

Every one of the more than 100 people who attended a genealogy swap meet Saturday in Mount Airy had their own reasons for being there, but Suzanne Settle was on a special mission.

“My husband passed in July,” the West Lebanon Street resident explained while seated in front of a computer logged into the Ancestry.com website, as a member of the Surry County Genealogy Association accessed information for Settle.

“I feel like my husband and I are still one,” she said, describing their relationship as the classic “soul mate” situation.

And now that he is gone, Settle said she feels a need to honor his memory by researching her husband’s family tree. This was the kind of situation tailor-made for Saturday’s free family history and genealogy swap meet on the third floor of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History.

Among other pro bono services, the event allowed Settle and others to tap into the Ancestry.com website, normally a paid service, for key information.

In her case, Settle was accessing local cemetery records as part of the quest for information on her husband's family. Whereas she has lived all around the world, he had deep roots in Surry.

"I came here (to the swap meet) because my husband was born and spent many years in Surry County," said Settle, who added that Saturday marked her first time exploring genealogy records in such a way. "I'm here to see if there's any facts I can glean about his family," the city resident added while making entries in a small notebook.

Meanwhile, the museum's third-floor conference room was a beehive of other activity as participants pored through family history information and exchanged tidbits of information. Genealogy swap meets are only held every few years locally, and on Saturday everyone seemed to be making the most of the occasion.

Surry Genealogy Association President Esther Johnson estimated that at least 50 family histories were on display Saturday. "Some have brought published books," Johnson reported. "Others have just brought stuff they've run off the computer."

Such a family history helped one Mount Airy couple, Tim and Lannie Edwards, establish a link they didn't know about beforehand, through their meeting with another local resident, Harold Mooney.

“We didn’t even know each other in the beginning, and found out we had common relatives,” Lannie Edwards said of their encounter with Mooney. “We just started doing our genealogy research about two years ago.”

Tim Edwards is proud of his Irish heritage, and said he has always referred to a great-grandfather of his as “the leprechaun.”

Providing attendees such as the Edwards couple and Mooney a forum to network and discover previously unknown family links seemed just as important Saturday as the mountains of written information available.

“Oh, it’s just a lot of fun,” Tim Edwards said. “Just exciting and fun to find out where all your folks came from.”

From Near And Far

While most of those at Saturday's family history and genealogy swap meet were from this general area, Emily Holmes journeyed from Virginia Beach, Virginia, where she is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Though she has visited Surry County before, Holmes said Saturday's event was the first of its kind that she has attended here.

Holmes said her roots include 11 local families. "All originated in Surry County in the 1700s," the Virginia resident said. Included are such surnames as Nichols, Myers, Weatherman, Fleming, Young and Robinson.

"This is very exciting," Holmes said while surveying the goings-on in the museum at the time. "I really like the concept."

Similar to Holmes, Stephen Harris attended Saturday's gathering seeking details about a particular family line of his locally, the Franklins, "which I know nothing about." So far he had not put his hands on any such information, but was continuing to search and still having fun.

“It’s been an enjoyable trip up here from State Road,” Harris added.

The Ancestry.com station, manned by Don Edmonds, recording secretary of the Surry County Genealogy Association, was a popular stop.

Edmonds said it was enabling swap meet participants to access birth, marriage and death records — and in some cases, pleasant surprises regarding their forebears.

“Sometimes you get pictures — and pictures (of ancestors) they’ve never seen before,” Edmonds said.

Despite the different ancestral lines being explored Saturday, everyone at the swap meet shared a common bond related to the family of man.

“All of us want to know where our ancestors came from, where we got all the little quirks we have — whether we’re short or tall,” said Dean Brown of Mount Airy, who has been researching his family links for more than 20 years.

Brown said the long search has produced some revelations about his forefathers he is proud of and others which he is not.

“And that’s true with every family.”