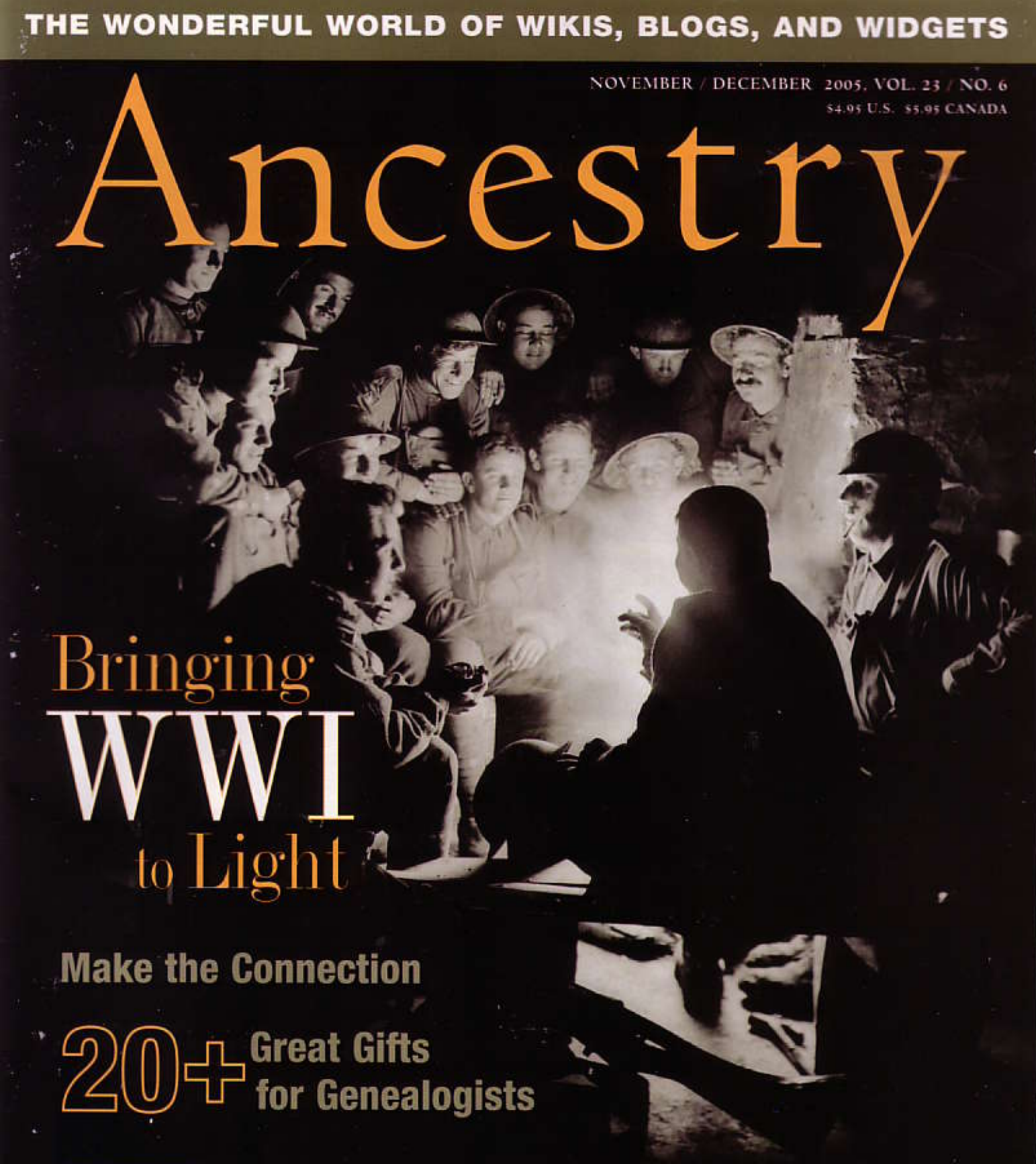
THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WIKIS, BLOGS, AND WIDGETS

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2005, VOL. 23 / NO. 6
$4.95 U.S. $5.95 CANADA

Ancestry



Bringing WWI to Light

Make the Connection

20+ Great Gifts for Genealogists

Gotta-Have Gifts for Genealogists

By Lisa A. Alzo, M.F.A.

Don't be alarmed if you find a little family history under your tree this year, particularly if it's wrapped in shiny paper and a bow. It may just mean that a well-wishing acquaintance—relative or otherwise—took your interest to heart this holiday season.

And you can, too. Whether you're looking for a unique gift for a family member or fellow family historian, or even something to jot down on your personal wish list, make this the year to forgo the practical items (they'll still be on sale in January) and load your sleigh full of family history and imagination.

