



Good Purpose

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NEWSLETTERS THROUGH THE DECADE: 1996

THE HUB IN THE WHEEL OF GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Original article by Paul Miller Ruff, Foreword by Lydia Greenberg

I've been feeling horribly nostalgic as of late, so I've been leafing through the newsletters of yesteryear. What a blessing it is to have a record of the hard work and dedication of our volunteers throughout our history. Today, I have the honor and pleasure of bringing you an article from volume 1, issue 3 our newsletter, written by our founder, Paul Miller Ruff.

"Early in our national history, the county of Westmoreland was sometimes spoken of as the Star of the West. Often, it was known as the place where the West began.

And today, it could well be known as the hub of genealogical study of the early migrations and population of the Northeastern states of our country. More than any other area, this was the destination of the Eastern Pennsylvania and Western Maryland colonists of the latter part of the 18th and early part of the 19th centuries. Large numbers of Scots-Irish, Swiss, Germans, and French Huguenots settled here in Westmoreland, which at that time included much of Southwestern Pennsylvania. The early tax lists beginning in 1774 and the church baptismal records beginning in 1772 tell an amazing story.

Thousands of young Scots-Irish men and families took up land here, then moved down the Ohio and into the Northwest territory, giving place to more thousands of German families who settled here. And their children moved North and South and West across the great plains toward the Pacific.

This great migration and settlement can be pictured as a great wagon wheel, the spokes converging here in Westmoreland. Coming here from the Northeast and Southeast, their paths were like spokes in the wheel, from the Northeast or Northampton, from the East or Lancaster and York, from the Southeast or Fredrick county, all here to the hub and then the spoke extended to the North, the Armstrong, Mercer, and Clarion; to the South into Fayette, West Virginia, and Kentucky; and finally to the West into Ohio, Indiana, to Illinois, and on to the setting sun.

It was here in Westmoreland that the battles were fought to decide the destiny of our young nation. It was from here that the church, school, and farm passed along our culture from the East to the West.

And so, today, here in Westmoreland, we stand in the hub, the center, and we look East for our own family roots. And, the people to our North and to our South and West look to us to help unravel the strands of their family history. What a thrill, and a responsibility, and a joy to be part of the Baltzer Meyer society."

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MARY, MARY QUITE CONTRARY

By Lydia Greenberg

The weather is finally warming up here, and I couldn't be more excited! This is the time of year when I look forward to tidying up my balcony, washing my windows, and staring at my gardening supplies in confusion and debilitating anxiety. What should I grow? Do I focus on flowers or herbs? What about vegetables? What plants are native to this area? What fertilizers are good? Should I buy horse manure from my friend?

Nobody is forcing me to dig my fingers in the soil, but I go through this every single year in an effort to relive my childhood memories.

I vividly remember my mother growing herbs on the patio in flower pots. I remember how downright fancy I felt sprinkling fresh-picked garden-grown thyme on my eggs. I remember naming the hornworms that visited my mother's tomato plants. We also had flowers, of course, to varying success. My mother attempted to pass along her green thumb to me, but I regret to inform you that I've killed every plant I've ever been entrusted with – even succulents. I fear I'm a hopeless case!

Alas, gentle readers, I ask you; how does YOUR garden grow? What are your favorite gardening memories?

MYSTERY ARTIFACT

By Becky Plischke



The object is from 1934. It is black plastic. It is small, measuring approximately 3 1/2 inches wide, 2 1/2 inch deep and 1 7/8 inches tall. We have the original box.

GENEALOGY LIBRARY HOURS

The 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month are the only days Lori is scheduled to be on site 10am-2pm. Please email LMyers@BaltzerMeyer.com to schedule research.

Wednesdays 6pm-8pm
Thursdays 10am-2pm

THE COURTHOUSE: DEMYSTIFIED PART 2

By Lori Myers

This is the second part in a two-part guide on the six most important offices in a Pennsylvania court house and what records they hold. Please see newsletter volume 32 issue 3 for part one.

Orphans Court

Pennsylvania's Orphans Courts include a variety of court actions, including estate disputes arising after a person's death. Also held by Orphans Court Clerks are guardianship records, which can be important for genealogists to find. These records appoint a guardian for minor children after the death of a parent.

The Orphans Court Clerk's office may also hold the following vital records:

Birth & Death Records (1893-1905) Before Pennsylvania began statewide birth and death registration in 1906, the counties were tasked with recording births and deaths for a short time.

Marriage Records (Beginning in 1885)

Don't be misled by the name. One of the duties of the Orphans' Court is to administer the estates of minors and incapacitated persons, but even those persons are not necessarily "orphans" as we think of them today. If one parent passed away, the court would often appoint a guardian to manage the minor child's estate even if the other parent was still living. Besides this, the Orphans' Court is responsible for the distribution of a decedent's estate among all eligible heirs, regardless of age or relationship. Partition or Sale of Property, for example, are often extraordinary documents for genealogy because they identify all eligible heirs. If an ancestor did not leave a Will, this distribution of estate based on testate laws will enumerate living descendants. Even if an ancestor did leave a Will, heirs named in the Will may be expounded upon in the Orphans' Court distribution. For example, a Will may have been written many years prior to the benefactor's death. Unmarried daughters in the Will may be married by the time of distribution. Some of the heirs may have predeceased the benefactor and accordingly their children may be identified in the distribution to receive their share.

Recorder of Deeds

The Recorder of Deeds holds records related to real estate transactions including deeds and mortgages.

Tax Assessments

Tax records can be valuable to genealogists for a number of reasons. The records can offer insight into an ancestor's economic status, or reveal their occupation. Genealogists can use tax lists to narrow down the timeframe in which an ancestor relocated or died by identifying the year that the individual no longer appeared on a tax roll. Occasionally, tax records can even reveal parent/child relationships. When parents could not afford to pay the school tax for their young children, the head of household and the names of the children may be included on tax lists.

The tax assessment office may hold their county's historical tax records, but many offices have transferred these records to local historical societies.

County Archives

The following counties have separate archives which store many of the records mentioned above: Chester, Cumberland, Delaware, Franklin, Lancaster, Monroe, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia, and York



Mystery Artifact Answer

It is a subminiature camera. The camera was constructed of molded black plastic (Durez) with a metal folding wire viewfinder. It was capable of capturing six 1 3/4 x 1 1/2- inch exposures on specially made Eastman Kodak company No. 00 roll film. The film was unique in that it contained the rewind knob on the top of the roll of film. It featured a genuine Eastman fixed focus lens and a precision movement instantaneous shutter. The Norton camera was originally priced at 0.50 cents.