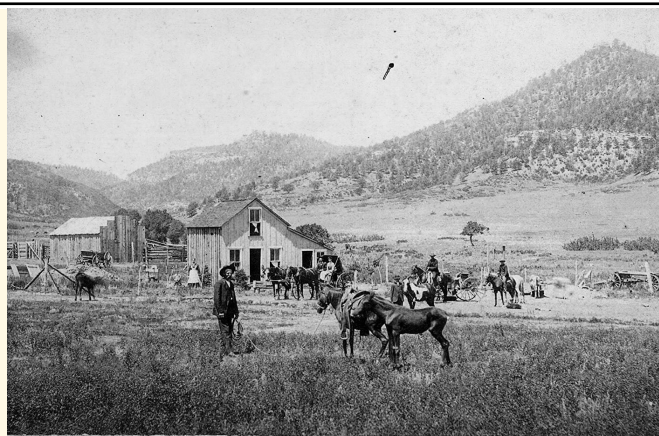


The WHAGS Journal



Volume 4, Issue 7

Just The Facts

April 2024



Editor's Note

Ron Ware

The Bluebonnets are back. Wildflowers everywhere, are in bloom. The natural world is coming back to life and after the March general meeting of WHAGS, my enthusiasm for genealogy is also renewed. I bet yours is as well.

On the 16th, 30 WHAGS members enjoyed a presentation by Kelvin Meyers, a professional genealogist from Dallas, titled, "Plowing Through Land Records to Find Your Ancestor." What a

(Continued on page 2)

RootsTech Experience

This month's feature article comes from Neal Scott. Neal attended the 2024 RootsTech conference in Salt Lake City, and then spent some additional days researching in the FamilySearch Library. He shares his experience in following article.

Traveling to Rootstech 2024

by Neal Scott

For several years I've wanted to attend Rootstech in person in Salt Lake City. At first it was because that was the only way a person could participate in this world-class and world-sized conference. But, 2021 came along and the pandemic cancelled all

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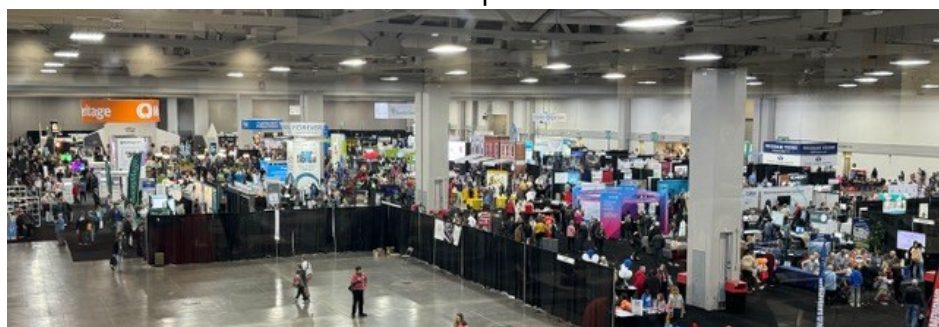
President's Note

Gayle Colby

Only two programs left in our 2023-2024 program calendar, and both are great topics: immigration, and genealogy records from the Texas General Land Office (GLO). This has been a great program calendar thanks to the dedicated work of the Program Committee. This committee/team demonstrates the value of volunteers. They are a team of individuals each doing a chunk of the work in an organized and successful way. This would be an overwhelming task for a single individual, but as a team, they are very successful. And we reap the rewards!

Volunteerism comes in all shapes and sizes; it is not an all-or-nothing undertaking. It does

(Continued on page 2)



Vendor Area at RootsTech 2024

(Continued from page 1)
Editors Note

great hour of learning. I am now reviewing my land records and applying the tips learned in Kelvin's presentation. I'm amazed at the clues I overlooked in those documents.

