across more than 400 databases from around the world including Ancestry.com and the Ellis Island Database, as well as lesser-known databases such as Ireland's Gravestone Index, US Civil War Soldiers' Records and DNA Databases, to name but a few.

There is also Family Tree Builder Software on the site, and the ability to set up a family website for free (enhanced sites cost from $2.95 to $9.95 US per month). Although the site indicates it is still in beta form, its streamlined search features are sure to appeal to genealogists at every skill level.

18. Joe Beine's Online Searchable Death Indexes & Records

www.deathindexes.com

This easy-to-use website is a directory of online death indexes listed by state and county. Information about death records, death certificate indexes, death notices and registers, obituaries, probate indexes, and cemetery and burial records can be found here, as well as links to special pages on searching the Social Security Death Index online, and an Obituaries Research Guide. Joe Beine's categorized guide has information and links to all sorts of useful genealogy records, including census records, military records, naturalization records, passenger lists and state research guides, among other great tips on conducting your genealogy research and where to look.

Perhaps you've been told you look like Wyatt Earp, top left, or your Uncle Leo, top center, bears a striking resemblance to George Clooney, top right. MyHeritage.com's face recognition technology allows you to upload photos and see which famous figures you resemble the most.

19. LINKPENDIUM
www.linkpendium.com
Use this free "definitive directory" to browse surnames worldwide. Results may include websites, obituaries, biographies and other material specific to a surname. You can also browse by US locality to find the areas where your ancestors settled. Use this site to find those results buried beneath the surface — those most relevant to your genealogy and family history that even Google might've missed!

20. OLIVETREE GENEALOGY
http://olivetree genealogy.com
This site has been around since 1996, and currently has more than 1,900 pages of free genealogy resources " to help you find your brickwall ancestors". Check out the Directory of Genealogy Links to offsite databases, the genealogy tutorials and help files: Virtual genealogy lessons on finding your ancestors in census records, land records, ships passenger lists, PERSI, and more. Just as helpful are the resource guides: How-to guides that help you find your family tree as you search for ships passenger lists, Huguenots, Native Americans, Canadian Immigration, Palatines and so on. Genealogy Resources include books, microfilm and little-known records on microfilm, fiche and CD.

21. STEVE MORSE'S ONE-STEP WEB PAGES
www.stevemorse.org
A collection of online forms used to search certain genealogical databases in "one-step". The most notable is the "Searching the Ellis Island Database in One Step" section, which enables researchers to mine data from the Ellis Island Database. Users can choose "sounds like" search criteria for first and last name, as well as town name and define a number of other more specific parameters. This is especially helpful for locating the often misspelled surnames and names of towns/villages. Steve's recently added "gold form", *www.jewishgen.org/databases/EIDB/ellisgold.html*, will add more power to searches for those hidden ancestors in the Ellis Island database. One key feature of the new form is the ability to search on traveling companions (previously only possible with Steve's "Blue Form for Jewish passengers"). This is particularly helpful for those instances where you know that several family members immigrated together. At the bottom of the page, you can now specify which fields you'd like to see displayed on the results page and how you'd like to have the results sorted. The pages from this online search guru just seem to keep on generating genealogical heat! For more information, see page 12 of this issue of *Internet Genealogy*.

22. USGENWEB
www.usgenweb.com
The USGenWeb project site is one of the Internet's genealogical research gems. The site is run by a group of volunteers working together to provide free genealogy websites for genealogical research in every county and every state of the US. Organization is by county and state, and the website provides you with links to all the state genealogy websites which, in turn, provide gateways to the counties. The USGenWeb Project also sponsors important special projects at the national level and this website provides an entry point to all of those pages, as well. Once you access the main page of the site, simply click on a "State Link", which will take you to that particular state's official website. Clicking on the tabs at the top of the page will take you to additional online resources and links. The project marked its 10th anniversary in 2006.

23. WORLD VITAL RECORDS
www.worldvitalrecords.com
This new website, created by Paul Allen (one of the founders of Ancestry.com) contains free and subscription-based ($49.95 US annually) content. WorldVital Records.com will offer users international record databases, references to top genealogical resources, a blog planet, podcasts, videocasts, "webinars", expert advice, training and user-generated content. WVR's stated aim is to become the number two player in the genealogy industry behind Myfamily.com. This site is another in the market promising the "one-stop" search for data and resources that genealogists crave. For more information, see the December/January 2007 issue of *Internet Genealogy*.

Do you feel your mouse getting warm? Is your monitor starting to burn up? These are but 23 of the countless websites that fuel the popularity of genealogy and with any luck, you will be able to find a nugget or two from them that will set your research on fire.

Be warned though — it could get hot!

Lisa A. Alzo is the author of the recently released **Slovak Pittsburgh** *(Arcadia Publishing), as well as numerous articles for genealogy magazines. She currently teaches online genealogy classes for the National Institute for Genealogical Studies and the newly formed GenClass.com.*