



Dane County Area Genealogical Society News

Reunion Time: Ideas for Planning and Hosting a Family Reunion at April 1 Meeting

It may be April Fools Day, but at the April 1 DCAGS meeting, Ruth Simpson will be offering ideas on planning a family reunion.

Family reunions are excellent places to gather the family, share stories and pictures and find out what family members are up to. They take time to plan.

Attendees of the DCAGS meeting will receive a Reunions

Workshop, published by Reunions Magazine, which provides lists and ideas of how to go about planning a reunion (limit one per family). The workbook is a great foundation for your reunion planning process. For long-time, seasoned and veteran organizers, the lists can remind you of the details to consider for each reunion and provide new tips for planning.

Ruth has planned family reunions and will show examples of things she has done. We invite members to bring examples of their handiwork to the meeting to share with everyone. We will discuss what worked or didn't work at your reunion.

Please join us on Thursday, April 1 at 7 p.m. at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4505 Regent St.

Finding Court Records

Rick Pifer began his presentation at the DCAGS meeting on March 4 by showing members a picture of the newly remodeled reading room at the Wisconsin Historical Library. The room has much more light and much of what was in the back is now in the reading room. Rick advised us to stop in and see it. The reading room is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday and Saturdays.

What records will one find in courts? Probate, naturalization, divorce, adoption, guardianship, mental commitment, civil and criminal litigation.

How does one go about finding court records? Rick said there are some

strategies that don't work, like using Cyndi's List and Google.

So what strategies will work? Rick advised that most governmental information useful to genealogists is county-based or geographically focused. In Wisconsin and in most states, court records are county-based. Knowing the county your ancestors lived in will help you find court records.

It is important to understand the court system there. Different states have different names for courts – probate, chancery etc. Figuring out where records may be located is one of the most important skills a genealogist can develop. Rick recommends studying manuals and guides focused on individual states and the

kind of records you seek.

The first thing you should do, Rick said, is to find out where the records are housed. Are they still at the Courthouse? If the records are no longer there, try the appropriate state historical society or state archives. Websites often may be found by doing a search for the name of the state followed by the phrase "historical society" or "state archives."

Rick said it is also important to know the name of the office where court records are kept. In Wisconsin it is the Clerk of Court that keeps divorce and civil records. The Register of Probate has the probate records.

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March 31, 2010

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Regular DCAGS meetings are generally the first Thursday of each month at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints located at 4505 Regent, Madison, WI beginning at 7 p.m.

DCAGS Update:

The DCAGS Governing Board meets the third Tuesday of each month. The next meeting is set for Tuesday, April 20 at 6:30 p.m. South Madison Library, 2222 Park St. We invite all members to attend. Please join us!

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Court Records continued...

In Alabama, the probate court handles both probate and divorce and the Clerk of Civil Court handles the other civil matters.

In Pennsylvania, the Prothonotary handles divorce and probate. The Clerk of Court handles other civil cases.

To find out what records WHS holds go to its website, www.wisconsinhistory.org, and click on the "genealogy" link. There are links to MadCat and ArCat. MadCat is the UW-Madison catalog. It contains information about published genealogies, indexes and records and about some microfilmed sources such as the federal census. ArCat is the Archives online catalog and contains information about original records (such as court records) of use to genealogists, unpublished genealogies, and genealogical research files.

Rick recommends doing a guided search to find materials by keyword. This approach allows you to use terms that are meaningful to you to find archives and library materials. To find manuals for genealogical research in specific areas, search in MadCat and enter the name of the place, genealogy and the word manual (the cataloging term for self-help books).

To find out if there are any published court records, which may be true for older records, search again in MadCat and use the phrase "court records" along with the name of the state you are looking in.

Rick said to watch how things are cataloged. You may be able to use similar words to find what you are looking for.

Another suggestion was to go to other state historical libraries and search through their catalogs.

In Wisconsin, court records are stored in the Area Research Centers (ARC), located at UW campus libraries throughout the state. One can use ArCat to find the location of the records. If you cannot travel to an ARC facility, you can make a request for a transfer of records to your local center. The records will be

transferred to you for review.

