

CONNECTICUT PROFESSIONAL GENEALOGISTS COUNCIL
Donna Holt Siemiatkoski, President
33 Hillcrest Road
Windsor, Connecticut 06095-3310
203-688-6822
December 18, 1993

Barbara

Dear Friends,

This page was originally planned to be my Christmas message to everyone and was to be part of the secretary's package of information. However, recent developments in Hartford caused me to hold off on sending the message so I could report on the results of some then-secret discussions. I will now report on the exact nature of the problem, our possible response, and the timing. The unexpected time requirements for the response require that I get this letter out immediately and not send it with the secretary's package, which will originate in Massachusetts.

Early in December Ted Wohlsen, head of the CSL History and Genealogy Unit, escorted me on an hour's notice to a pre-arranged meeting with State Archivist Mark Jones. These gentlemen told me that Richard Ackroyd, State Librarian, having considered several options, felt that he may well have to cut back the hours at the History and Genealogy Unit, possibly by as much as an entire day. to enable staff to perform library functions which they cannot attend while on reference duty. As those who work in the unit are aware, the current staff of four cannot adequately both serve the public and continue their behind-the-scenes duties. For a temporary measure, Mr. Ackroyd has assigned the State Archivist to the archives security desk for twelve hours per week, thus seriously impacting his work with building and conserving the collection of state archives. Ted and Mark were of the opinion that response from the public to state policy makers who control the budget might be of some help and that Mr. Ackroyd would like to explore some options with a delegation from the Council. They urged no publicity until we could hear Mr. Ackroyd and formulate a recommended response. Past efforts on behalf of various other publics to protest budget cuts had proven counterproductive as some actions have been taken in the absence of all the facts. I was asked to select a team to meet with Mr. Ackroyd, and chose our vice-president, Warren Buchanan, who uses the library more than anyone and who had begun to formulate ways in which we might communicate with government officials; Judith Plummer, Council member and past president of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, who has had years of experience with the Connecticut Education Association, a professional union; and Ted Smith, a member of the CSG Board of Governors and its chairman of the Government relations committee (of which I am a member.) I felt that this team represented a good balance with the Council and CSG as we certainly want to keep the Board and membership of the larger organization informed of matters of public concern. With the exception of Ted Smith, who had a prior family commitment, and

Mark Jones, who had a professional commitment, the team met with Ted Wohlsen, Lynne Newell, Ted's supervisor, and Dick Ackroyd on this past Friday afternoon. Mr. Ackroyd described his fiscal dilemma and his reluctant decision to cut the library hours by a full day. He said that he fully realized it was a 20% reduction in our available work hours, following the elimination of Saturday hours three years ago. He went on to say that he knew that we were an advocacy group and may wish to write to Governor Weicker to voice our concerns and expressed his support for such an action by individuals and groups. By law, the Governor must present his budget message to the General Assembly in early February. He is currently working on that budget, and is looking to make further cuts to enhance the state's fiscal condition. He is probably looking for a budget in his last year, one which will be fiscally sound and will include an emphasis on youth programs.

The three of us responded with two proposed paths of action. We realize that we cannot act for the Council or CSG without a vote, but indicated what we as individuals were willing to do and to recommend to our colleagues. One response is to write to the governor to encourage him to continue the present hours at the library with another staff position funded to help the staff's workload. He recommends that such letters reach the Governor by year end if at all possible...hence the need for speed with this letter, coming as it will immediately before Christmas. If you cannot respond within this time frame, as response by mid-January will be better than none at all. Just possibly the receipt of two dozen well-worded letters will shape the governor's decision-making in our direction. We should know by early February what his budget will contain for the library. If the governor's budget does not meet our needs, we have the option to move into a Phase II of our response in late February and March...writing to various legislators and/or appearing at a public hearing on the budget. Judy and I testified before the Appropriations Committee in 1988 and saved the Saturday hours for two years by that effort, backed up by hundreds of letters from constituents, mostly CSG members. For now our efforts will be directed to a smaller group, given that not many people can be reached by January 1. Please consider writing to the governor about your concerns for the hours of the library and its staffing, including comments about the outstanding job done by so few for so many with so few resources now. We know that we can rely on our colleagues for well-reasoned, focused, letters. If you represent any other genealogical groups and can perhaps even use their letterhead, that will help. The governor's staff needs to see that access to the History and Genealogy Unit impacts a wide range of individuals for a wide range of reasons. For our members out of state, who don't vote or pay taxes here, you can help us by telling our leaders how important Connecticut resources are to the rest of the country...and how much revenue comes into Connecticut because of the collections...both by way of retainers for Connecticut professionals who pay state income taxes and by way of money spent by visiting genealogists on lodging, food, gasoline, and related items. I am sure we can come up with as many responses

