The USGenWeb Project

N E W S

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Notes From The Editor
Denise Wells

My message this month is short and sweet. I'd like to say "Welcome!" to our new NC along with the newly elected members of the Advisory Board. I, for one, will miss our past NC, Linda Haas Davenport, and I thank her for her help and guidance as I began my editorship of the Newsletter. She was a wonderful support and equally committed to the success of the Newsletter. I'm sure our newest elected members will work well with those whose terms are continuing. The News will continue to celebrate its commitment to the entire USGenWeb. Thanks to everyone and their dedication to this wonderful project.

Notes From The N.C.
Scott Burow - USGenWeb Project National Coordinator

It seems that the incoming NC's first message in the newsletter is usually one of thanks - to the Election Committee for all their work, to the voters and to those who supported their candidacy, and to the past members of the AB and the outgoing NC for their leadership. But I'm not going to do that. I think they all know the respect I have for each of them and public statements are not nearly as important as the experiences we've shared while we were all together.

Instead, my thanks goes out to everyone - whether they be a Local or County Coordinator, transcriber, submitter, Special Project coordinator, assistant, lookup volunteer, or any other position which helps to make this project the wonderful resource it is. As we start the second decade of the USGenWeb Project, many of us can look back to the humble beginnings and be awed by the growth and changes that have occurred. In ten short years we've become the primary and most well-known free genealogy resource for millions of users across the world. Not one speck of it would be there without the foresight of a few and the hard work, research, and dedication of our volunteers. To you, I give my thanks on behalf of those millions of people who visit our sites and share the passion of breaking down those brick walls and finding our roots.

I am very honored to be elected as National Coordinator for the coming year. I will do my best to live up to that honor and serve the interests of the project and its members during this term. I am always willing to listen to your ideas and input of where you, as a member, would like to see this project head in the coming months. This is your project; guide it in the direction you want it to go, and recognize that you are its strength.

Over the last ten days I've received hundreds of emails and contacts from people all over the country. Many have questions or comments, some have praise about specific sites, and some have complaints. I'll try to answer each one as I can, or find someone to answer your question if I cannot. I've also received a lot of mail regarding the recent FGS Conference in Boston, both from members and people interested in the project from what they heard and observed there. Our representatives did a tremendous job of promoting a positive image of the project and getting the simple message across of what we are all about:

The USGenWeb Project, home of the free . . . . genealogy.

Notes From The R.A.L.
Mike Peterson - USGenWeb Representative at Large

Many thanks to those who supported and voted for me as the Representative at Large. Thanks also to the many who sent me private e-mails of concern and provided me with different perspectives and ideas. It has been an interesting experience and campaign and my promise is that I will do whatever I can to be a representative for all of you during this term of office. I will maintain my subscription to USGENWEB-DISCUSS mailing list and I will ask each of the Regional Coordinators for permission to be subscribed to their mailing list so we can maintain communication. If you would rather communicate privately, please feel free to use e-mail address - usgwdp@cox.net

Thanks to the hundreds of Local Coordinators who have made USGenWeb the great organization it is. I want to be a part of helping us grow as a genealogy resource and in expanding our reputation as a top-notch genealogy organization and, to that end, I welcome your help.

Memo from The News
GENDEX
Many CCs have a link to GENDEX on their pages, and even one state's CC guidelines recommends a link to GENDEX. This valuable genealogy resource created by Gene Stark indexed 60 million people, but went off-line April 22, 2004. The links to GENDEX no longer work, but are not broken...how can this be? What was GENDEX? Are there replacements? For answers to these questions, see Dick Eastman's article at http://blog.eogn.com/eastmans_online_genealogy/2006/01/the_next_genera.html

After reviewing several sites that now accept GENDEX, the least commercial site we found is the one mentioned by Mr. Eastman, TNG Network at http://tngnetwork.lythgoes.net/, with 3,571,408 names currently indexed. You do not need to be a TNG user in order to search this site, or to add your GENDEX file. To add yours, click on the "Register your site" link, then on the next page in the "Base URL" box enter the full URL of your genealogy web site. In the "File URL" box is where you enter the full URL to your gendex.txt file.

TNG author Darrin Lythgoe tells The News, "I didn't actually revive GENDEX, I just created my own searchable database like GENDEX. It uses the same file format and is searchable like GENDEX, but the main difference is that the old GENDEX used to go out and crawl all the links periodically to update the index, while this new strategy requires that you go in and re-import your links if anything changes."

