WHEELING AREA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

1970 to 2020: From Microfilm to Digital

By Carol Bell, WAGS 50 Committee Chair

So, here we are in the middle of a pandemic trying to figure out a way to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wheeling Area Genealogical Society (WAGS). Wouldn't it be lovely to have a nice event with members and guests gathered to eat, drink, and be merry and talk genealogy, but we can't. Therefore, we decided to go on with the celebration and reminisce through print media and pictures.

On September 22, 1970, a group of thirteen people founded a society dedicated to preserving Wheeling area genealogical data. See the WAGS history story in this issue written by Evelyn Renshaw who lived it. Members worked tirelessly for hours and hours over many years to produce numerous research materials, which are available to anyone who wants to trace their family history. All of the WAGS publications that are for sale can also be viewed in the Wheeling Room of the Ohio County Public Library (OCPL). WAGS has had a longstanding relationship with OCPL, which houses a large collection of materials related to Wheeling's rich history. In the Wheeling Room, WAGS volunteers assisted with genealogical and historical research. The Society also donated dollars, new publications, and rebound books, and still holds monthly meetings in the library auditorium. In 2018, WAGS received OCPL's Library Legend award. We are pleased to have their support.

Just seven years after WAGS was founded, I began my genealogy adventure after watching the TV mini-series Roots. I couldn't wait to get back home to Wheeling to ask my parents a million questions. With their information as a starting point, I spent many hours looking at microfilm borrowed from the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City. Many of you have gone through the microfilm experience and know it was a long slow process. This was during the time that WAGS members were transcribing cemetery records, creating maps, collecting obituaries, and starting a newsletter.

The first Lookout newsletter was published in March 1992, and appearing on every issue is the society's slogan “Keeping an Eye on Our Heritage for Our Posterity. If you want a good look at local genealogy history, browse the 2005-2020 Lookout newsletters posted on the WAGS website at wagswv.org (membership required). You may break through your genealogy brick wall. The Survey and Land Grant Map of Ohio County (1774-1850), created by John Logan and Audra Wayne in 1985, remains one of our most popular items for sale. The most recent cemetery book, The Cemeteries of Ohio County, West Virginia, by Glenna Dillon, was published in 2007 and is an excellent resource.
The Internet came along and changed a genealogist’s life forever. Ancestry.com was launched in 1996 followed by many other online resources. Suddenly researching family histories was much easier and more fun, and WAGS moved into a new era.

At the request of members Audra Wayne, Phyllis Slater, and Mary Staley, another member Linda Cunningham Fluharty created a website for WAGS in 1998. When the Ohio County WVGenWeb site became available for adoption in 2005, it was blended with the WAGS website at www.wvgenweb.org. In conjunction with the Ohio County WVGenWeb site, there is a Facebook Private Group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/269676687045/ for discussing and sharing history and genealogy of Ohio County. In 2019, WAGS launched an information and events website at www.wagswv.org created by member Louis Yurkovitch. Our hard-copy obituary collection, which stretched from 1987 through 2014, ended due to the availability of obituaries in digital format online. The wall of drawers containing all those print obituaries saved at OCPL is still there.

In recent years, WAGS sponsored various opportunities to be genealogy detectives and indulge in genealogy activities. We enjoyed field trips to: Atkinson Cemetery near Clearview (Warwood) led by Bruce Kern who discovered and restored this cemetery (Lookout Summer 2005); the Ohio County Clerk’s Office, which houses vital statistics and court records; and the Dorothea and Henry H. Hood Local History Center at the Citizens Library in Washington, Pennsylvania. We offered beginner and intermediate genealogy workshops and a Family History contest for 8th grade students. We invited speakers on a number of topics, and over the last few years we sponsored three lecture series: Wheeling’s Silent Cities of the Dead, Wheeling’s First Families, and History of Churches in Wheeling.

We hear of the demise of local genealogy societies, but WAGS continues to be relevant in our community because as Donna Cox Baker, The Golden Egg Genealogist (gegbound.com), says, “We have something no state, regional, or national organization can replace: knowledge of and commitment to the locality.”

The Wheeling Area Genealogical Society has transitioned from the microfilm era to the digital era and now celebrates its 50th Anniversary with the determination to serve researchers and historians for years ahead. Come join us and make a difference.