April's presenter promises to be just as informative. Genealogist, Paula Perkins will share her knowledge of Immigration research through her presentation titled, "Immigration, Passenger, and Naturalization Records in the Digital Age." I'm looking forward to that. I have been researching for many years, and I don't know how, when and from where, most of my ancestors came to our country. Maybe Paula can help.

April will be a busy month at WHAGS. On the 3rd, we will bus our way to the Clayton (Houston Public Library Family History Research Center at the Clayton Library Campus) library for a day of research among their almost boundless historical books, microfilm, magazines and other research aids.

It will also be a busy time for our SIG's and committees. G2 software development beta testing will continue. At WHAGS Writers, a small group of us wannabe history writers, are having a great time helping each other improve their writing. Another great special interest group is "Members Helping Members" where there is an opportunity to learn from other WHAGS members. Consider attending their monthly Zoom meetings. If you are just starting on the genealogy adventure, join the "Beginners" SIG. Those folks can

help you jump start your road to discovery.

Let's not overlook the support of our leadership team. People serving on the board of directors are working tirelessly to bring a good experience to our members. The continued success of our genealogy society depends on their contribution. April is election time and there will be a couple positions open. Consider stepping in to help. Perhaps run for one of the open board positions or by simply supporting one of the committees. We need your help.

(Continued from page 1)
Presidents Note

not mean you dedicate your life to the organization for a specified time or term. We see volunteerism in those who bring snacks and drinks to the in-person meetings or welcome people as they arrive. Is there something you would like to see WHAGS do better; let us know how you can help. It takes all of us to make WHAGS the genealogical home of our members.

April is National and Global Volunteer Month and WHAGS wants to thank all our members for their gift of time attending meetings, events, and/or special interest groups (SIGs). We do these things for you, and it makes us happy to see you. I want to give a big shout-out to the coordinators providing the opportunities for all of us to extend our genea-

logical knowledge: Neal Scott – Beginners SIG, Ricky Armes – G-2 SIG, and Ron Ware – WHAGS Writers.

Neal is also the incumbent Vice President, our Webmaster, co-publishes the *Leaflet* with Pacquitta, and is part of the tech team that facilitates our program meetings. Ricky is also a Director, coordinated the Calyton Library trips, is a member of the Program Team, and co-hosted the Holiday Party. Ron is also a Director, the editor of the *Journal*, and a member of the Program team. These gentlemen do a lot of WHAGS.

The Board is responsible for the business and management of WHAGS. I am very grateful to all the members of the Board for their leadership and professionalism. In addition to the gentlemen above, Tom Matchett is the WHAGS treasurer, serving in the role for four years. He keeps our finances straight and facilitates the state and federal reporting processes. Pacquitta Laverents will be entering her final year as Secretary in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. She is involved in all facets of WHAGS and keeps the Board and Leadership Team (LT) on task with the Action Tracker. Pacquitta coordinates the Program Team, helps edit the *Journal*, co-publishes the *Leaflet* with Neal, and is a member of the

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RootsTech

plans for it that year. Who knew when it would come back, or what form it might take?

Well, FamilySearch, the genealogy branch of the LDS Church and the organizer of Rootstech, wasn't going to let covid stop a great thing, and in 2022 they came back and put on a larger Rootstech than ever before. And they did it entirely online, and, made it free for everyone. What seemed like hundreds of workshops, speakers, presentations and demos, were all streamed into my home where I could pick and choose, set my own personal schedule, and watch and learn sitting at my desk. Wow, I was spoiled!

Then, last year, they put on a hybrid version, with a huge number of online presentations, while also hosting an impressive lineup of in-person events. As I settled in at home for another great Rootstech experience, I began to realize that I was missing many of the in-person presentations, often given by high profile presenters known throughout the genealogy world. These speakers had traveled to Salt Lake City to talk in person about new releases of software, the future of technology in family history searching, and many how-to's of online products and tools. And while I enjoyed many of the online

presentations, they were mostly pre-recorded and I felt like I was watching a YouTube channel instead of being a part of the giant Rootstech event. I felt like I was missing out somehow and it was then that I resolved that "next year" I'm going to be in Salt Lake City for Rootstech 2024.