Some genealogy programs such as TNG can still create GENDEX files. If you don't have such a program Gene Stark's GED2HTML Windows or UNIX program can. Information about the program including downloading links are at http://www.starkeffect.com/ged2html/3.6a/Welcome.html

USGenWeb at the 2006 FGS Convention - Part I
Linda Haas Davenport - Roving Reporter
Passing on Many "Thank You" Messages
In celebration of the USGenWeb Project's 10th year anniversary, the National Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) http://www.fgs.org invited the Project to host a track of presentations http://www.natchezbelle.org/fgs/ at its national conference in Boston (Aug 30-Sep 3). A group of Project members banned together in a fund raising effort to sponsor a USGenWeb booth in the conference exhibit hall. Although other volunteers have hosted a Project booth at conferences, this is the first time the Project has been given the opportunity to present seminars, thus allowing hundreds of people to learn more about the Project.

Each day during the conference I posted a report on the Project's Discuss list, passing along news of the conference and thank you messages we received. Since many of you are not subbed to the Discuss list, I want to share with you my reports so you can understand just how much you and your hard work are appreciated.

Day One:
I'm in Boston and the FGS conference is in full swing. The Project's booth opened this morning and it looks great.

The USGenWeb Track is attracting a lot of attention and the presentations yesterday were well received. There are three or four USGenWeb Presentations each day and everyone here is working hard to promote the Project to the 1,500+ attendees. I'm delighted at the number of people who have told me how often they use the USGenWeb sites and the number of stories about the help they have received from a Project member or by a visit to a Project site. I, and the rest of the Project people here, are proud to be able to represent the Project on your behalf.

Today is the USGenWeb luncheon and we have 128 people who will attend (one of the largest).

To everyone who donated money for this - your money has been well spent and is helping to promote the Project to many people. Thanks for making this possible.

Day Two:
The USGenWeb Project luncheon today was a great success. There are several CCs here, but the majority of the people attended because they are visitors to the Project sites and wanted to learn more about us. Our keynote speaker did an excellent job discussing our 10 year history and used several sites as examples of what a visitor is apt to find on one of the Project sites.

There were several people today who stopped by the booth asking how they can volunteer. I spoke with many researchers today and it seems as if everyone I spoke with had a story to tell about how a project website or a CC helped them knock down a brick wall. People asked me to "tell everyone thank you!"

Tomorrow evening is the USGenWeb Panel discussion and, if even half the people who said they will be there attend, it will again be a full house.

Ellen and I talked today and we'll be contacting some of the speakers to see if we can place their seminars on-line for those of you who were not able to attend. Many of the sessions are being recorded and I'll stop by the recording booth tomorrow to check on prices and availability of tapes for anyone who is interested.

It has been a long, busy day, and it's time to call it a night; but before I do, I want to add my thanks to everyone else's for what you do. You may not realize you are appreciated, but from what I've heard the last two days - you are, by more people than you can possibly know.

[Ed. Stay tuned to The News as we continue this series in our next issue]

Site Spotlights
Newport County, RIGenWeb
http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rinewpor/index.html
This website by CC Susan White Pieroth is an easy-to-view, quick loading site full of interesting information and links about Newport County, as well as Rhode Island. Susan was the first permanent Newport County, RIGenWeb Coordinator. She was also the RIGenWeb State Coordinator for eight years.

Upon entering this county site, a clickable map loads of Rhode Island and its counties, along with Connecticut and Massachusetts. This page then includes a list of towns with information on their founding, dates the records cover, and an address for the town/city hall. Next, a how-to primer on researching in Rhode Island provides insight to the state. Links to the history of RI and a timeline provide additional structure. There is a link to various sources for performing RI research followed by a lengthy list of cemeteries.

Several links to query sites are followed by a bibliography of books on Rhode Island, interesting topics, and town information. The Newport Chapter Reading Room is chock full of scanned and/or transcribed articles, all relating to Newport County or Rhode Island and its citizens. Susan states that she adds items as she finds them (usually from eBay) or as they are donated. Her focus in recent years has been adding scans of original old documents so the primary source is on the site, instead of just a transcription that needs to be verified. Scans include an 1893 atlas of Newport County with surnames http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rinewpor/maps/, many tax lists, two city directories, almanacs, school graduation lists, old photographs, and postcards.