as there are genealogists! Warren and Judy want me to ask each of you who write to please send a copy of your letter to me at my home address, above, to have for our files. Please address your correspondence to the Hon. Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., Governor, Room 200, State Capitol, Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106. For our next meeting Warren will have prepared a list of legislators on key committees, which he will update when the session begins. Meanwhile, Judy has volunteered to review the sign-in sheets to count the number of out of state visitors this year to get an idea of the economic impact to the state and the importance of the institution to so many others.

Our second possible response was proposed by Warren, who probably spends more work hours in the library each week than anyone. He suggested that several of us volunteer for a three hour shift each week (10-1; 1-4). We would have a desk near the front and give a tour at the beginning of each session and be on hand to answer the many simple questions that arise each day. Mr. Ackroyd was impressed with this possible solution to the problem and directed the staff to devise ways to make such a program work while avoiding potential conflicts with the unions. Only ten of us are needed to cover a week, and back-ups will be helpful as well. Although we all take our hours in the library seriously as professionals who rely on this work for household income, I urge everyone to consider Warren's proposal in light of these unusual times. We can certainly discuss these items at our next meeting before anything becomes permanent. Again, my colleagues wish that anyone who will volunteer for a three hour shift once a week or twice a month contact me at my home address.

As for our next meeting...because of the serious and timely nature of this problem, I hereby call a special meeting of the Council on Thursday, January 6 at 2:15 p.m. in the State Library cafeteria. If weather intervenes, the meeting will be held the next work day, or the next. Call me if you are unsure before starting out. This will be a regular meeting, with other agenda items allowed as needed. However, please try to keep other business to a minimum. Dick Ackroyd, as well as Lynne Newell and Ted Wohlsen, hope to be on hand to address us. Both Dick and Lynne welcome the opportunity to get to meet us and to work together on this matter of common interest. If I have not conveyed the situation accurately, you may hear from the Library Staff themselves the nature of the problem and the possible solutions. We may also have further updates on the situation at that time. I do not need to remind you that the meeting we attended occurred at a busy time and that even the mechanics of composing, copying, and mailing this letter, also consume significant chunks out of, literally, the already-busy days before Christmas. (In addition, my roof is still under repair and still requiring all the sorts of incredible attention that contracting jobs do....) Please try to come to this very important meeting on January 6, health and weather permitting, as a good turnout will be very helpful for Mr. Ackroyd. Because of the timing at this time of year we were not able to contact any other members per-

sonally, once the secrecy was lifted by Mr. Ackroyd at the meeting. We wanted to be careful to advise the Council executive board and the CSG Board of Governors at the same stage in the process, to keep everything even-handed. Thank you for your confidence and understanding in this delicate matter.

In other developments, Roger Joslyn visited the State Library last week, along with Robert Anderson, chairman of the Great Migration Study Project, our latest member. Both are Fellows in the American Society of Genealogists and both often cover Connecticut families in their work. Roger is past president of the Association of Professional Genealogists. At the December meeting the members authorized me to contact Roger regarding the APG and either the Council's membership as a chapter or individual memberships (~~several of us are already members.~~) I had not made the call (Christmas, the roof, Ackroyd, etc.) and meant to ask Roger over coffee. He "beat me to it" by asking me if we had considered becoming a chapter. I said that in our formative months we had considered such an affiliation but not acted upon it, but formed ourselves as an independent group, reserving consideration of such affiliation until later. I have invited Roger to our February meeting to discuss the possibility. The February meeting (see below) will be a busy one, but I do want to work Roger into the program, rather than wait until the April meeting to do so. Subject to confirmation, Roger Joslyn will speak to us on the APG and our possible membership as a chapter (without obligating individual members to join) in February.