My calendar worked out and Rootstech 2024 didn't interfere with a WHAGS meeting or any other events I couldn't miss out on, and last fall I signed up, taking advantage of their early bird pricing. Then THAGS announced their annual SLC trip and it fell immediately after Rootstech, so It seemed logical to jump on both to get the most bang for my traveling buck. THAGS stays at The Plaza hotel which is both adjacent to the FamilySearch Library and across the street from the convention center, and the rates they get are really quite good. But I eventually found an AirB&B that was just a mile from the convention center and library that was an even better deal and I jumped on it.

Arriving in Salt Lake City on Wednesday afternoon I caught an Uber and met my B&B hosts, unpacked, then walked the 20 minutes to the SLC convention center, known as The Salt Palace, to do early check-in and avoid

the rush that was bound to happen the next day. Check-in was a breeze with 20+ stations, manned by smiling faces, waiting to help



Neal Scott enjoying the experience of RootsTech

and keeping well ahead of the arriving visitors so there was no line. They scanned the QR code from my phone that I'd received when I registered, and their system instantly printed out my badge. A lanyard was then attached and I was on my way! Easy peasy! I did a little walking around to get the feel of the huge convention center and saw the beehive of activity in the vendors area as giant walk-through booths were being built. My excitement was beginning to build as I saw familiar company names and logos rising above the booths.... MyHeritage, Ancestry, FamilySearch, and many more. I confess I was also a little star-struck when I walked past a guy with the name "Jonny Perl" on his badge, who I recognized as the creator of DNAPainter and WATO. Later in the conference I would be sitting at their

(Continued on page 7)



Corner

The Margaret Bell Story

Episode 2

By Ron Ware

Life on the Johnson Mesa in the summer and early autumn was lovely. A beautiful grassland with open views as far as the eye could see. To the south of the Bell homestead was Towndrow hill, rising out of the grassy plain. To the north rose Red Mountain, a hill that held a large herd of Elk. Also



St. John's Church on the Johnson Mesa, Colfax County, New Mexico.

to the north was the Colorado border, and to the west stood the snow-capped Sangre De Cristo mountains. Early explorers thought the high plateaus uninhabitable, but the settlers proved them wrong. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Johnson Mesa had become a farmer's paradise, successfully raising corn, barley, and oats.

One achievement that Margaret and her neighbors were most

proud was the construction of a church on The Mesa. To attend church service, settlers on the west end of The Mesa had to make the ten-mile trek into Raton, on the east they traveled an equal distance to Folsom. Attending church service at either location, traveling in horse drawn wagons required a full day's commitment. The Mesa needed its own church, and Margaret's father was one of the driving forces behind the project. The work was completed, and the church dedicated in 1897. Margaret's first attendance there was as a 17-year-old girl. In 1961 I traveled to New Mexico with my grandmothers, Margaret, and Helen, where we visited the Mesa. I once had a photograph of Margaret standing in front of the St. John's church with tears in her eyes. She was then 81 years old, and it had been 64 years since she last attended church there. What I would give to still have that photograph!

As much as the settlers enjoyed life on The Mesa, the brutal winters were their nemesis. During those months, the north wind would often sweep across the open prairie where temperatures were known to plummet to forty degrees below zero. But most families continued living there until the turn of the twentieth century. Even so, when the 1900 U.S. Census was taken, the enumerator found the Bell family

still there. Living in the household were Alonzo and Louisa with their daughter, nineteen-year-old, Margaret. The boys had all left home and homesteaded their own farms on The Mesa. Soon after the turn of the century, the early settlers had aged, and they began to move to the valley to escape the treacherous winter conditions. The Bells soon followed.