These are just a few of the items that make this an exciting county to wander through for hours on end. Even if you do not have ancestors from this area, you'll be intrigued with the variety of documents represented here.

Hood River County, ORGenWeb
http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~orhoodri/
Hosted by CC Beth Perry Johnston, born in the county, this well-organized site loads fast, and with a black font on a light background is easy to read. In addition to helpful research links and leads, a goal is to get as many Hood River County records as possible transcribed and online.

One interesting feature is the Hood River Co. Social Security Death Index, 1965-95. Instead of just a link to the SSDI, there is an alphabetical listing of the people with birth and death dates. The 1933 Hood River County School Census is another large database. A very valuable resource are the three transcribed volumes of "History of Early Pioneer Families of Hood River," comprising of "Indian," "Early Events," and "Pioneers" with 164 biographies of pioneers and their families. These types of books give an insight to how our ancestors lived, and the struggles they endured as well as the happiness.

The Hood River Genealogical Information link provides information from histories of Hood River County -- Families from the Hood River County portion of the 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1900 Wasco County, Oregon Census; the 1910-30 Hood River County Census; 1933, 1940 and part of the 1950 Hood River School census; and a part of available marriage records, death records, and information from various sources. The database currently contains 61,725 individuals.

With a host of other reference and resources links, this can be a one-stop shop for genealogy researching in Hood River County and the neighboring area.

Reading Old Handwriting
Anne J Mitchell - Records Reporter
The One of the biggest road blocks facing individuals doing genealogy or historical research is reading old handwriting, also known as paleography. The handwriting styles contained within these documents hold clues about our ancestors. These clues can be uncovered by learning how to decipher and analyze the letters, numbers and abbreviations written on many of the early records. It takes time, patience and skill to transcribe these records because the further back a topic is researched, the harder the documents are to read.

Read over the document and begin evaluating the writing word-for-word and letter-by-letter. Compare any difficult words with familiar words within the same document. Transcribe the document by writing down the words exactly as they appear. Try not to assume the spelling of any word. Note what you think the word may be and note words you are not sure of. It is easy to mistake one letter for another, especially when they look so similar. For instance, a capital "T" can easily be mistaken for a capital "F" and vice-versa. I ran into this problem a few years ago. I located a marriage record for one of my ancestors. I was not sure if the first letter was a "T" or an "F". Luckily, there was a textual marriage index that allowed me to cross-reference the name.

It is important to remember that the information written on the older records were written as they sounded. Many of the words were misspelled or followed the writer's own form of abbreviation. Use other documents to try and validate the misspellings and abbreviated words, especially those that contain an ancestor's signature. Capital letters were not reserved just for the first letter of names and places. Capitals were used to accentuate a word. Additionally, the use of punctuation was different than it is today. For instance, an equal sign was sometimes used to signify a word that was continued to the next line. Take notice to the date on the document. This will give you a starting point to do further research for similar writing styles during the same time period. If you are stumped on a word, an individual who works at a repository for genealogical and historical records would be a great person to ask for a second opinion. Finally, the Internet is an excellent tool to solve some of the problems of reading and transcribing genealogical and historical records. This is because there are many websites with samples of various styles of old handwriting and websites that have images of documents themselves.

For further information, see the websites below:

Old Handwriting Examples
http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mahudson/ole-hw.htm

Old English Writing
http://usgwarchives.net/special/oldenglish/oldenglish.htm

Rootsweb Mailing List for Old English Writing
http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~oel/index.html

Paleography: Reading old handwriting 1500-1800 A practical online tutorial
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/

Old handwriting in genealogy research http://amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/oldhand.html

Guidelines for Reading Old Documents
http://www.genealogy.com/68_sperry.html

Tips for Reading Old Records: Dangerous Dates and Word Meanings
http://www.genealogy.com/75_reading.html

Tips for Reading Old Records: Handwriting, Spelling, and Boundaries http://www.genealogy.com/76_reading.html

How to Read 18th Century British-American Writing
http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/writing.html

Languages, Names, Handwriting and Calendars http://home.ptd.net/~nikki/language.htm

Focus on Special Projects
Daryl Lytton - Assistant Editor
With eight of them, IAGenWeb almost has more SPs than you can shake a stick at. Here to tell us about them, and what makes an IAGenWeb SP, is Greta Thompson, the IAGenWeb Butler and Marion counties CC...

