

“I enjoy solving puzzles. Genealogy is one giant puzzle,” says Ethel Heidesch. Robert Arens agrees that “uncovering the unknown” is one of the attractions of genealogical research.

Genealogy, the tracing of ancestral lines, has become a popular pastime in the United States, and according to “GenealogyInTime” magazine, nearly 8 million Americans have done at least some genealogical research.

Heidesch, who lives in Remsen, IA, and Arens, of St. Paul, MN, are members of the Luxembourg Heritage Society of Northwest Iowa, and each is an avid genealogist.

While both pursue genealogy for their own families, they also make major contributions to the Luxembourg Heritage Society. Heidesch has been a part of the Society since its founding in 2005. “I was part of the Luxembourg Heritage Society of Northwest Iowa from its very beginning. As I was already doing research on many of the area families, a spreadsheet of people born in Luxembourg and who lived in northwest Iowa at some time was a good way to record them. I also built up a paper file on Luxembourg families. The files range from one newspaper clipping to complete family histories donated by family members. There is a wealth of information, including photos, just waiting to be utilized.”

Now, after 15 years of maintaining these records, Heidesch is stepping back from the task. “I need my laundry/office/guest room back. The family files need to find a new home and caretaker,” she says.

While Heidesch was working on Remsen-area family histories, Arens spent over 1,000 hours researching the original 38 Luxembourgers who traveled across Iowa in ox-drawn wagons from St. Donatus, IA to Sioux County in 1870. As a result of his massive research, Arens has constructed 38 individual books listing 13,381 names, births, deaths, marriages, burials, addresses and many obituaries and some journals of descendants of those settlers. Arens notes that, “Printed out, bound, and laid open for people to read, these books will occupy

about 76 lineal feet of table space. The 38 books will range in size from about only 10 pages for Nicholas Frantzen 1844-1917, a priest, to about 3000 pages for the most prolific ones.”

Arens will display the books at Lux Fest June 5-6, 2021. For the sake of privacy, books on display will not contain the names and other information about living people. Lux Fest, centered in Alton, IA, will include genealogical displays of other Luxembourg families, a community mural, vendors, and a visit by the Luxembourg ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Gaston Stronck.

Like many others, Heidesch now wishes she had asked more questions of family members. “I got serious about genealogy after my Dad died [1975]. He could have filled in so many questions about his family,” she commented. One frustration she feels about her genealogical research is finding her great grandmother’s parents. “I cannot cross the Atlantic to connect my great grandmother, Elisabeth Haarmann, to her birth in Prussia. I think I’ve found her parents, but haven’t found any way to prove it.” She continues, “This is an ongoing project; I don’t see myself quitting entirely, not ever.”

Arens also spent a great deal of time searching for information about one of his grandparents. He said one genealogical goal was to find the biological parents of his grandfather, Frank Remackel. He learned in 1970 that Remackel had been adopted in Iowa. “After over 40 years of work, I’ve accomplished what I wanted. On February 20, 2019 I finally learned with 100% certainty the biological parents of my 'adopted' grandfather, Frank Remackel 1892-1959. I have created a 76-page pictorial journal of my 40+ year quest.” In honor of his Luxembourg heritage, in 2016, Arens traveled to the Grand Duchy with 18 members of his family where he and 13 members received their dual US/Luxembourg citizenship. Six of Arens’ eight great-grandparents were born in Luxembourg.

The Luxembourg Heritage Society is looking for someone to volunteer to take over Ethel Heidesch's research into area Luxembourg families and to maintain her records. Anyone interested is asked to contact a member of the Society or to email stokesberryjudy@gmail.com. The Luxembourg Heritage Society of Northwest Iowa will meet Saturday, September 12 at 9:30 a.m. in the conference room of Thrivent Financial, 700 12th St. S.W., in Le Mars. Everyone is welcome to attend.