There is some confusion as to where they settled in the Raton valley. My grandmother, Helen, told me that she was born in a house at the foot of the Johnson Mesa. That would be about 10 miles from town. I have two conflicting documents. One claims



Tom and Margaret Bell O'Connor
1902

they settled two miles east of the town and another, Alonzo's obituary supports Helen's claim that

(Continued on page 5)

WHAGS Writers Corner

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(Continued from page 4)

Margaret Bell Story

the ranch was at the foot of the Johnson Mesa. Be that it may, I am certain that they settled in the valley along today's route 72, the access road to the Mesa.

The valley was very different than the Johnson Mesa. Although the winters were far less severe, it was much drier. More suited to cattle ranching than farming. The move did provide for an improved social life and medical care. On the Mesa, other than Saint John's church, there was little to do in the way of entertainment. Now, there was easier access to restaurants, theatres, and other entertainment. This was a welcome change for a twenty-something-year-old Margaret, now a young lady with a social life.

Access to medical care was also improved. In 1904 Margaret's father contracted a disease called neuralgia, an ailment that finally paralyzed the left side of his face and head. Although he died in 1914 of the disease, had he lived on the Mesa, he would have suffered much worse from lack of medical care which helped control the pain.

It was while living on the valley ranch that Margaret married Thomas Lennis O'Connor.

The wedding took place on August 6, 1902, in the ranch home of her parents. The newlyweds had met while Tom was on leave from the Santa Fe Railroad and serving in law enforcement as a deputy of the county sheriff, Abe Hixenbaugh. Abe deputized Tom on several occasions and upon the sheriff's recommendation he became the Raton Town Marshal. Margaret didn't like Tom's choice of work and encouraged him to take safer employment. He followed her advice, and although working in the rail yards could be dangerous, she felt more at ease with the occupation. Fortunately, he worked many years there and retired without incident in February 1941.

To be continued

Profile of Samuel Robert Griffin (1874-1943)

By Liz Philip

Samuel Robert Griffin was born in La Plata, Macon County, Missouri on 29 October 1874. His father Charles Griffin was a farmer in Macon County, Missouri as was his grandfather John Griffin. He came from a long line of farmers. He would work as a farm laborer for years.

He married Carrie Bell Wood on 9 February 1901 in La Plata, Missouri. Soon after, they moved to Walla Walla, Washington in the county of the same name. Their first child, Walter, was born there

in 1902. All told, they had six children: Walter, Willard, Nancy Ellen, Winona Jewell, my grandmother, Robert, and Mary Margaret.

Samuel worked for the Walla Walla Construction Company as a teamster for approximately ten years. In the early 1900's, the typical teamster worked 12-18 hours a day, seven days a week for an average wage of \$2 per day, \$60 per month.



Samuel Robert Griffin, and Carrie Wood Griffin

In October 1912, Samuel went to work for the Northern Pacific Railway Company. The pay was better there. He started at \$62.50 per month according to his personnel file. He was promoted to Section Foreman in 1913. Samuel was assigned Bridge #1 Pendleton, Oregon at \$65 per month. The Section Foreman directed the men in repairing and maintaining the tracks and necessary equipment.

Samuel had different assign-

(Continued on page 6)

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Samuel Griffin

ments during his 30 years at the Northern Pacific. He was assigned to Helix, Oregon in Feb. 1917 and remained there until assigned to Cunningham, Washington in 1918, then White Swan, Washington in March of 1920, then Weikel, Washington in November of 1921. He returned to Helix, Oregon in May of 1922.

I remember a story my mother related to her grandpa, Samuel Griffin. She said that she was playing on a pump car which was on the tracks. A train was coming, and Grandpa Griffin lifted the pump car off the tracks by himself just before the train came. Grandpa Griffin was not a big man. But he must have been extraordinarily strong. On his World War I draft card, the description said that he was five foot six, medium build, and had gray, brown hair.