Inexpensive or extravagant, homemade or high tech, they're all here—more than twenty gifts to give or to receive, perfect for everyone from the professional genealogist to the novice, or even the loved one who still doesn't quite get your family history passion.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Looking for a gift that helps keep the family history momentum in high gear year round? Try one of the following ideas, each packed with a practical usefulness that can help make even the toughest family history challenge run a little smoother.

Quench the Yearning for Learning

Genealogical societies are a great value for the money, and the benefits of getting together with other genealogists are too great to detail. Whether it's through membership in a local genealogical society or attendance at a national, state, or local genealogy conference, providing networking, learning, and discussion opportunities for your favorite family historian can help recharge almost any research. Look to Society Hall <www.familyhistory.com/societyhall/main.asp> for a list of societies that may be of interest, or check with local historical societies for specific contacts. Additionally, check with the same historical societies about local conferences or seminars, or visit the National Genealogical Society's website <www.ngsgenealogy.org> or the website of the Federation of Genealogical Societies <www.fgs.org>.

Research Assistants

A prepared genealogist should never be caught without a camera. No bigger than a standard keychain, the Mini Digital Keychain Camera is smaller than a business card, letting you be ready to take a picture at a moment's notice. The camera is easy to use and takes both still and video

images, and the price—under $15.00 at Amazon.com—makes it easy to justify. Similar products are also made by Bell+Howell, Oregon Scientific, and Phillips, although they're priced a little higher.

Handle the Heat

No it's not glamorous, nor is it romantic—it might even be the toaster of family history gifts—but no genealogist should be without a safe, yet portable, place to store family documents, photographs, electronic media, and heirlooms. In an emergency situation, a portable safe can let you quickly take the most irreplaceable records with you, and if you're not home during an emergency, the fireproof factor will give your documents a better chance of survival. Prices for fireproof safes vary according to size and make and are available at most superstores, office supply stores, and online.

Professional Help

Sometimes even the most experienced genealogist needs assistance, particularly when searching for foreign-born ancestors. While the services of a professional researcher or translator may not be cheap, they're often well worth the investment. Find translators and professional researchers by searching your favorite search engine (Google, AltaVista, Yahoo!, MSN) for the country or language name plus either "translation" or "genealogy research."

Get Out of Town

For a real hands-on gift, send your favorite genealogist on a walking tour of the town where his or her ancestors lived. New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Boston, Charleston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago: some city tours pinpoint specific areas of interest, others have a broader appeal. Internet searches, travel agents, and historical societies based in the city of interest can help you locate the tour that makes

the perfect gift. Try a tour of the steel mill heritage of Western Pennsylvania <www.riversofsteel.com>, or visit a coal mine in Eastern Pennsylvania <www.nvds.com/coalmine.html>. The genealogist in your family might also appreciate a day tour of Angel Island <www.angelisland.org/faq2.htm> or Ellis Island <www.nps.gov/stli/>.

Mapping Plans

Can't actually get to an ancestor's hometown? How about looking at it on a keepsake, frameable map detailing the area and the time period of interest. If Irish ancestors are involved, check out <www.pasthomes.com> for highly detailed and gently colored townland maps or copies of the First Edition six-inch scale Ordnance Survey maps of Ireland, surveyed between 1829 and 1843. Both town and county maps are available. Looking for UK maps? Try <www.old-maps.co.uk>. Genealogy Unlimited has a variety of maps from other countries, including Eastern Europe, available for purchase at <www.genealogyunlimited.com>. Choose an appropriate frame to accompany the map, and you've got a great gift to display along with family photographs or memorabilia.

Curl Up with the Family

When the day is done, even the most dedicated family historian needs time to relax. And what better way to get that warm and cozy feeling than with a personalized family tree throw or quilt. Available via Things Remembered (online at <www.thingsremembered.com> or at a local Things Remembered store), you can have family names embroidered on a luxurious 50" x 60" Family Tree Throw ($44.95 retail) to give as a treasured heirloom for generations to come. Or, if you're feeling ambitious, you can create a family tree quilt yourself, complete with family photos that you print directly onto fabric. For photo transfer instructions and ideas, visit <www.hp.com/go/quilting>; check your local crafts supply store for printable fabric or search online for "inkjet fabric."

ONE OF A KIND

What do you do for the person on your list who already has absolutely everything? Try the following one-of-a-kind gifts:

Ancestors—in 3D

Solid Memories™ <www.solidmemories.com> can convert almost any ancestral photo into a 3D sculpture. Of particular interest is The Local Branch™, a three-generation

3D snapshot of one branch of a family tree—four grandparents, two parents, and up to four children. Each sculpture is durable enough to be treasured for generations to come.

