

The USGenWeb Project

NEWS

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SPECIAL PROJECTS REPRESENTATIVE ELECTION

Tina Vickery - EC Chair

The Election Committee has been directed by the Advisory Board to conduct a Special Election to fill the seat of Special Projects Representative. <http://www.usgwelections.org/register1.asp>. The nomination period will be September 14, 2005 - September 21, 2005.

RESOURCES FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY KATRINA

Ellen Pack - Recording Secretary, SC MSGenWeb

"MSGenWeb has prepared a regularly updated list of online resources for families and friends affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Katrina Survivor and Family Online Lists and Message Boards
<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~msgenweb/survivors.htm>

To add a resource or report a broken link, please contact Ellen Pack. e.j.pack@natchezbelle.org

All USGenWeb volunteers are welcome to link to the page, and to forward the URL to any interested person.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Ellen's note above is very modest. Her resource has helped families reunite. Ellen is very good at jumping in where there is a need and finding a solution. USGenWeb volunteers truly are the very best!!!

On a more somber note USGenWeb has volunteers who live in the area affected by Katrina. I have been asked not to list them for their privacy and to ask others not to email them at this time. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

Help save records damaged by hurricane Katrina and stress the importance of digital records to your local societies.

Pam Reid - TS Project Coordinator

The USGenWeb Archives Project offers a way to preserve documents and photos from being permanently lost when tragedy strikes. By encouraging any and all people to transcribe and digitize important historical documents, including historical and genealogical societies, the USGenWeb, along with Rootsweb, can help protect those artifacts, papers, and pictures from loss in the future.

People were not the only "victims" of Katrina. Historical documents, records, photographs, artifacts have been damaged or lost. Cemeteries have been damaged and mausoleums displaced. National news reports on various channels repeat the stories. Little damage was done to New Orleans' legendary cemeteries, a true blessing. In St. Bernard Parish some mausoleums were swept to one end of the cemetery; coffins are still contained within the cemetery because the cemetery was enclosed with walls. This information was reported on LAOrlean-L@rootsweb.com. CNN.com and other news outlets reported that parts of the Jefferson Davis National Cemetery (aka Beauvoir House), in Biloxi, Mississippi had been washed away. The status of coffins is unknown at this time, a startling reminder that this can happen anywhere.

The Washington Post (Thursday, September 1, 2005; Page A19) reports that The Park Service's Museum Resource Center sent curators, archaeologists and historians to the area to assess what documents, photos, and artifacts can be retrieved and restored. The emergency team from the National Park Service will begin its work: blotting, washing, drying, straightening and preserving centuries of historical artifacts that tell the story of one of the oldest U.S. cities.

The team also plans to work with universities and the residents of New Orleans helping to restore hundreds of years of memories. Subscribers to the LAORLEAN-L list report that The Notarial Archives is under direct control of the City of New Orleans. The city has hired a Swedish company to come in to dry-freeze and restore the records that were on the first floor. The ones that are on the 2nd floor are in a vault and are safe.

The USGenWeb Archive volunteers have an opportunity to be good neighbors in this crisis by helping to digitize and safely store documents, photographs, records and any other type of historical record that can be salvaged from this disaster. Magazines, newsletters and other printed materials can be scanned and OCR'd and permanently stored. Handwritten materials can be scanned and both the scan and a transcription of the documents permanently stored. The scan preserves the original document; the transcription can be searched with our search engines. Photographs, bible records and more can be handled the same way. Historical and Genealogical societies would be well advised to make use of the facilities to make certain that their valuable holdings are safe from the ravages of disasters, weather, time, careless handling, and more.

The USGenWeb Archives Project provides the safest digital storage facility for all historical and genealogical records. The USGenWeb Archives Project is a central, digital library, and is a free resource for researchers. While it is ideal that the data go into the Archives, which provides one search engine for the entire collection, it is possible to set up web sites for records storage. Rootsweb will set up free accounts for any genealogical and historical society that requests space. Volunteers of The USGenWeb Archives Project can help anyone, individuals or groups, to digitize and save their records for posterity.