He was in Helix, Oregon for 13 years. His final assignment was Section Foreman in Walla Walla, Washington in August



The Griffin Family

1935. He retired there in October 1942 after 30 years.

His retirement was short, however. He had been in ill health for months according to his obituary. Samuel Robert Griffin died at home in Walla Walla, Washington on 12 May 1943, 69 years old.

(Continued from page 2)

Presidents Note

tech team. Diane Rausch is a Director in a position that is up for election this year. She has been instrumental in coordinating the Audit Committee for the past few years and ensures WHAGS' finances and fiscal procedures have been followed for the prior year.

The Leadership Team encompasses the Board, committee/team chairs, and other leads. We all work hand-in-hand with each other to provide the best experiences and organization for our members. Liz Philip has been a member of the LT for almost as long as she has been a WHAGS member. She is the Membership Chair, the Welcoming and Social Chairs, and has coordinated the Nominating Committee for the last few years. Liz has the most challenging job in WHAGS—trying to find people willing to volunteer. Linda W. [she has indicated she does not want her full name in the newsletter] is the WHAGS' Li-

brarian and will bring and pick up books for members; just send her an email with the book(s) you want. Mary Sandmann is our newest LT member serving as the WHAGS Historian. The Historian is analogous to a yearbook editor, capturing our activities and events for posterity. This position works closely with the Secretary and Membership Chair. I look forward to fully implementing this position for next year.

Without these dedicated individuals and their teams, WHAGS would be a passive organization instead of the vibrant and growing group we are today. Please reach out and thank every one of them for all they do!

WHAGS

Our Purpose

As stated in our bylaws...

The purpose of the West Houston Area Genealogy Society is to:

- Promote and stimulate an interest in the study of genealogy,
- Provide for the exchange of information among members,
- And provide educational programs and other events that assist our members with their genealogical research.

(Continued from page 3)

RootsTech

booth as he sat with me to personally give me some pointers on my own WATO dilemma.

After check-in I was getting hungry for dinner and broke my own rule about not eating Mexican food in a state that doesn't border Mexico. But dinner at The Blue Iguana, just a couple of blocks from The Salt Palace, wasn't bad at all. A friend from Houston had suggested it and I trusted their judgement. Then back to the B&B to start sorting through all the presentations, build my itinerary, and then get a good night's sleep before the mayhem of the convention.

The Rootstech app was a necessity during the conference and included maps, announcements, schedules, and vendor information. As I browsed through the many many presentations I could simply click on an "Add to My Schedule" button to build my personal pathway through the conference. There were several times I struggled to decide, and I was happy that the app permitted me to double-book some sessions so that I could make a last-minute decision as to which I attended.

The first day began early with first sessions starting at 8:00 am. I had no trouble getting up early and again walking to the Salt Palace convention cen-

ter. Being in Mountain Time the 1-hour of "jet lag" worked to my advantage.

What a different scene on Thursday versus Wednesday's check-in. Thousands of folks were filling the halls, criss-crossing paths as they headed to their own sessions, the smell of roasting cinnamon pecans in the air (I really hated that booth out in the main corridor!), and I noticed the long line of folks still checking in which made me glad I'd done that before.

Sessions were one hour in length with a 30-minute break between. That afforded me plenty of time to get from each session to the next, and usually enough time to wander through the vendor area, grab a snack, or take a necessary break. There was free wifi, so I kept up with email and updating the WHAGS website as needed. The Salt Lake weather was pretty chilly, but I knew to layer for comfort. They had a free coat-check for those that really bundled up, but I just kept my jacket with me through the day.

My choice of sessions followed a decidedly technical route with sessions such as the coming impact of AI on genealogy, what's coming on Ancestry and another similar one on MyHeritage, the importance of chromosome painting, DNA Painter, the new BanyanDNA

program, WATO and WATO+ demonstrations, and others. I've also been curious, but not yet taken the leap, to join the SAR and attended a very interesting presentation on preparing to join a heritage organization such as SAR.

