

RootsWeb.com

Rootsweb is undoubtedly the oldest of the genealogical websites on the net. It gradually developed in the 1980s, and was hosted for many years by a couple from their cabin on Pine Mountain in Kern County. It started with just a surname list of folks sharing what names they were researching. (The name comes as a result of the popularity of the TV series Roots.) When the couple could no longer keep up with the demands of the increased interest in genealogy and genealogical resources, they sold the site to Ancestry with the stipulation that it and the resources found at RootsWeb would always remain free.

Similarly, in the late 1990s, a fellow got the idea of having a genealogy website for every county in the country. He originally thought to combine his efforts with RootsWeb, but they could not come to a meeting of the minds (and servers, I guess) and so **USGenWeb** was born as a separate entity, but, also with the goal of providing resources free of charge to genealogists.

What kinds of things will you find at RootsWeb?

- Family trees in the WorldConnect Project, a database of trees submitted by thousands of RootsWeb.com researchers. One can still submit family trees to this project.
- RootsWeb Surname List (RSL) - a registry of more than one million surnames submitted online genealogists. Included with the surnames are dates, locations, and contact information for the person who submitted each surname Submitted records that have been transcribed for inclusion in their user-contributed databases.
- Mailing Lists – messages that a list subscriber sends to the list and is then distributed to all other list subscribers. These cover surnames, U.S. counties and states, other countries and regions, ethnic groups, etc.
- User-Contributed Databases (This is the area most affected by the recent server problems at Ancestry.)
- Message boards
- Social Security Death Index (SSDI)
- Genealogy websites – RootsWeb offers free webspace and an online editor for those wishing to create their own website. Before our current website was created, VCGS had its website at RootsWeb.
- RootsLink - a website registry, where users can add and categorize a genealogy link from anywhere on the Internet.

USGenWeb.com

Its mission statement: “We are a group of volunteers working together to provide free genealogy websites for genealogical research in every county and every state of the United States. This Project is non-commercial and fully committed to free genealogy access for everyone.” Many USGenWeb state and county sites are hosted on RootsWeb sites.

Note that because the sites are created by volunteers, the content of the county sites varies tremendously. Some of them are awesome – some a little less so!