Photos of tombstones are as important as any other photo. People think if it is "carved in stone", it is forever. In the best of situations, that is not the case. Older stones are often unreadable due to the ravages of time, weather and vandals. One can only imagine what Katrina has done to the stones from the Gulf Region. Imagine the above ground graves in New Orleans. What has happened to them will be revealed in time. A photographic record of those graves and of any others can save them for the future, no matter what nature, time and vandals may do.

The purpose of this article is to encourage volunteers to help out in the effort to save and store records from the Gulf Coast. Contact societies, get the word out to individuals and use any method to let people know The USGenWeb Project Archives and other USGW volunteers are more than willing to help with this work. It is a good time to remember that natural and unnatural disasters can occur anywhere at any time. Fires and natural deterioration of old paper are two problems that come to mind. We should also concentrate efforts on convincing societies to store records in digital form. As mentioned earlier, The USGenWeb Archives Project is not the only possibility for this storage. Rootsweb will give space to societies who wish to safely store records in a digital format. Furthermore, those storing records on other web sites should be encouraged to contribute their transcriptions, scans, and cemetery surveys to the USGenWeb Archives, just in case something happens to them and their sites.

Many societies are very concerned that if they allow their records to be digitized and placed online, they might lose the fundraising income that they take in from the sale of these records. What we have found is that researchers are MORE likely to purchase books if they can be assured that the documentation they need is contained in the volumes. Most use online copies for search purposes and then buy the books so that they can own the source material. This has turned out to be a very good thing for the societies and for online researchers as well. Please note that any documents stored by us remain the property of the submitter, whether they are a society's records or those of an individual. USGenWeb and Rootsweb make NO claim of ownership and the records stored belong to the original owner.

PLEASE, be a good neighbor and help in this important cause. Our historical documents represent the memories of times gone by. Let us all do our part to make certain these records are safely stored and continue to be accessible to future generations. Contact societies and make them aware of the services that USGenWeb and Rootsweb can offer to lessen the chance that these cherished, treasured, and invaluable records will never be lost to us.

For updates on this information visit <http://rootsweb.com/~cemetery/article/savingrecords.html>

WELCOME TO OUR NEW NC

Linda Haas Davenport - NC

First I would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in the annual election. The representatives you voted for are seated and we are working hard to get organized and under way. This term I have asked the Advisory Board to try a different way of meeting. The meeting will be split between formal and informal meetings with things like motions, official announcements, etc. being handled in the formal meeting and discussion being held in the informal meeting. This will give your representatives the opportunity to discuss issues in a friendly open format which will result in better decisions. If you would like to see your elected representatives at work you may join the Advisory Board list in read only mode.

If you do not belong to your Regional List this might be a good time to join and let your elected representatives know how you feel on any issues under discussion. You will find information on the Project's mailing lists on the National web site. <http://www.usgenweb.org/volunteers/mail-lists.shtml> Instructions for joining the lists are provided at the site.

Please feel free to contact your regional representatives, the Representative At Large or me at any time with any questions or concerns you may have. You will find us all listed, along with our e-mail addresses, on the Advisory Board page <http://www.usgenweb.com/about/advisoryboard.shtml>

GOOD-BYE FROM SHARI

Shari Handley - Former NC

As my term of office as your National Coordinator comes to an end, I'd like to wish the new NC, Linda Haas Davenport, all the best in the coming term. I am confident that, with her abilities and her experience, Linda will guide the project in an even-handed and resourceful way throughout the next year. I know the Project is in good hands as I turn my full attention back to the state and county sites that I love in MDGenWeb and DEGenWeb. It has been an honor to serve you over the past year, USGenWeb. During my term, I have been continually amazed at what you all are able to accomplish through generosity with your time and talents. I know that the love of family history and the desire to help others that has made us THE preeminent volunteer genealogy project will carry The USGenWeb Project into a robust and exciting future.

AN INTRODUCTION FROM MIKE ST. CLAIR

Mike St. Clair - Advisory Committee Representative at Large

When the newsletter editor invited me to introduce myself to the project as the new Representative at Large, I jumped at the chance. You see, one of the things that I think could be most helpful in making the project more successful is a little more communication from the membership to other members and to the project leadership and this will give me the chance to beat that drum a little.