Local Tribute

You won't find them everywhere, but if you check with a local historical society or museum, you may find a unique way to pay tribute to a living or deceased family member. For example, the Senator John Heinz Regional History Center in Pittsburgh recently opened its Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum to pay tribute to the Pittsburgh region's sport greats. If you have an ancestor who played sports in western Pennsylvania, either amateur or professional, you can honor him or her (for a $250 tax-deductible contribution) with a customized "Ultimate Sports Trading Card," on the museum's "Wall of Fame." For more information on the Pittsburgh opportunity, visit <http://sports.pghhistory.org/Wall_of_Fame.asp>.

Grow a Family Tree

Choose a living memorial for a marvelous, long-lasting gift. You can have a young tree planted to honor a special person or occasion. You can even arrange for your gift tree to be planted in the state or country (not all are available) of your choice via Treegivers <www.treegivers.com>. Tree dedications are also available through TreePeople <www.treepeople.org>. For a $25 donation, TreePeople will plant a tree in honor of or in memory of a loved one; for $100, a grove of five trees are planted. Notification certificates are sent to the honorees of the donations.

Coming Home

Want a great way to thank an ancestor—a parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent—who risked everything to come to America? Place the ancestor's name on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor® at Ellis Island, the only National Monument where any American can have a name inscribed in tribute. Cost is $100 for a single name entry (John Smith or The John Smith Family) or $200 for a two-name entry (John and Veronica Straka Figlar). Contributions are tax deductible. For information go to <www.wallofhonor.com/honor_f.asp>.

Born to Be a Genealogist?

DNA testing is gaining popularity among genealogists as another essential tool for tracing roots, particularly when paper trails end and other conventional leads have dried up. Use search terms like "DNA testing genealogy" or "DNA genealogy" in your favorite search engine to find companies that perform the tests. You may also want to consider including *Trace Your Roots with DNA*, an easy-to-follow, comprehensive guide to using DNA tests for genealogical purposes, written by Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak and Ann Turner (Rodale, 2004), as part of the gift package.

UNIQUELY YOURS

Not every ancestor is the off-the-shelf variety, and neither is every gift. Try your hand at creating some of the following treasures for gifts that are as unique as the characters on your family tree:

Create History

Pick a relative and book some time in a StoryCorps booth <http://storycorps.net>. StoryCorps is a national project to instruct and inspire people to record each others' stories in sound. Recordings are conducted at the company's StoryBooths in New York City, at Mobile Booths touring the United States, or through a rented StoryKit (keep it for up to seven days for $100, plus a $500 refundable deposit). You'll receive a copy of the StoryCorps interview on CD and have the option of archiving the interview at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

Watch and Learn

Why make your own family history CD? Because it's an easy, inexpensive, and entertaining way to create and share family history research with everyone in the family. Tributes and presentations can be created with a software program like *Telling Stories* <www.tellingstories.com> that will record and help you design and create the project—the program even gives you ideas and the right questions to ask to elicit the most information.

Frame a Character

It's easy to create a frameable character sketch to highlight the life of an ancestor. Just type up a quick one page summary or a memorable story, add

some small pictures to the document, and print the document out on a high quality color printer (consider taking the electronic document to a copy store to print out your document on a color laser printer for the best quality). Choose paper and ink colors to help create a mood, emotion, or scene. Then drop the finished piece in a picture frame for a great gift. Or do several and start a home-based wall of honor. If writing isn't your forte, try your hand at creating family history heirloom art—a painting based on some aspect of the life of your ancestor. And if you like the idea but you're not ready to tackle the creative commitment on your own, consider having an oil painting and original narrative commissioned that commemorates your family history courtesy of the Family Painter <www.familypainter.com>.

A Family Check-up

We admit it—a family health history doesn't sound like the most exciting gift, but it could be one of the most practical, useful, and important gifts you'll ever give. A family health or medical history is a record of important medical information about your relatives that can help document familial patterns that could impact your health. Prepare a family health history by talking with immediate family members—parents, grandparents, and siblings—and try to collect details on every direct family member who has died and that person's cause of death. Document medical conditions for all family members as well, including the age at which a person was diagnosed, treatment, and any surgeries. For guidance on the project, consult the National Society of Genetic Counselors <www.nsgc.org/consumer/familytree/index.asp>. Or download free *My Family Health Portrait* software to walk you through the project courtesy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative <www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/download.html>.

