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Online library may be largest of its kind

BY TERRY DATE

tdate@eagletribunc.com

PELHAM — Local historian and information gatherer extraordinaire William Hayes, 69, sees himself as a sower of stories, of sorts.



William Hayes

“I just pile it on,” he said.

He was talking about his practice of adding information to his and Web designer Karen Genoter’s award-winning online library.

LIBRARY: It may be largest one online

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The Hayes-Genoter History and Genealogy Online Library may be the largest online, small-town and genealogy library in the country, Hayes said.

Counting its digital links, the library gives users access to hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of pages of information. Hayes, whose friends call him “Spike,” said a regular story has a beginning, middle and end, but his information helps storytellers form that chronology.

“I load lots of information out of which stories are formed,” Hayes said.

The library has information on just about every Pelham birth, marriage and death.

“There’s no better way to find out about your family if it was in Pelham,” said Hayes, who grew up in Pelham.

Hayes, a married father of three grown children, said the digital library includes Pelham gravestone data, and can even help visitors find the cemetery

and row where a great-great-grandfather is buried.

The digital library includes information culled from state archives and letters from Pelham soldiers, as well as muster rolls.

Hayes, sitting in the Pelham Historical Society’s building, points at marble tablets on the wall that include the names of Pelham soldiers who fought in wars, including the American Revolution.

In some cases, Hayes can identify what battle a particular soldier fought in, even where they were on the battlefield.

The Hayes-Genoter digital library also includes all of “Aunt Molly’s Scrapbook,” about 3,500 items. The scrapbook was made by Molly Hobbs, the town librarian between 1892 and 1958.

From the time she was 18, Hobbs clipped every newspaper article she saw that involved Pelham.

Though Hayes does not know how many people use the online library, its great advantage is that it is available 24/7, it takes

up no space and he doesn’t have to worry about documents disintegrating.

If Angela Delaney, 25, of Nashua is any indication, there must be many users.

On this morning, over the course of an hour, she is the only one to come into the historical society. She’s searching for information on generals and trolleys.

In the course of the conversation between Delaney and Hayes, she tells him that she has used his online library to find out information about her church in Pelham and the property it sits on.

“It’s a great tool, I do use it,” Delaney said.

In October, the Hayes-Genoter library received the 2009 Research and Documentation Award from the Association of Historical Societies of New Hampshire.

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