Wheeling Area Genealogical Society's
Beginner's Genealogy Workshop
2013 Workshop Schedule
Saturday May 11th, 2013 at 10:00am
Saturday July 13th, 2013 at 10:00am
Saturday Sept. 14th, 2013 at 10:00am
Saturday Nov 9th, 2013 at 10:00am

Computer and Internet
Genealogy Workshop
2013 Workshop Schedule
Saturday June 8th, 2013 at 10:00am
Saturday August 10th, 2013 at 10:00am
Saturday Oct. 12th, 2013 at 10:00am

Workshops are held in the basement of
the Ohio County Public Library

Our mission is to preserve
the history of the people
who have gone before us.

Please consider becoming a member of
the Wheeling Area Genealogical
Society (WAGS).

2013 - Workshop Brochure
Wheeling Area Genealogical Society History

Written in 2000 by Evelyn Renshaw, Charter Member (1922-2008)
Reprinted from Lookout, June 2000

Thirteen members, the majority of them having participated in the Oglebay Institute Class, *How to Climb Your Family Tree*, instructed by Monroe Worthington, decided to form a genealogy society.

The organizational meeting was held and the Wheeling Area Genealogical Society was born on September 22, 1970 in the boardroom of the WTRF-TV building. Charter members attending were: Helen Hartlieb, Charles Fortney, Helen Knierim, Ruth Moss, John Nation, Marie Nelson, Jessie Price, Eileen Shemenski, Audra Wayne, Lib Woods, Monroe Worthington, Evelyn Renshaw and Marcella Steinman.

The purpose of the group was to get those people together who were interested in obtaining sources and further information to aid in their search in family histories and to acquaint the public to the satisfaction that go along with this most fascinating and sometimes frustrating hobby.

The first order of business was to decide on a name for the organization. Several names were suggested and the name Wheeling Area Genealogical Society was selected. Temporary officers were chosen with the understanding that in six months a formal election would take place. Charles Fortney was appointed chairman and Marie Nelson secretary-treasurer. At the end of the six months period Charles Fortney was elected president, a position he held until 1978, and Marie Nelson was elected as secretary-treasurer. Fortney, an employee of WTRF-TV, was granted permission for the society to meet in the board room during his tenure as president. When he retired from WTRF-TV, he was honored by WAGS with a life membership. Harry Parshall, his successor, arranged for WAGS to meet at the Ohio County Public Library.

Minutes are missing from October 1970 until January 1973. A constitution and by-laws had been adopted which stipulated that a three member Board of Directors, elected by the membership, had the duty of electing the society officers. An amendment to the Constitution and By-laws in 1981 eliminated the board of Directors and constituted that a nomination committee of three members, appointed by the membership, select a slate of officers including a president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer. Nominations were to be made from the floor and officers elected by the [membership]. The first major project undertaken by the society was in 1973, when members helped pack and transport the books in the West Virginia Room of the Ohio County Public Library on Market Street to the Library’s new building on 16th Street. They also unpacked and shelved the books in the new West Virginia Room. This room was renamed the Wheeling Room in later years. The society was asked to provide volunteers to staff the room and help visitors with their research. Volunteer members from 1973 to date have consistently provided this service.

The second major project also had its beginning in 1973. A five-member committee copied and compiled the Stone Church Cemetery Records dating from 1873 to 1925. In 1984, two members visited the cemetery and copied tombstone inscriptions in the old section of the cemetery dating back to 1787. Compiling early cemetery records has been an ongoing project. At present early records of every known cemetery in the Wheeling area has been copied with the exception of Greenwood Cemetery, which is the largest. However, a member has copied tombstone inscriptions in several of the older sections of this cemetery. As the saying goes, “What goes around comes around.” Last year the Stone Church Cemetery Records were updated with additions and extension of the records to 1945. WAGS member, Sylvia Sligar of Orange, California, accomplished this.
Due to the efforts of many members, working individually or as a committee, the Wheeling Room Collection has more than tripled in size since 1973. Valuable existing records have been restored and preserved, the cost covered by donations of members and from WAGS funds. A vast variety of old records have been located and compiled.

Members have placed copies of their own genealogies, histories and other material in the collection. Visiting researchers, who were impressed with the collection and help they received from WAGS volunteers, have donated their family genealogies and made monetary contributions to the society. WAGS has continually purchased new books for the room.

The names of all the members who have contributed to the achievements of WAGS during the past 30 years are too numerous to mention, but there are several outstanding members who deserve special recognition.

Audra Wayne, who died in 1999, was an active genealogist and a volunteer at the Ohio County Public Library before WAGS was organized. She served as president of the society for six years and as a volunteer in the Wheeling Room. She was the author, co-author, compiler or indexer, and in many cases all four, of over 55 books. In 1987, she initiated the Obituary file, which continues to grow. Inquiries as to where a copy of the book, History of Wheeling City and Ohio County, West Virginia, could be purchased prompted the society to have the book reprinted. Audra managed the sale.