Each day also featured a "General Session" that brought everyone together in the cavernous "Main Stage" room. Each of these sessions was highlighted by a celebrity and were the largest gatherings of the conference with many thousand attending each. Day one featured comedian Henry Cho, son of Korean immigrants, who was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee (he joked, "so, I'm a South Korean"). He told stories and joked about his experiences as the only Asian he ever saw in school 'til his senior year, and after FamilySearch evaluated his DNA sample, discovered he has numerous Japanese roots.

I admit I skipped day two's general session to spend some time in the vendor area, but day three was one of many high points of the conference for me with the appearance of Kristin Chenoweth, live on stage. I was so glad to see a piano on the stage when we went in since that indicated she would be singing and not just talking about her family and childhood experienc-

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

RootsTech

es. And wow, did she sing!

The vendor areas of the conference provided a great space for discovery as providers of every sort had booths to inform, answer questions, and promote their goods and services. Ancestry & MyHeritage had deep discounts on their DNA kits and most others had some sort of “show specials” for free trials, discount memberships, etc. I bought Clan Scott pin from one vendor who was there from Scotland. I recruited a lady from Wikitree to speak to a future Beginners SIG. I learned about the Million Names Project. And I talked with an Ancestry customer service rep, LIVE, who processed an ongoing 30% discount since I’m a member of AARP. And more!

Another fun part of Rootstech was what they called “Relatives at Rootstech” and using the Rootstech and FamilySearch apps you could find others in attendance who are related to you, or, check to see if you’re related to someone you meet. You could also search “Relatives Near Me” to see who’s in your proximity, maybe in a session, or in the vendor area, who’s your relative. On Day 2 WHAGS member Kyla Bayang spotted me and we checked to find out that we are 8th cousins

(based on the FamilySearch one-tree)! The vendor area had a “Cousins Corner” spot to get your pic taken with your newly-found cousins.

The three days of Rootstech passed by quickly and I was a little sad to see it come to a close. And to add insult to the pain, while we were all comfortably indoors on Saturday, the weather turned to a blizzard outside! Blowing snow and accumulations of slush in the streets made the short walk to the nearby FamilySearch Library interesting, to say the least. The snow continued to fall the rest of the day and overnight, and turned Salt Lake City into a beautiful winter wonderland, worthy of any Christmas card. I was thankful for Uber that made it easy to get anywhere I needed to go for the next few days and save this Texan from driving in snow!

In 2021 Salt Lake experienced a seismic event that actually toppled the gold statue of the Angel Moroni from the top of the LDS Temple on Temple Square. They are in the middle of an enormous project now to reinforce the Temple, top to bottom, to make it safer from damage by future earthquakes, so the entire building was wrapped in scaffolding and sheeting during my visit. If you didn’t know what was there you might never have guessed it was the LDS Temple. I don’t

know the timetable for completion, but it should be quite a sight again when it’s finished. Additional construction is going on now as well and the entire Temple Square is largely a construction zone.

I do hope you were able to participate in Rootstech 2024! Many of the sessions and presentations are available for



Neal Scott at the Salt Shaker
Salt Lake City

view online still, so go to Rootstech2024.org and browse for sessions that will interest you and help you on your path. And if you can make it, start planning now to attend Rootstech 2025 in person! The dates are already set for March 6th through 8th!

...Neal Scott

Our Committees and Special Interest Groups at Work

Membership Update Liz Philip

We have 70 paid memberships, 82 people, as of March 14. That is an all-time high. Did you know we need you? Are you looking for an opportunity to volunteer? Do you have any accounting or finance skills? Do you have data entry skills? Are you technically inclined? It would not involve much time away from your other interests. It would mean so much to the rest of us. By us, I mean the other members who work behind the scenes to bring programs, trips, and content to WHAGS. Contact me for more information; membership@whags.email

WHAGS Writers Ron Ware

Our March 13th WHAGS Writers meeting included a small but productive group. In attendance were me, Liz Philip and Tom Woltz. We watched a 5 minute "StoryLine" by Lynn Palermo, titled, "Making Your Ancestor Real for the Reader." Following Lynn's StoryLine, we reviewed submissions by Tom and Liz.