The February meeting will be held on Monday, February 7 at 10 a.m. at the kind invitation of Everett Wilkie, Head Librarian of the Connecticut Historical Society. Everett invited us on a Monday as the library is closed to the public then and the staff can devote their full attention to us as we meet in the reading room and take a tour. Participation in the volunteer program, for those who wish, will be mentioned, and covered in more detail in March if interest warrants. Not everyone will volunteer at both libraries, or even at either, but we do want to make these choices and opportunities for service available to our members. One of our members (who says he has a "real" job and pursues this profession in other hours) requested that the March meeting be held on a Saturday. I realized that a vote on this at our last weekday meeting would not be meaningful as none of the "Saturday-only" people were there. I like the idea of having at least one meeting a year which those members of our group employed elsewhere can attend...and thus feel a part of what we do. While responding to me on the matters of the letter and your availability as a library volunteer, please "vote" on having a meeting on Saturday, March 5 from about 10 a.m. to about noon. Please vote: Please have one, I can't come any other time; I don't care; and please don't, I can't come. To help us with future planning, if you cannot come, please indicate whether an occasional Saturday is entirely out of the question or if this Saturday in particular is bad.

When planning to come to the Historical Society, remember to bring food as none is available on the premises or nearby. Coffee and tea are available. Anyone for making a desert for us? As a consolation, the parking is abundant and free.

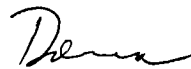
Although I had originally planned to have the executive committee plan programs on January 6, we will hold the general meeting then, hopefully with Mr. Ackroyd. Several additional program ideas have presented themselves and I do not wish to lock us in for the whole year at this point, while our organization is still taking shape and we are already addressing several issues. For example, Lynne Newell also heads the CT newspaper conservation project and, when asked, replied that she would love the opportunity to address us. Furthermore, our member Laurie Hamblin is developing information on tourism for us, which may prove very helpful as our appeal to the governor and the legislature develops and we may wish to devote time to that. Some have also expressed a desire to meet Kay Church, the supervisor of public records, or to hear from APG on ethics issues. However, between the state budget and getting to know the Connecticut Historical Society, we have sufficient items to learn and to track for the immediate future (the next three months at least). However, do continue to raise items and issues of interest for the group.

In addition, the December meeting graciously gave permission to move the June and August meetings forward to the previous weeks to accommodate my previously existing tour schedule. I am very grateful for the group's flexibility. The meeting dates will be published in advance.

That National Archives had proposed a cutback of hours from 10pm to 8pm closing. Member Betty Bradway wrote to us with the news, and we were one of several societies who registered a protest. As a result a hearing was held. We do not yet know the results. We thank Betty for alerting us to this situation, and encourage our members to keep us informed, and, in reverse, to help us here in Connecticut with our situation.

I will close now with my sincere good wishes for the Christmas holiday. We have had an eventful year, which has included our formation as a Council. I wish everyone a New Year full of prosperity, learning, and growing. Most of all, I wish everyone, new friends and old friends, a holiday full of blessing for you and happy times with those you love.

Sincerely,



Extra Note--Dec. 21--I just received the secretary's report which she mailed out before she knew of this letter or the meeting with Dick Ackroyd. Through a miscommunication of some sort the wrong reason was given for holding the February meeting at the Connecticut Historical Society on a Monday and I am very embarrassed. Admission for non-members was never an item of discussion between Everett Wilkie and me. We have been invited to come on a Monday so that the staff can give us their full attention and we can meet in the library when no other patrons are there. We would not have been charged admission as individuals for this meeting in any case. I am sorry if any wrong impression has been given.

Barbara is to be commended for the fine job she has done in organizing the CPGC brochure. You may bring any changes or additions with you to the regular meeting which I have called for January 6. I also thank Barbara for alerting everyone about the upcoming New England Regional Conference, and, with her as a CSG Board member, I urge submission of any of your qualifying works to the CSG Book Award contest.

Today Ted Smith called in from his weekend away. He will contact Ida Ragazzi, CSG president, and I will send her a copy of this letter so we will all be in open communication. I have invited Ida, and, through her and Ted, any members of the CSG Board who wish to come to our meeting on January 6 to hear whatever Mr. Ackroyd and Lynne Newell would like to tell us.

My roofing project continues to take up lots of time as the lack of flashing near the chimney sent water cascading over us as we slept last night!

We are heading toward Christmas anyway...and we will take time out from our cares to enjoy the blessings of this time.