

# Sensebach Heritage

Volume 10  
Number 1  
Spring/Summer 2006

## A family history newsletter for:

Sinsabaugh Sensibaugh Sensenbaugh Sensebox  
Sinsapaugh Sencabaugh Sencenbaugh Sencerbox  
Sincebaugh Sencebaugh Sincerbeaux Sincerbox  
Sensabaugh Sencibaugh Cincebeaux Sensaboy  
Sensebaugh Cencebaugh Cincebox Senciboy

and other variations of the name

## Caught in the Net

by Kathie Sencabaugh

This issue of *Sensebach Heritage* focuses on the Internet as a tool for genealogical research. Over the past ten years, the amount of genealogical information available on-line has exploded. Sitting at our own desks, we can now complete in a matter of minutes research that, twenty years ago, would have required travel to a distant location and countless hours of quinting into the microfilm reader.

This is by no means a "how to" primer on Internet genealogy research. There are dozens of good books on the subject readily available. Most well-known is *Netting Your Ancestors: Genealogical Research on the Internet*, by Cyndi Howells, founder of Cyndi's List, the premier Internet site that lists and links to thousands of other Internet sites and databases of interest to genealogists. Instead, this article raises a few of the issues that confront those of us who are attempting Internet research and then presents some examples of the often elusive Sensebachs we've been able to hunt down and capture on the Internet.

### To Pay or Not to Pay

There is a wealth of genealogical information available at no cost on the Internet. Thousands of people have created personal websites to showcase their genealogical research; and thousands of others have posted the fruits of their research on free regional websites. Many state and provincial governments have free websites on which they make available census records or vital records (births, marriages, and deaths) eligible for public access. And of course the mother of genealogical research, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, provides an enormous website at [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org), to which access is free.

There are also websites which require a paid subscription in order to access either the website itself or the detailed information to which the website is a gateway. Of these, perhaps the most well-known are [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) and [Genealogy.com](http://Genealogy.com); many of the databases on these two services are international in scope. Other for-fee databases belong to organizations that focus on regional data, such as the New England Historical Genealogical Society (NEHGS).

Paying a subscription fee, unfortunately, doesn't guarantee the accuracy of data. The quality of data on both free and subscription websites varies widely. As with printed materials, it is essential to evaluate the source. Some of the best material, for example, the actual images of the 1901 and 1911 Canadian Censuses, sponsored by Library and Archives Canada, is available at no cost. Conversely, many subscription sites allow subscribers to post their own family trees, with the expected mixture of fact and fantasy. Sadly, much information posted on both free and paid websites is incorrect and worth very little, if indeed it's not harmful. In the past, the cost of publishing kept a great deal of genealogical rubbish out of circulation. The downside of the computer and the Internet is that they have made it possible for anyone to publish, and to publish widely; and the bad has proliferated alongside the good.

Most of the exploration detailed in this issue occurred on two subscription websites, [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) and [newenglandancestors.org](http://newenglandancestors.org), the website of NEHGS. Access to the latter is a benefit of membership in the society, a non-profit organization which I supported long before it had a website. Although access to [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) may seem expensive, a year's subscription costs less than a trip to any of the locations I would have to visit to consult just the U.S. Federal Census images, and less than it would cost to rent the micro-

films through my local LDS Family History Center. Additionally my subscription brings me the benefits typical of subscription sites: a substantial number of actual images; otherwise unavailable indexes to data, especially to the U.S. Federal Census records; and the invaluable ability to search all of the site's databases electronically.

### Image, Transcription, and Index

Aside from the personal genealogies, most research materials on the Internet fall into three broad categories: actual images, transcriptions, or indexes. The indexes, in turn, may either link to actual images, or may be posted as guides to primary source material that must be viewed elsewhere.

The existence of an index indicates that some dedicated soul has waded through the primary source material to extract and organize the names that appeared in the primary source; and selfless genealogists have been doing this for years. Many of the independent indices that now appear on the Internet first appeared in book form. An index, though, is a mixed blessing. It's a blessing to be able to look for Sensebachs with all of their variant spellings in an index of the 1930 United States Federal Census, to use one example, rather than having to read through every reel of the census microfilm – an impossible task. The drawback is that the index was created by a human, who may have misread the often execrable handwriting of the census taker, who in turn, may have applied his own creative spelling to our surname.

Perfect examples of the problems of indices occur in the 1820 and 1830 U.S. Federal Censuses for Pennsylvania. Simeon Sinsabaugh, born and married in New York, was known to have lived in Green County, Pennsylvania, for a number of years prior to moving to Lick-

*continued on page 5*