My primary objective as Representative at Large is to see that the needs and concerns of the project members are given top priority. It is my firm opinion that the local coordinators are the most important folks in the project, and that all other members should be devoting their primary efforts to supporting the local coordinators. That includes state coordinators and any who are assisting them, the special projects, the board, the national coordinator - everyone. I'm going to try hard to make my actions as RAL consistent with that philosophy. I'm struggling just a bit to determine how to get the needed input and feedback from the local coordinators so I can accurately represent their interests. Here is what I've planned so far:

I'm going to monitor and participate in the Discuss mailing list and the four regional mailing lists. I've requested permission to be a member of the state mailing lists for local coordinators. Some are allowing that and others have policies against anyone but local coordinators joining their lists. In the later case, most of them have agreed that I may send occasional messages which will be posted by the state coordinator. On these state level lists I will be listening, where it is allowed, to help me understand any concerns or needs that surface there. My postings on the state lists will be extremely limited, unless I am explicitly requested to provide information to the group. I am planning to provide a monthly report in the Newsletter, which might include status information as well as request input on known upcoming issues. I have set up a special mail box to allow me to pay priority attention to input from project members. That is RAL@On-TheWeb.com. I set up an experimental forum at RAL.On-TheWeb.com where members can ask questions, provide input, and discuss issues if they wish to. That forum does require registering and providing evidence that you are a project member. If it turns out to be useful, I will continue to provide it.

I do encourage all project members who have an interest in board actions and decisions to contact me through any of these channels so I can consider your interests and needs when I discuss and vote on matters that come before the board. I would appreciate your feedback on my actions, whether you agree with what I have done or not. I will be doing my best to act consistently with what it appears the majority of the project members want. That old saying about "a watched pot never boiling" is not a perfect analogy when it comes to organizations and boards. I believe that processes that are monitored, improve. And those that are ignored will generally degrade. But if only the critics listen, and if they are quick to jump on every small thing they disagree with, it can quickly become very unfriendly. If a broader group is paying attention, and passing on positive feedback, not just disagreements, I think the board will be more productive and be more likely to take the actions with which you agree. I invite you to monitor your board, and thereby help us and the project to improve.

What about those who prefer to stay as far as possible away from "politics" as it is sometimes called? As far as I'm concerned, if you perform well in keeping your web sites up to date, adding resources, and helping your researchers, you are of great value to the project. Still, I encourage you to take just a little time when the annual election rolls around to vote, to encourage good local coordinators that you know to run for office and thereby select good board members. And it would be wonderful if you would find the time every few years to volunteer to help your fellow

project members by running for the board or serving on a committee at the national level, or doing either of these or taking one of the other opportunities your state might provide the chance to do such as serving as a mentor. This is an organization of volunteers and your service does make a difference.

I look forward to getting better acquainted with many of you during the coming two years. If you have a problem that I can assist with, or a position you'd like me to consider, or even if I disappoint you with one of my actions, I would love to hear from you. And I can assure you that your other representatives on the board feel the same way. We want to direct this project in the path you wish it to go. It's your project.

SEARCH ENGINE TIPS

Mike Jarvis - Webmaster

As genealogists in today's high-tech world, the importance of using search engines properly is ever increasing. With genealogy related web sites making up a huge part of our World Wide Web, we would like to share some search engine tips that perhaps a few you will find helpful. There is much that could be written about this, but we will focus only on a few tips that we find most helpful. We use [and] to indicate terms that would be written in a search box.

First - The use of quotation marks. When using a combination of words in the search box, the search engine results will include every web page where these words occur anywhere on that page regardless of whether these words are immediately next to each other. Using the search term of [family history] will result in 109,000,000 hits while ["family history"] within quotations will result in 5,400,000 hits. This is because in the second instance it is only finding pages where the words are actually next to or immediately touching each other. Try this with a family name. For example my grandmother is named Flora MacDonald. If I search [Flora McDonald] in Google it returns 251,000 hits. Putting ["Flora MacDonald"] in quotations results in 29,600 hits. This is far too many hits and primarily relate to a prominent woman in Scottish and American history. This is not my grandmother. However, knowing that my grandmothers middle name was Hermosa, it makes sense to put ["Flora Hermosa MacDonald"] in the search box and I get two hits related specifically to my grandmother. Success!

