

Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council

Thursday, 6 April 1995
The Connecticut Historical Society

Attending: Bob Bamford, Kathryn S. Black, Warren D. Buchanan, Ron Cormier, Barbara Ferris, Harlan Jessup, Jack E. Kuras, Dianne Lenti, John Lenti, Barbara J. Mathews, Robert L. Rafford, Donna Siemiatkoski, Neil Sundt, Helen Ullmann.

Speaker:

Harlan Jessup, CPGC member and Historian of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brookfield, Connecticut, discussed the records of his church. Among the records are those of the Rev. Ephraim L. Whitcome, rector from 1877 to 1906. The Rev. Whitcome was a genealogist's friend, compiling records of the earliest church members (bef. 1800) with their birth and death dates; for his contemporaries he wrote obituaries which include information on their parents and place of birth. With the Rev. George N. Crocker, Harlan Jessup has written a pamphlet outlining all of the extant records. Copies of *Guide & Index to the Genealogical Records, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brookfield, Connecticut, 1995* will be placed at the Connecticut State Library and The Connecticut Historical Society.

Business Meeting:

The business meeting was called to order by President Donna Siemiatkoski. On a motion by Harlan Jessup seconded by Bob Rafford, the minutes of the last meeting were accepted without change.

Barbara Mathews made the Secretary/Treasurer's report. While membership has remained stable over the past month, Barbara did report that people have supported the assessment for reprinting the Member List wholeheartedly. Over 19 have sent \$5 to Barbara and several included \$5 with their forms to Warren. This represents a significant return in only three weeks.

President Siemiatkoski reported that she has sent a list of researchers and a list of those who specialize in missing heirs work, to David Brown, Ph.D., President, and to Richard Tomlinson, Ph.D., Treasurer, of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists at their request.

In addition, President Siemiatkoski reported on efforts to further communications with those responsible for the preservation and proper use of vital records. These efforts are beginning to bear fruits as relationships are established and all the parties have more opportunity to share their concerns and to work together for the welfare of all.

The Registrar of Vital Records, John Boccacio, hosted a visit by Donna Siemiatkoski and Warren Buchanan to the offices on Washington Street. They toured the vault area where Mr. Boccacio discussed some of the space and safety concerns that currently limit access. The CPGC officers were able to explain the concerns of genealogists and the reasons we often need to see the records and indexes for ourselves, for example, spelling anomalies for some surnames. Mr. Boccacio also explained the systems for creating vital records in Connecticut. For instance,

- **Birth Records:** Each day the 26 "birthing centers" in Connecticut forward the information for birth certificates to the State Health Department's Vital Record Office where computers generate forms which are then forwarded to the various town clerks and city registrars.
- **Birth Record Sealing for Adoption:** The order to seal a birth record comes from the Court to the Vital Record Office, where the record is removed and placed in a brown envelope which can only be opened with a Court order. The town clerks and city registrars also receive orders to seal their corresponding birth records.

Our representatives learned that Mr. Boccacio has requested \$60,000 from the state legislature in order to microfilm the original birth, marriage and death records since 1897. [These constitute cards for 1897-1952 and books for 1953-present.] The microfilms would allow much greater access for researchers who often want information rather than certified records. In addition, Mr. Boccacio would then be able to forward the marriage and death cards to the State Library and Archives. Members expressed support of this policy both for making the records we are entitled to search more accessible and for helping to preserve the originals.

As part of Mr. Boccacio's partnership with the town clerks and city registrars, he publishes a regular newsletter. He has offered a column in this newsletter which we can use on behalf of all genealogists in Connecticut to communicate our concerns. Donna has written her first column which she read to those at the meeting. Members present congratulated her for reaching just the right tone in communicating their concerns and desire to work together.

Mr. Boccacio also requested a list of the legally incorporated genealogy societies in Connecticut. Jack Kuras used computer facilities at the office of the Secretary of State to verify a list of societies which Donna will be sending to Mr. Boccacio. Finally, Mr. Boccacio has made some time for Donna to speak on behalf of all genealogists in front of the next statewide convention of town clerks.

Warren Buchanan presented the report of the Legislative Committee. He has worked with the Bill Room of the State Legislature and determined that four bills have been submitted which could impact access to vital records if passed. The bills have much in common with each other but in the committee's assessment do not completely eliminate some of the confusion of the current statutes.

The Legislative Committee worked hard over the past week to respond to the proposed legislation. Warren drafted a letter which Donna and Jack refined to send to Mr. Stephen Lewis, Administrator of the Public Health Committee, expressing concerns about the current statutes and their proposed replacements. Donna read this letter out loud to those assembled, who expressed appreciation to the committee for such a reasoned and clear response. [The letter is appended.] We were moved to ovation to express our thanks to Donna, Warren and Jack.

Mr. Lewis has expressed to Warren on the telephone that the committee staff now feels this is a very complicated issue that needs more discussion before any bill is brought to the floor. Warren is arranging a face-to-face meeting for further communication. The Legislative Committee suggested that members write to Mr. Stephen Lewis, Public Health Committee, Legislative Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06115. They suggest that we write simply in support of the concerns expressed by CPGC.

Warren Buchanan asked CPGC members to send him copies of any notices that they find in the different towns and cities regarding local policies on access to vital records. He is compiling a file to help us better understand local differences in interpreting the current statutes, sections 7.51 and 7.51a.

Ron Cormier told us about his own efforts to support those researching Acadian [Cajun] roots in maritime Canada. We asked him to show the English translation of the video "Acadia Liberte" to us at our June meeting which we set for the 29th.

Helen Ullmann alerted us to the new 1994 Addendum to the IGI, a CD ROM currently in beta test which may be distributed to local Family History Centers as early as this coming Fall. It contains 42 million new records including some of the "pre-1970" temple work which she talked about in her presentation last Fall.

At our May 4th meeting, we will receive progress reports from the various committees and will discuss plans for future meetings. In addition, we have set only one meeting time for the months of June, July and August, for June 29th, where we will learn about the differences between French-Canadian and Acadian roots.

Our next meeting will be on 4 May 1995, at 10:00 AM at the Connecticut Historical Society.