
TSGS 30th Anniversary — March 15, 1977-March 13, 2007

Submitted by Mary Lou Bevers

Editor's Note: Program Chair Mary Lou Bevers read the following historical overview of the first 30 years of the Tri-State Genealogical Society at the 30th Anniversary celebration meeting in March 2007. With a few exceptions, the history is included below in its entirety.

Tonight is a time for “us old-timers” to reminisce and to recall people whom we may have not thought of for a while. At the same time, it will enlighten those who joined us in later years, so that they may have a better understanding of how TSGS came to be and has thrived for so many years.

Technology has come a long way in 30 years. We need to be on our “best behavior” because we are being watched tonight on the ghostcam website by Carol Bartlett, and maybe by Don Baker, George & Lou Wolf, Margery Shaw, and Carol Lantaff. I have messages from some of them that I will read later. Let’s all wave to them now.

There will be a lot of “name calling” tonight, but in a positive way. It is impossible to mention everyone who has helped TSGS without reading thirty years of membership lists—and I don’t believe you want me to do that.

Also, be thinking of any funny TSGS related stories that you might briefly share with us at the end of the program, if time permits.

Thirty years ago this Thursday night on March 15, 1977, sixty-one persons met in this room to discuss organizing a genealogical society. Don Baker, Director of Willard Library, called the meeting to order.

Jeanne Bender was nominated Acting President, and Mildred Blake as temporary Secretary. Others on the organizing board were Mary Lou Bevers, Edna Kasper, Dee Margedant, and Billie Berkemeier. Don Baker, Mike Cook, and Kay Kirchgestner were asked to be Advisors. Don Baker announced that about mid-April Willard Library would begin remaining open on Tuesday evenings.

Organizing details were worked out in April and May, “Tri-State Genealogical” was chosen for the name of the new organization, and an agreement was signed between The Society and Willard Library whereby the library agreed to let TSGS meet there, and TSGS agreed to house book purchases at Willard for public use. Also, if TSGS ever left the library, or ceased to exist, then the books would become the property of the library.

On June 14 the first regular meeting was held and a slate of officers was elected: Jeanne Bender, President; Edna Kasper, Vice President; Alfred Johnson, Recording Secretary; Billie Berkemeier, Corresponding Secretary; Betty Ann Ewers, Treasurer; Mary Lou Bevers, Membership Chairman; and Kay Lant, Program Chairman. The speaker for the

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evening was Willard Heiss, Chairman of the Family History Section of the Indiana Historical Society, who came down from Indianapolis. He made some sort of a remark “that TSGS would probably not last long, as so many new Societies didn’t.”

A membership list as of August 9, 1977 shows that 234 individuals had joined TSGS already. Their addresses included Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Florida, Missouri, Texas and Wyoming. This was primarily a result of “word-of-mouth communication.”

By September, we were “really organized” and had plans for the year ahead. (This explains why our membership year begins in September.) The first issue of *The Packet* was produced that month by Michael Cook as Editor. Mike set the high quality standard for *The Packet* which continues today. Sometime during our beginnings, Jeanne Bender resigned as President, and Edna Kasper stepped up to the plate to finish the year as our President, and Amanda Kessner became Vice President.

By December we had started the Surname File, a version of which still exists today. Very early in our beginnings, we started offering what we called the “6:30 Help Session” preceding the 7:30 meetings. We soon began teaching genealogy courses.

We have always been fortunate to have very knowledgeable members willing to share their expertise. Three were Certified Genealogists—Bettie Ann Cook, Brenda Joyce Jerome, and Marjory Kinsey. While I never took the time to become certified, I have always understood the need for courthouse records in research, and have “preached” about the subject many times. Others and their specialized fields are Karen Marie Kirsch, church records; Larry Goss and John West, computers; John Powell, military records; and Dr. Margery Shaw, genetics, plus many other members who have helped with training in numerous ways.

By the end of our first year, June 1978, we had 291 memberships: 339 individuals in 22 states. That summer, on August 8, Ye Olde Genealogie Shoppe from Indianapolis brought their books to Willard for a “Book Fair.” For the rest of his life, until his death just a few years ago, owner Ray Gouldy praised TSGS for causing him to stop smoking. He said he was so out of breath after taking his books up and down the stairs that when he began the drive home he threw his cigarettes on the dashboard and never smoked another one!

Our second year began in September 1978 with Bettie Ann Cook as President. Our first book was published that Fall — *Newspaper Abstracts of Owensville & Gibson Co. 1872 – 1915*. A second book soon followed — *Cemetery Records Of Vanderburgh Co.* by Carol Lantaff and Glenda Trapp, plus a second volume later. Many more books followed. Some of the outstanding ones were the “Five Generation Chart Book” edited by Ken Franks and his committee of six, followed by Volume 2 edited by Karen Kirsch, Barbara Thompson, and Joan Elliott Parker with John West as Consultant; *1880 Census of Vanderburgh Co., IN* by Eleanor Glenn Tenbarge and Gladys Hobbs; *1870 Census of Vanderburgh Co., IN*, edited by Karen Kirsch; *Vanderburgh Co. Will Index 1840 – 1944* by Eleanor Glenn Tenbarge; and *Warrick Co., IN Marriages 1813 – 1859* by Kay Lant and Kathryn Freels. Clarice June Hale compiled several books and donated them to TSGS to publish.