I was impressed at the improvement in both Tom and Liz's writing, and they both agreed that they felt like our writers' group

was helping. We take writing reviews seriously but have fun while doing it. That makes it all worthwhile.

Next month, new member Paul Clites and I will present work for review by members. That meeting time has been adjusted to 3:00 PM on April 10th.

Our group now consist of 8 members with 3-6 in attendance each month. Anyone who would like to join us, please contact me at newsletter@whags.email. I will send you a link to our next Zoom meeting.

Program Team

Pacquitta Laverents

Providing high-quality interesting programs is one of the primary goals at WHAGS, and the Program Team takes its job seriously with an appropriate amount of enthusiasm and fun. It's one of the most rewarding ways to help out the Society.

The Program Team meets monthly to plan and coordinate presentations with speakers throughout the program year. We spread out the responsibility across several team members so the effort doesn't become a burden for any single person. If you would like to participate on this team or have program topics you would like to suggest for the future, we would love to have you join us! Send an email to program@whags.email and let us know you'd like to help.

DNA SIG Gayle Colby

The DNA Special Interest Group (SIG) is a forum for WHAGS members to meet and learn about DNA and its use in genealogical research. We will learn together and help each other solve any DNA-related mysteries. Members of all levels of DNA knowledge are welcome to learn and help other members.

In the SIG we will work our way through the book Genetic Genealogy in Practice by Blaine T. Bettinger and Debbie Parker Wayne. Meetings are normally held the 1st Tuesday of the month at 10am via Zoom.

Beginners SIG Neal Scott

We all have to start somewhere, and the Beginners SIG (Special Interest Group) is a new group for WHAGS members who aren't experts (yet) to meet, discuss, and learn about the basics of genealogy and building your family tree.

Each month we'll cover a different topic and talk about it in easy-to-digest terms and language... even DNA! Topics planned now include, Getting Started, DNA, Organizing All My Stuff, Organizing Digital Records, Software Packages, Genealogy Websites such as Ancestry.com and Find-a-Grave, Archives and Libraries, and more.



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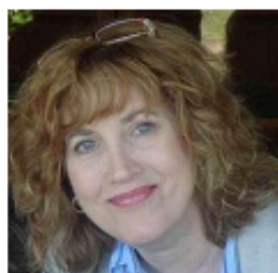
Helping to Find Your Roots

Monthly meetings are hybrid: in person at Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Road, and via Zoom

WHAGS April Program

Immigration, Passenger, and Naturalization Records in the Digital Age

Presenter: Paula Perkins



One of the most difficult problems for family historians is locating an ancestral village in the Old World. Knowing when and where an ancestor arrived in what became the United States can help solve that problem. Covering timeframes from the Colonial period to the present, this program will help identify the types of records containing ancestor arrival information in America. It will also

explore the contents and location of those records.

Lucky for us, accessing digital images is easier today than ever before!

Paula Perkins is a sixth-generation Texan, whose family history interest began when her parents took her to visit "cousins" and her maternal grandmother shared stories, photographs, and letters, which she inherited. Paula actively serves in a variety of roles for the Texas State and Collin County Genealogical Societies.

She is an avid DNA researcher, working as a Project Administrator with FamilyTreeDNA for the Orphan Train and other surname projects. In addition, she is coordinator at both the Texas county level and the Georgia state level for the USGenWeb project. Paula is a guest lecturer and genetic genealogist with several articles published in genealogical society publications. With an extensive background in genealogical education, she enjoys instilling her passion and knowledge to all.

Saturday, April 20, 2024

Meet & greet 10:00 am

Program begins at 10:30 am

If you want to join in virtually, visit our website for the link to register for the Zoom presentation: www.whags.org. Those joining us in person will meet at the new Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Road. Visitors are welcome!