Rick then started discussing the types of records found for probate. In Wisconsin the probate records are kept by the Register of Probate. If a will exists, there will be a testate proceeding. If there is no will and the person dies intestate, there may be a record if the estate was big enough to tax or if there was a court proceeding to resolve a family dispute. One should always ask, "Is there a probate file?"

Some records will disclose a will, a property inventory, estate on legacies (taxation documents), and letters of testamentary. Each of these records may also have a record book on file at the Clerk's office.

Case file indexes may also have indexes to probate records.

Divorce records may include information on the marriage: where and when it took place. Minor children will be listed. Some may have additional information.

Naturalization records have a mixed record. There was wide variation on how they were handled in different states. There are two distinct documents when dealing with Naturalizations: the Declaration of Intention and the Petition for Naturalization. Sometimes the records are in two different places because there was generally a waiting period between the two. (Military service waived that requirement.)

Sometimes people only got the Declaration of Intention and failed to follow through with the Petition for Naturalization. The other thing that makes these records hard to find is the original records were given to the person and not recorded. Sometimes one will find state records. Also some counties may have Naturalization indexes.

Next Rick discussed restricted court records – adoptions, insanity commitments and

guardianships. It is very hard to get information on these records because the records were often sealed and not available to the public. Rick recommended searching ArCat to see what records may be available.

One thing that was mentioned during the question and answer period is that today in Wisconsin there is access to court records with CCAP: Circuit Court Automation Programs. In most counties access to civil and criminal case records is available for cases from the mid-1990s. Go to www.wicourts.gov to find CCAP.

One item on Rick's handout is a note that during the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration inventoried the records of many courthouses. These inventories provide a good indication of records available in 1940 and are probably available in the courthouse or archives. Search MadCat with the term "Works Progress" in the first search box and the state name in the second box.

We thank Rick for showing us how to find court records.

Forum on the DCAGS Website

The DCAGS Board has decided to put issues of the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) *Forum* on the DCAGS website. DCAGS is a member of FGS.

The latest issue can be downloaded from <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~widcags/fgsforum/forum09winter.pdf>. The others can be viewed by using "08" instead of "09" and "spring," "summer," or "fall" instead of "winter" -- as appropriate. All 2008 and 2009 issues are available. (Note: "dcags.org" does NOT work in this situation -- the full "real" URL must be used).

Upcoming events

Beginning Genealogy /Family History Classes in Waunakee

Waunakee Class

Where: Waunakee Senior Center

When: Wednesdays, April 7-May 5 from 1 to 4 p.m.

Cost: \$44

Register at: Waunakee Senior Center, 608-849-8385

Instructor: Pat Skubis

University of Wisconsin Union Mini Course: Genealogy

When: Tuesdays April 6, April 13 and April 20. The class runs from 6 to 8 p.m.

Where: The room at the University has not yet been assigned.

Instructor: Sherry Lloyd

Cost: Standard charge for Union members or students: \$44.50, for UW staff or others the charge is higher. Please see Mini Course web site for membership options and registration, <https://www.union.wisc.edu/minicourses/>.

2010 Gene-A-Rama Finding Your Ancestors in Wisconsin's Ethnic Melting Pot

When: April 16 & 17, 2010

Where: Holiday Inn, I-43 and Highway 151, Manitowoc, WI

Cost: Registrations received prior to March 26 are \$50 for WSGS members and \$60 after that date. For non-WSGS

members the price is \$75 before March 26 and \$85 after that date. There are different rates for attending only on Friday or Saturday. All meal costs are extra and you must pre-register for meals.

Main Speaker: Stephen Samuel Barthel, former International Reference Consultant for the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

Other Speakers: Kathy Meade, Jerry Paulson, Penny Dashur, Pat Geyh, George Findlen, Margaret Skare, Kris Beisser Matthies, Sandra K. Hynek

For more information: www.wsgs.org

2010 NGS Family History Conference: Follow Your Ancestral Trail

Where: Salt Palace Convention Center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

When: 28 April to 1 May 2010.

Information: Whether your family helped settle the nation, migrated across the country, stayed in the same place, or recently arrived in America, this conference has much to offer. The family history resources in Salt Lake City, Utah, will provide a depth and breadth to your research. The Family History Library has an extensive collection of international records. A major focus of the conference will be increasing research skills in foreign countries.