Proceeds from the History of Wheeling book sales provided funds for the equipment and production of books offered for sale by WAGS. Serving on this committee and doing a tremendous job are: Phyllis Slater, Mary Staley, Nancy Roe, William Maxwell, and Mary Lou Henderson. The proceeds from these sales is used for equipment maintenance, supplies, and book purchases for the Wheeling Room and microfilm for the microfilm department of the Ohio County Public Library.

Mary Lou Henderson served as president for seven years and as a volunteer in the Wheeling Room. She is editor and publisher of the LOOKOUT, the quarterly newsletter included in the membership dues. The LOOKOUT also is exchanged with many organizations. Due to the LOOKOUT, a membership of 38 local members in 1992 increased to a high of 350 members nationwide in 1996. Mary Lou is a past board member and secretary of MINING YOUR HISTORY FOUNDATION, West Virginia’s State Genealogical Society.

Evelyn Renshaw has served as secretary-treasurer of WAGS since 1974. An amendment of the By-Laws in 1994 divided the office of secretary into recording secretary and corresponding secretary. Evelyn has continued serving as corresponding secretary-treasurer which totals 26 years of service this year. She also served as a volunteer in the Wheeling Room for 23 years.

Ken Craft, WAGS member of Atlanta, Georgia, has taken on the enormous task of copying the indexes of 41 volumes of the OHIO COUNTY COURT BOOKS 1777-1881. He has completed six volumes.

Charles Dodds, WAGS member from Texas, put WAGS online with their own web page for a couple of years, for which we are grateful; but we did not have the know how to pass information to him. Then Charles took on a new job for a new company and his hostville site was inaccessible for some time.

Linda Fluharty, WAGS member from Louisiana, put the society on the present site. With more computer knowledge and Internet experience more people are contributing information to the web site.

Since 1994 the governor of West Virginia has presented HISTORY HERO AWARDS in recognition of outstanding work and significant contributions to the preservation and promotion of West Virginia History. WAGS members who have been recipients of this award are: Audra Wayne, Mary Lou Henderson, Margaret Brennan, Evelyn Renshaw, Phyllis Slater, and John Logan.

Past Officers of the society are:

Presidents: Charles Fortney, Harry Parshall, Roger Ewing, Audra Wayne, and Mary Lou Henderson.
Past Recording Secretary: Mary Staley.

WAGS Officers for 2000 are: President, Nancy Roe, Vice-President, Rae Baker, Recording Secretary, Cheryl McCombs, Corresponding Secretary-Treasurer, Evelyn Renshaw.

2005 - Examining books containing naturalization records from 1854-1907, compiled by society members, seated from left, Mary Staley, Phyllis Slater, Adda Thornton; standing from left, Glenna Dillon, Bill Maxwell, and Dorothy Albasin, (Photo by Linda Comins)

**WAGS Memories**

To celebrate our 45th Anniversary, longstanding WAGS members who were active over many years and contributed so much to local genealogy projects were invited to write a historical memory of their time in the Society. Our friend, Bill Maxwell, who passed away February 8, 2020, told us his tale of volunteering.

**Volunteering**

Written in 2015 by Bill Maxwell (1929-2020)
Reprinted from *Lookout*, September 2015

After I retired in 1995 I remember using a DOS based Family Tree Maker computer application I shared with my youngest son. It was quite primitive, but it was a start. I saw in the local newspaper that Mary Lou Henderson would be giving a talk at the Elm Grove Methodist church on genealogy. My wife and I decided to attend that talk and it was there I paid my ten bucks and joined WAGS.

Soon thereafter Audra Wayne, a WAGS officer and very active library volunteer, assigned me the volunteer job of maintaining the "Vertical File" in the Ohio County Public Library. That was a very time consuming duty and the paid library staff could not devote the time required. I continued for several weeks until a second open heart surgery took me out of circulation for a time. By the time I got back, the library had changed directors and the Vertical File had become much less important. I then volunteered in the basement Wheeling Room. That was a most interesting and educational experience. I shelved books and attempted to assist library patrons with their genealogy research.
Wheeling Area Genealogical Society History Timeline
Researched by Carol Bell

1970
Thirteen people founded the Wheeling Area Genealogical Society (WAGS)

1973
First major transcription project, Stone Church Cemetery Records (1873-1925)

1985
Cartographer John Logan and Researcher Audra Wayne create the Survey and Land Grant Map of Ohio County (1774 – 1850)

1987
Newspaper Obituary Collection project initiated

1992
First Lookout Newsletter (Vol. 1, No. 1) published

1997
Ohio County (WV) Index: Index to the County Court Order Books compiled by WAGS Member Kenneth Fischer Craft Jr., published

1998
• Ohio County WVGenWeb Website (www.wvgenweb.org) created by WAGS Member Linda Cunningham Fluharty
• Audra Wayne is the first WAGS Member to receive the West Virginia History Hero Award.

