Though its name has changed, an annual event on Saturday at Mount Airy Museum of Regional History has the same goal: helping individuals and families connect with their past. The Surry County Genealogical Association Ancestor Fair formerly was known as the Family History and Genealogy Swap Meet. A decision was made to drop the “swap meet” terminology, which generally refers to flea markets or venues where auto enthusiasts go to trade parts, and add ancestor fair to the title. This better reflects the historical nature of the event now in its fourth year, explained Esther Johnson, Genealogical Association president.

“This is the swap meet we have been having,” Johnson added in assuring that the gathering held each winter will feature the same attractions for genealogy buffs. “We’re pretty much sticking to the same things this year.” Also as in the past, everyone interested in genealogy is invited to the ancestor fair and admission is free, except for a small fee to copy records using a machine to be available Saturday.

Roots resources

A variety of resources will be highlighted during the event scheduled Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the third floor of the museum on North Main Street. “We will have someone there who can help you look up your family on Ancestry.com or FamilySearch,” Johnson mentioned in reference to one attraction, access to online services that normally require paying fees or establishing accounts. “Also, we can go on our computers,” she said of ones to be brought by Genealogical Association members. Laptops are welcome Saturday. An array of family history information, such as genealogy charts and records for various lines, tends to be on display at the fair. “Bring your genealogy and history on your family,” Johnson urged participants, “old pictures, scrapbooks, family group sheets.” One never knows what might be encountered at the event, which sometimes includes stumbling onto previously elusive information that can provide a genealogical breakthrough. “This is a good time to find people who are doing research on your family,” Johnson commented regarding the presence of a clearinghouse for an array of records. Those connected with a history or genealogy group also are invited to set up at the fair, where they can advertise their group and sell its items such as books and maps free of charge. And authors may offer their books for sale.

DNA attraction

A recent rage in the genealogy world is DNA testing, which offers an alternative to tracing one's family tree rather than relying strictly on written or oral records. It allows genealogists and family researchers to benefit from established scientific methods to confirm ancestry and relationships. "Everybody wants to have their DNA done," Johnson said of the popularity of testing, which she will be available to explain Saturday to ancestor fair attendees. "I've had my DNA done and I can show them what it looks like," Johnson said of the breakdown that results.

Classes offered

While Saturday's fair will be of special interest to students of a beginners genealogy class sponsored by the museum and taught by Johnson, it also is a prelude for the next round of classes. The five sessions are scheduled on Tuesdays from 6 to 8 p.m., beginning on Feb. 6 and ending on March 6. The first two are to be held in the second-floor classroom of the museum, the third and fourth at locations in Dobson and the fifth back at the museum. Fee and other information is available on the museum's website. In addition, the Surry County Genealogical Association meets at 7 p.m. on the second Monday of each month in the Teaching Auditorium at Surry Community College in Dobson.