Family Cookbook or Recipe Book

Almost every family has favorite recipes that have been passed through the generations. Your job is to gather those recipes—Pauline's pierogies, Uncle Andy's apple dumplings, great-grandma's peach pandowdy—and create your own family cookbook. All you need is a computer, a desktop printer, some paper, and a little imagination. Your cookbook could be as simple as 8 1/2" x 11" pages hole-punched and tied together with yarn, or you can take your electronic cookbook to your local printer or copy shop for more professional binding and printing options. Consider adding memories, quotes, stories, photos, drawings, even a family tree. If you'd prefer not to go at it alone, try a program like *CookBook Maker*, <www.cookbook-maker.com> to help you organize and print the recipe.

Puzzling Family Tree

Family historians deal with real-life puzzles everyday, so why not share some of the fun by creating a family tree puzzle? Even if you've never held a scroll saw nor an X-acto knife, you can still create a family tree puzzle on your own printer by using pre-cut paper (available at <www.compozapuzzle.com>). Simply print a digitized copy of the family tree right on the paper, and, with the help of your desk printer, you have a fun, customized gift. Or send a digital image of your family tree (or a family photograph) to <www.snapshotpuzzles.com> or <www.jigsawpuzzle.com> and let someone else create your one-of-a-kind puzzle for you.

SUBTLE PERSUASIONS

Have friends or family who just aren't ready to jump into genealogy with you? Take a look at the following gift ideas for the non-genealogist that will help you share your family history passion, even with the most reluctant recipient.

Talking Photo Frame

Preserve memories with both a photograph and a recorded message in a talking photo frame. Recording and playback are simple—just touch a button. Available in frames or cubes at a variety of outlets including <www.sharperimage.com>, <www.radioshack.com>, <www.amazon.com>, and <www.brookstone.com>.

Make this the year to forgo the practical items (they'll still be on sale in January) and load your sleigh full of family history and imagination.

Sweet Relations

Want to send a melt-in-your-mouth greeting? Customize a bag of M&Ms®. Choose the colors, packaging, and messages that you want to deliver (some restrictions apply)—up to two separate messages per order. Fill a bowl of family-name, customized chocolates on your holiday table or hand them out at the next gathering. Orders can be submitted on the M&M website at <http://shop.mms.com>.

Photos, Photos Everywhere

Want a new way to show off photos? Try drink coasters, a leather photo bookmark, or a pocket photo gallery. These non-traditional frames are delivered picture free—you add the photo in the size you want. Check websites including <www.solutionscatalog.com>, <www.shop.com>, <www.amazon.com>, and <www.lillianvernon.com> for these and similar items.

Or, for an even more unique experience, try putting a family photo on a stamp. Upload your favorite photo, old or new (some restrictions apply), to PhotoStamps <www.photostamps.com> or Zazzle <www.zazzle.com> to start your order. Use the sites' customization interfaces to zoom, move, and rotate your image, change the color of the border, or perform other small edits until you get exactly what you want. Then finish your order online. You'll get a sheet of twenty first-class stamps in the mail a few weeks later.

Graffiti, Graffiti Everywhere

Try some customized word-art for your walls with Wonderful Graffiti. Think Colorforms and Post-It notes rolled into one. Graffiti letters are actually thin pieces of vinyl—a light adhesive quality holds them firmly on the wall until you're ready to remove them. Wonderful Graffiti is flexible, durable, and washable, and it looks like it's been printed on the wall. Customize your phrases—friendly reminders, genealogy inspirations, quotes from your ancestors, even paper a wall with ancestors' surnames. Check <www.wonderfulgraffiti.com> for design ideas and ordering information.

Fun and Games

If fun and games are your style, try family-history-themed board games like Family Lore <www.familylore game.com>, Family Tree Trivia Game <www.waldorfresources.net/heartscorner/page2.htm>, Life Stories <www.boardgames.com/lifestories.html>, or Reminiscing <www.tdcgames.com/rem.htm>. For a more free-form experience, pass out a deck of GoAskAnyone Cards, conversation cards (great stocking stuffers) for everyone in your family. The extensive product line includes cards for sparking conversations between generations of family members. Of particular interest to genealogists are the Go Ask Your Mother, Go Ask Your Father, and Go Ask Your Grandparent cards—all provide great open-ended questions like "What is your most treasured possession?" "If you could go backward/forward in time, to what time would that be?" "Whom do you admire?" and "What talent do you wish you had?" For more information about GoAskAnyone cards, visit <www.goaskanyone.com>.

Lisa A. Alzo is the author of Three Slovak Women *and* Baba's Kitchen: Slovak & Rusyn Family Recipes and Traditions *(Gateway Press), and the recently published* Finding Your Slovak Ancestors *(Heritage Books), as well as numerous articles for genealogy magazines. She teaches Basic and Intermediate Eastern European and Slovak, and Great Lakes Region research classes for MyFamily.com, and is a frequent speaker at national conferences and genealogical and historical societies.*