2002
Evelyn Renshaw, last active charter member, completes 28 years as secretary-treasurer

2007
The Cemeteries of Ohio County, West Virginia by WAGS Member Glenna Dillon, published

2009
A new Wheeling Room, the genealogy and history resource center of Ohio County Public Library, opened

2014
28-year newspaper Obituary Collection project ends due to new era of digital availability

2018
WAGS receives the Library Legend award from the Ohio County Public Library

2019
WAGS Information & Events Website (www.wagswv.org) created by WAGS Member Louis Yurkovitch

2020
WAGS celebrates 50th Anniversary during the COVID-19 pandemic
Members of Wheeling Area Genealogical Society Who Are West Virginia History Heroes, 1997 - 2020

Since 1997 the governor of West Virginia has presented History Hero Awards in recognition of outstanding work and significant contributions to the preservation and dissemination of West Virginia history.

Lee Bourne*  
Douglas Breiding  
Margaret Brennan  
Gloria Brinkmeier  
Glenna Dillon  
Jeanne Finstein  
Linda Fluharty  
James “Jay” Frey  
Mary Lou Henderson  

June Jefferson*  
Rebekah Karelis  
Hazel Kerby*  
John Logan*  
William Maxwell*  
Joan McClellend  
Peggy Niebergall  
Diane Rhodes  
Nancy Roe*  

Phyllis Slater  
Mary Staley  
Clarice Stanley*  
Joanne Sullivan  
Carla Tustin  
Phyllis Walters*  
Audra Wayne*  
Louis Yurkovitch  

*Deceased

WAGS By the Numbers

Charter Members in 1970 13
Members Nationwide in 1996 350
Members Nationwide in 2020 134
States with Members 24
Members in West Virginia 68
Members in Wheeling 59
Members in Ohio 25

Marjorie Richey accepts OCPL’s Library Legend Award for WAGS
Dedication

In memory of two men who worked tirelessly for the Wheeling Area Genealogical Society:
William E. Maxwell and Albert Lee Bourne
and others who have gone before us.

Wheeling Area Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 6450, Wheeling, WV 26003-6450

WAGS accepts new members who have an interest in genealogy. The cost is $10 per person; nationwide membership is about 110 people a year. Our only income is from membership and book sales. Privileges include quarterly newsletters and access to the member-only part of the wagswv.org website. We meet the second Saturday of each month except December.

Ohio County WVGenWeb www.wvgenweb.org/ohio/index.htm

Facebook Private Group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/269676687045/
For discussing and sharing history and genealogy of Ohio County, West Virginia, in conjunction with the Ohio County WVGenWeb site.

WAGS Information & Events www.wagswv.org
Lee Bourne & Judy Fugate

Genealogy Detectives at Citizens Library

Officers & Board of Directors
President: Scott Owen
Vice President Pro Tempore & Newsletter Editor: Wendy Elswick
Secretary: Marjorie Richey
Treasurer: Jeanne Finstein
Directors:
Louis Yurkovitch
Diane Rhodes
Carol Bell

Doug Breiding, Sarah Kleeh, Diane Rhodes

Anna Brinkmeier & Citizens Librarian Ella Hatfield

WAGS Lookout Breakfast at Perkins

WAGS SNAPSHOTS
WAGS SNAPSHOTS

Genealogists - Historians - Stewards
WHEELING AREA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION or DUES RENEWAL

Membership in the "WAGS" is $10.00 per individual for the year from January 1 to December 31. Make checks payable: WAGS or WHEELING AREA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, P.O. Box 6450, Wheeling WV 26003-6450.

[You may "print" on paper or photocopy this information and mail to WAGS, if you don't want to cut your issue.]

PLEASE PRINT THE BELOW INFORMATION

Name: ____________________________  First

Last

Address: __________________________

Street

Mailing Address (if different from above): __________________________

City __________________________  State ________  ZIP ________

Home Phone: (____) ________ PRINT E-mail Address: __________________________

Enclosed is my check for $10.00 _____ Check one:  □ NEW  □ RENEWAL and/or _____ DONATION