Cost: Members: Postmarked after 8 March 2010 - \$210.00

Non-Members: Postmarked after 8 March

2010 -- \$245.00

Registration: Visit <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org> for more information

Federation of Genealogical Societies 2010 Conference Rediscovering America's First Frontier

Where: Knoxville, TN

When: August 18-21, 2010

Registration Fees: FGS Conference Early Registration Fees (postmarked or online NO LATER than 1 June 2010) Full Conference Registration (Wed. through Sat.): \$185; Single Day Registration: \$99

FGS Conference Registration Fees (postmarked or online after 1 June 2010) Full Conference Registration (Wed. through Sat.): \$235 Single Day Registration: \$125

Topics covered: Tennessee and Kentucky research, research in other Southern states, researching ethnic groups including African Americans, Native Americans, and the Scots-Irish, methodology, resources, technology, DNA, land platting, and much more.

Information: Information on the conference and secure online registration is available at: <http://www.fgs.org/2010conference/index.php>. Be sure to check the conference blog for regular updates: <http://www.fgsconferenceblog.org/>

President's Message

Hear! Hear!

Our monthly programs are a very important part of what our society does for and with its members. We want to provide the necessary tools for our speakers to easily and clearly present their knowledge and ideas to us. In recent years we have focused on three such tools--a computer projector, high-speed internet access, and a flexible microphone system.

We have a first class "computer projector," purchased in 2006 when DCAGS was formed by the merger of our two predecessor societies; this projector replaced one purchased earlier by the Computer Assisted Genealogists of Southern Wisconsin (CAGSW) which had reached the end of its useful life.

The high-speed Internet access

goal is in a holding pattern right now; we had a technically good solution last fall--used at the Genealogy Fair, but we found its subscription plan to be unworkable. At the moment we have a temporary means for providing high-speed Internet access which depends on personally-owned equipment belonging to one of our officers; the board hopes the marketplace for high-speed wireless internet access will improve in the next year or two.

This brings me to the current equipment project. The board feels we need a much more flexible microphone system than what is currently available in the LDS church. For nearly all of our speakers, amplification is necessary in the LDS church chapel (Rick Pifer, our March speaker, was a notable exception). We want to be

able to give our speakers freedom to move around without being tied to a fixed-position microphone or having to hold a corded microphone. My prior experience with wireless "lapel microphones" has not been very satisfactory, in that the amplification level changes a lot as the speaker moves around or turns his or her head. I am in favor of a wireless headset, such as many of the television reporters used at the 2008 political conventions. These are very lightweight units "worn" on the side of the speaker's head; a distinct advantage of this type of microphone is that the microphone stays at a constant distance from the speaker's mouth.

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Dane County Area Genealogical Society
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We're on the Web!

See us at: www.dcags.org



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Madison, WI 53705-0652

See you at the April 1 Meeting!

DCAGS officers for 2010:

President: Rollie Littlewood
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Standing Committee Chairs

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We want to also have a handheld "baton" microphone which can be used by officers and members speaking briefly at various places in the chapel (or the church gym). Some of you will remember that we tried an inexpensive multi-microphone wireless microphone system in late 2008; it proved unsatisfactory, especially because they interfered with each other.

We are looking again, this time at much higher quality equipment. We are expecting to give such a system a trial run at the April DCAGS meeting. This setup will include multiple microphones and a mixer; it will rely on the loudspeaker system already present in the chapel. Should we move our meetings to a different location at some future time, we would have to develop a different arrangement for loudspeakers. A very significant aspect of purchasing this equipment would be its cost (a little less than \$2,000; about \$12 per society member). This would consume the bulk of the current financial reserves (what will be left over after taking care of this year's regular expenses). Although I am certainly no expert on audio equipment, I will speculate that it would last at least ten years with only minimal upkeep costs. Given the importance which our monthly meetings have to our society, The Governing Board would be very interested in hearing your views. We will conduct a survey in conjunction with the April meeting, or I can be reached at rkittle@wisc.edu or (608)273-0211.

Rollie Littlewood