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On Sunday, June 8, 1980 we had our first and last picnic. It was held at the Paul Grimes Log Haus on the USI campus. Were any of you there that day?

May 1981 was our first Seminar. It was held at The Methodist Temple, with Willard Heiss, Pat Gouldy, and Jean Miller as speakers. Several other seminars were held there. In October 1986 we were still there when Marsha Rising, our first nationally-known speaker, provided the lectures. In November 1987 we went big time and had Dr. George Schweitzer at the Ramada Inn. A few years we had no seminar, but during most of the years that followed, we had nationally-known speakers.

In 1991 the seminars were expanded to include displays, demonstrations, and more vendors. The “granddaddy” seminar of them all was in 1993 when we had Dr. Schweitzer back again, with 267 in attendance. In the years following that, we continued to put on good seminars with some of the best genealogy speakers in the nation, but something happened that affected our attendance—and that of seminars and training programs all over the country.

More and more people were doing research, but fewer and fewer seemed interested in learning about how to do research. They didn’t know that there are basics that one needs to learn—they were too busy playing on the Internet in what they believed was a goldmine of family “information” already compiled—just copy it and pass it on, with no thought of the need for evidence. Some found lineages going as far back as the year 500! Unfortunately, many still do that, and will never realize that they have nothing of value without evidence.

Speaking of computers—and the Internet—I know that some of you are too young to comprehend how we did research without one. Imagine that even for census records we had to rely on published books and whatever film our local library had; that is, if you were lucky enough to have a librarian who was not opposed to genealogy, as many were (and still are).

And, speaking of librarians, Willard would not have anything like the collection they have today had it not been for the interest that Don Baker had in genealogy, and the wisdom to figure out that cooperation between Willard Library and a responsive genealogy community would be a good thing for us both. We are so fortunate to have the good relationship we enjoy, while many libraries and genealogical societies fight each other. We are one of the largest genealogical societies in the Midwest, and Willard Library has the third largest genealogy collection in the state—with only Fort Wayne and Indianapolis having more.

When some of us first began research in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and when Don Baker came to Willard, there was one microfilm reader with a high stool to perch on, and two small cases of books of interest to genealogists. Owensboro, Ky. was *the* place to go for research. The nearest LDS Library was in Louisville, Ky., and some of us would borrow film from Salt Lake, and then drive to Louisville to read it!

By 1976 Willard had opened this upstairs room with a real genealogy and local history department. This room had been used as storage for newspapers, etc., for nearly 100

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years. Joan Elliott was hired to manage the department. Later, Frank Chandler worked with her for several years, and was followed by a number of others whom we grew to like, such as Carol Bartlett and Carol Money. Lyn Martin became the successor to Joan Elliott Parker. Peggy Newton and Pat Sides came on board several years ago. John Scheer has contributed to the efficiency of the library. Many others have also served us well.

On 14 April 1987 we celebrated our tenth anniversary at the Cambridge Inn with 90 members and guests present. I believe that was our first Dinner Meeting. I remember it well. Marj Kinsey was President and was called out of town that morning, and I, as Vice President, had to preside. Again, Willard Heiss from Indianapolis was our speaker, and he saw that we were still a very lively group. At that time we had 385 members from 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Alaska. We had almost \$2,100 in the treasury and had published ten books. Of the original 234 Charter Members, 104 were still members.

A good number of our members have compiled and published books. Probably the greatest number have been produced by Bettie Cook and her late husband, Michael Cook, and by Brenda Joyce Jerome. Their books can be found in many libraries throughout the United States. A very significant one that Michael Cook and Glenda Trapp published was *Kentucky Genealogical Index*.

TSGS became incorporated under the Presidency of George Wolf. We later joined the Federation Of Genealogical Societies, and also became a Chapter of the Indiana Genealogical Society.

For many years John West has been the Coordinator with the 4-H participants and judging.

Marjorie Kinsey began writing a genealogy column for *The Evansville Courier* in October 1991 and continued until her death on 21 July 2003. It served the genealogy community well.

TSGS has had a website for many years, first with Chris Myers as webmaster, followed by John West. I was in the audience at a national conference lecture when the well-known Cyndi Howells of Cyndi's List fame used the TSGS website as an example of one of the best genealogy websites in the U. S.!

On our 25th Anniversary in April 2002, 59 Charter Members were still active.

Today, 30 years after organizing, we still have 36 Charter Members on our current membership list. That translates to 16% of our original membership.

What an awesome amount of time has been contributed to make TSGS successful for 30 years! Happy Birthday and congratulations!