Those of us who volunteer in IAGenWeb think we have one of the very best state projects, not least because of our Special Projects. Each one has a unique history and purpose, but all of them provide valuable data for our visitors.

The Iowa State Census Project http://iagenweb.org/census/ is an effort to identify, transcribe and publish the state census data for Iowa. Custom templates are available to the transcribers. A table summarizing the current status of transcriptions can be found at http://iagenweb.org/census/icstatus.htm

Orphan Train Riders http://iagenweb.org/iaorphans/ to Iowa hopes to educate visitors about the subject and further the research of those whose ancestors came to Iowa on one of the infamous orphan trains.

One of the oldest SPs documents the people, events and genealogy of Iowa in the Civil War http://iagenweb.org/civilwar/. The newest SP focuses on the people, events and genealogy of Iowans in the Great War (World War I)
http://iagenweb.org/greatwar/.

The Iowa History Project http://iagenweb.org/history/ brings the history of the state alive through the transcriptions of books, journals, and other documents, while Iowa Old Press http://iowaoldpress.com/ provides a look back at the lives and times of our Iowa ancestors as reported in early newspapers.

Two of our Special Projects focus on cemetery data. The Iowa WPA Graves Registration Survey http://iowawpagraves.org/ has collected the records for 82 counties compiled by WPA workers in the 1930s. Records may be searched within a county or statewide, and visitors may leave a post-em note to amend or supplement individual records.

The Iowa Gravestone Photo Project http://iowagravestones.org/ is a collection of almost 250,000 photos from all over the state. Individuals submit photos and transcriptions, which can be searched by county or statewide and by surname, first name, or cemetery. This is probably our best-known and certainly are most rapidly growing SP.

Finally, the Iowa Family Group Sheet Project http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~iafgs/ allows people to post family group sheets or search for their Iowa ancestors. The project also includes links to county sites that have their own collections of family group sheets, family histories, or family websites connected to the particular county.

Recently, we tried to describe the common characteristics of our special projects. We wanted to use those characteristics as criteria for evaluating proposals for new projects. Our fundamental assumption was that special projects should supplement, not compete with, the county projects. We also realized that while all the criteria would not fit every project, a strong proposal would be one that met most of the criteria.

These are the seven criteria we developed, phrased as questions:

1. Does a large portion of the data in this SP proposal cross county lines?

2. Does this SP proposal contain very specific resources and data important to researchers in multiple counties or the entire state?

3. Does this SP proposal facilitate the gathering, transcribing, or presentation of data in a way that couldn't be done as well at the county level?

4. Does the sheer volume of data to be gathered, transcribed, formatted and entered warrant this proposed SP? Or is the data contained in the proposal unusually difficult to gather, input, and assimilate? Or is there enough available or undiscovered data for this proposal to have a reasonable expectation of continued growth and value over a number of years?

5. Does this proposal require special software not available to, or maintenance beyond the capability of, most county coordinators? Affordability and availability, e.g., of software or technical requirements, are factors that also need to be considered in making a decision.

6. Has the coordinator of this proposed SP agreed in writing to allow the county coordinators to copy county-specific data to their county sites? If a database is involved, has the coordinator of the proposed project agreed to provide county-specific data to the coordinator? The data might go both ways, i.e., the county coordinators could share a relevant database or information with the SP. In either case, credit should be given to the county or special project and to the individual contributors.

7. Will the proposal, if approved, be willed by the coordinator(s) to IAGenWeb? This would include the website, data, software, and domains of the project. In addition, has the coordinator agreed in writing to abide by all IAGenWeb

requirements pertaining to special projects?

Our Special Projects enable us to provide data that isn't easily organized or searched on the county level, and therefore greatly enriches what we can offer to researchers.

Prose & Poetry
What If?
If you could see your ancestors all standing in a row,
Would you be proud of them, or don't you really know?

Some strange discoveries are made in climbing family trees
And some of them, you know, do not particularly please.
If you could see your ancestors all standing in a row,
There might be some of them, perhaps, you wouldn't care to know.

But there's another question which requires a point of view.
If you could meet your ancestors, would they be proud of you?
-- Leila Pearce, age 11

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