Second - The use of the minus sign. This is my second favorite search tip. Using any combination of words in a search box with the minus sign directly next to a word that you DO NOT want to find is also helpful. Using the search term ["Flora MacDonald" -Scotland -Scottish -"North Carolina" -NC] will eliminate any pages from my search that includes the words next to the minus sign. So I will get only those pages that have my grandmother's name and do not have Scotland or North Carolina on the site. This effectively reduces the number of sites by more than half, from 29,600 to 12,800 hits. Using quotation marks and the minus sign in combination greatly improves your search results.

Third - The use of the plus sign. The plus sign has the effect of instructing the search engine to give special emphasis to any word where the plus sign is against it. My grandmother's father was Alexander MacDonald. However, not the Alexander MacDonald who was prime minister of Canada. Using the search term [Flora MacDonald -Scotland -Scottish -"North Carolina" -NC +"Alexander MacDonald" -Canada] gives me 1 hit that directs me to a site about my grandmother. Here we have combined quotation marks with the minus sign and the plus sign

Fourth - The site search. Let's say that I would like to find Alexander MacDonald, however, I only want to search a particular domain. I would simply use the search phrase ["Alexander MacDonald" site:rootsweb.com]. Rather than thousands of hits I get 204. Similarly, you could put a minus sign in front of rootsweb.com so that it searches all domains except Rootsweb.

Fifth - The intitle search term. Suppose that you would like to find every site on the Web with the word genealogy in the title. The search box would need the term [intitle:genealogy], which would result in 943,000 hits. Similarly, use the term [intitle:genealogy -site:ancestry.com] and you eliminate 3000 sites related to ancestry.com. One more: try using the term [intitle:genealogy -site:com] which will have the effect of eliminating all domains with the.com extension (commercial sites).

Sixth - The related search term: If you like to know which sites are similar to your own then use the term as follows: [related:USGenWeb.org]. Results will vary with Google providing 31 similar sites and Yahoo serving up 35,000 related sites.

Nearly all of these terms will work in most search engines. If you'd rather not type in the shorthand for many of these tips, the search engines will typically have an advanced search page which will do essentially the same thing. Try: http://www.google.com/advanced_search?hl=en Good hunting!

DAILY UPLOADS

Cyndie Enfinger - Special Projects

Want to know what files have been added and updated in the USGenWeb Archives each day? The Daily Uploads Mailing List will keep you up-to-date.

To subscribe send an email to daily-uploads-l-request@rootsweb.com with the word 'subscribe' in the subject line and body.

Since July 1, we have had almost 40,000 files added, an average of over 600 per day.

An archive of historical uploads is also available at: <http://usgwarchives.net/dailyuploads/>

SUCCESS OF GENRECORDS

David Crosby - Archives Project Committee member; Tech consultant Georgia GenWeb Archives; Atkinson Co., GA Archives File MGR

The Genrecords concept started in mid 2002. Genrecords is a free service for the submission of Genealogy data provided for the Archives project to submit data to Rootsweb.

Genrecords was created to make the submission of genealogical records easier to manage for state and county managers, while making the data submission more attractive, available and responsive for submitters.

A short summary of how this has been achieved: providing a series of html forms supported by a database which performs simple validation and formats the output as a text file in a consistent way (for example automatically adding a copyright notice and other header information required by the Archives Guidelines). The output file(s) are automatically emailed to the relevant state or county manager, optionally sending to a mailing list and automatically uploading the file to rootsweb. Copies of Tombstone Images are also sent to the appropriate Tombstone Project Coordinator. In addition Tools are provided to speed up the creation of table of contents.

The Genrecords concept started with one server with one submission form for obituaries in one state. Currently Genrecords uses three servers and submits files for approximately 37 states with about 20 form types including photos. File submissions vary from 300 to 1000 files a day with about 100,000 to 150,000 hits a month across the three servers. Mirrored servers ensure availability of the forms in the event one is out of service.

Genrecords success has been due to working with file managers and submitters while continually working to enhance and improve the facilities.

The Genrecords forms can be found at <http://www.genrecords.org/>

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To submit articles, letters and ideas, write to sharon@marshallnet.com

The USGenWeb NEWS is archived at <http://www.usgenweb.org/newsletter/>

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