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Part I of a 2-Part Series:

The Ladson Library Is A Paradoxical Treasure

by Al Hackle, Assignment Writer

The Ladson Genealogical Library is a paradox: A public treasure, it began in the very private quest of its benefactor for his family's history. And though situated atop a busy commercial corner, it seems better known nationally than at home.

The first puzzle is undone in the nature of that benefactor, Jack Ladson, who was proud and inquisitive enough to learn as much as possible about his ancestors, but then understood enough of his need for that quest to share not just his ends, but the means. The Ladson Library contains the means to millions of similar private searches.

The quest began in the chance meeting of three Ladsons, two from South Carolina, one from Georgia, about 55 years ago. Jack wasn't even there. It was his brother William who attended Charleston's Citadel and thus returned to the place where his ancestor first landed in America 250 years earlier.

"You know how people love to ride out and watch those boys drill in their uniforms and everything. Well, these two old ladies, in their eighties, had their chauffeur drive them out to the Citadel in an old Franklin automobile," Jack recalled recently.

William Ladson, then a corporal in the cadet company, was summoned by loudspeaker to return a telephone call after the drill.

"And these two ladies, one of them says to the other, 'Sister, did you hear that fellow's name?' and the other replied, 'Yeah, it sounded like Ladson,' Jack narrated. "So she said, 'Well, I thought all the Ladsons were dead,' and 'I'd sure like to meet the young man.'"

So the sisters, Miss Isabel Ladson of Charleston and Mrs. Leila Ladson Jones of New York, met William Ladson, then of Moultrie, Georgia.

William told the ladies that his father's name was John, but when they asked his grandfather's name, William supposedly said "I don't know him by anything but Grandpa."

Jack, then on spring break from Duke University, was coming to Charleston with his mother and sister the following weekend. The ladies asked the whole family to Sunday dinner at their home, Number 8 Meeting Street in Charleston.

Isabel Ladson called Jack with the invitation, and he showed up that Sunday with the information that his grandfather Isaac Larramore Ladson was the son of John Connaway Ladson of Barnwell County, South Carolina. From there the Georgia Ladsons and their distant cousins were able to determine their relationship, and Jack Ladson developed a lifelong interest in family history.

Miss Isabel and Mrs. Leila took him to see famed Charleston geneologist Mabel Weber. With



JACK LADSON at home in his other library.

Weber's help he soon traced the Ladson's back to seventeenth century Northamptonshire, England.

Around the middle of that century, brothers John and Francis took a ship to Barbados in search

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Libraries To Host Genealogy Seminar

The John E. Ladson Genealogical and Historical Foundation Library will offer a seminar, "Research Opportunities for the Beginning Genealogist" from 9:30 am until 2:00 pm on Saturday, April 20.

The Ochoopee Regional Library System is cosponsoring the seminar, to be held in the Ladson Foundation Library at 119 Church Street.

Librarian Emilie Hartz will lead the program with "strategies for the beginning genealogist." Other topics for explanation will include "research in the southeastern and New England states" and "general reference sources. There will be a tour of the library for all-new patrons.

Registration is limited to 30 people and closes April 5. There is a registration fee of \$5.00. For information, call Emilie Hartz at 537-8186.

Ladson Library Treasure

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of new homes and fortunes. According to twentieth-century Jack, they were younger sons left out of the inheritance by the laws of primogeniture, but books in his collection indicate that John was also a Quaker, who may have found religious life more comfortable in a New World community.

In any case, John Ladson landed at Charleston of August 13, 1679. He received royal grants for 860 acres of land in Berkely County and one town lot in Charleston. He was elected to the Commons House of Assembly for its first three terms (1692-1697) and served as trustee of the Quaker church. John and his descendents would have a Charleston street, as well as a village near Summerville, named after them.

John E. Ladson, Jr., "Jack," sat in his home parlor - or was this another Ladson library? - among stacks of books, antiques and trinkets poured over tabletop, bookshelf and floor, an exquisite squalor. He has surrounded himself with the treasures of half a century of proving what could be surmised in a few hours with those Charleston ladies.

"Little by little, I became keenly obsessed with finding out more and more," Ladson said. His interest expanded to include his mother's family, and the roots of the family tree spread backward.

"If we go back just ten generations, we have 1,023 last names other than Ladson," he said.

- Parents from 2 families
- Grandparents, 4 families
- 3 generations - 8 families
- 4 generations - 16 families
- 5 generations - 32 families
- 6 generations - 64 families
- 7 generations - 128 families
- 8 generations - 256 families
- 9 generations - 512 families
- 10 generations - 1,024 families

"It became interesting to me to try to see just how many I could prove out of those ten generations," Ladson said. "And that's where the bug bites people."

The bug bit Jack Ladson continually for more than 50 years. At Duke University, and later while in Navy training programs at Columbia University and Harvard, he began searching book stores, antique stores and flea markets for old books on

genealogy and local history. Some books he bought for less than \$10 are now valued at much more than \$100.

His expertise grew with his collection. He became a certified genealogist and befriended genealogists from all over the country. He obtained collections representing the life's work of some of these people, such as Pauline Young's 30 volumes documenting the histories of South Carolina families, and Leonardo Andrea's more than 1,000 manuscripts.

In 1978, the John E. Ladson Genealogical and Historical Foundation was formed, and the Foundation Library became a part of the Ochopee Regional Library system. Ladson furnished the upstairs rooms at 119 Church Street, where he still maintains a private office and reception room lavishly furnished with antiques and paintings.

A hallway separates the reception area from the library proper, maintained at Ladson's expense but owned by the foundation. Four rooms house more than 14,500 books and pamphlets and 2,600 microfilm items. About 100,000 family names have been indexed.

The Ladson Library is the second or third largest genealogical library in Georgia, rivalling the collections of such large public institutions as the Washington Memorial Library in Macon.

Ladson's work has earned him recognition in books such as *Who's Who in Genealogy and Personalities of the South*.

NEXT WEEK: An answer to the second mystery - why isn't this famous library more popular? Also, hints for conducting your own personal search.