

# Massachusetts Genealogical Council

# The NEWSLETTER

[www.massgencouncil.org](http://www.massgencouncil.org)

MASSACHUSETTS GENEALOGICAL COUNCIL

SUMMER & FALL 2010

## President's Column Summer & Fall Issues 2010

### RECORDS CLOSURE NIGHTMARE ENDED

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At first it seemed like a nightmare. The Senate bill mandated that all Massachusetts vital records after 1840 be closed. The printed series goes up to 1850. It didn't make sense. However, it's best not to take anything lightly. It had already gone through the Public Health Committee and been sent to the House Ways and Means Committee for consideration.

We called on the genealogists in Massachusetts to make their thoughts on this clear to their legislators. Make it clear you did. So clear, that even in the middle of a budget crisis, House Ways and Means Chair Charles Murphy knew that the staff had come in to work with the faxes overflowing, the email inbox overflowing, and attention from both local and national groups in regards to record closure.

Critical to this effort was the fact that you got your local state representatives to write to Chairman Murphy explicitly stating that they opposed this bill. Because 2010 was the second year of the two-year legislative session, bills with this level of opposition are not to be put forward.



#### PROVISIONS OF OUR OWN BILL PASS

That wasn't the only bill regarding vital records on the legislative agenda. The Town Clerks Association had a bill submitted on their behalf, as did we. Many elements of the bill from TCA were similar to our bill. Both bills called for a computer system to be put into place and for the use of safety paper.

It was an election year and TCA (whose members manage elections) wanted their bill passed. Rep. Murphy found

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## *President's Column continued*

room to compromise. As a result, the Senator who had submitted the TCA bill put forward a heavily amended bill under a new number. The amendments were made to answer our concerns. The new bill, H4910, passed on 26 September 2010 and was sent to the governor. As a result, computerization and safety paper are now law.

The TCA will take credit for it, but I think we can, too. This bill is stronger, clearer, and more sensible because of your timely input. TCA's original bill flailed all over the place, referring to federal proposed regulations that will never be adopted and opening up a situation in which every town clerk could close any record without recourse. All of that was altered so that only the state registrar could do so and only under certain conditions; police investigations are mandatory. The bits that stayed were by-and-large the bits that also were in our bill. We can take a victory lap for the passage of this bill. Our voice was heard; the bill was amended; and the computer system and security paper the commonwealth needs are now in law.

## **MGC WELCOMES NEW DIRECTORS**

Our board's elected terms might be for two years, but sometimes life intervenes and we have to juggle jobs. D. Joshua Taylor, our Program Director, was appointed Director of Education at MGC member society the New England Historic and Genealogical Society. His new responsibilities include a heavy workload and extensive travel. As a result, we have elected new directors for the following positions:

- Program Director Michael Brophy, [program@massgencouncil.org](mailto:program@massgencouncil.org)
- Publicity Director Merlyn Liberty, [publicity@massgencouncil.org](mailto:publicity@massgencouncil.org)
- Newsletter Director Meredith Hoffman, [newsletter@massgencouncil.org](mailto:newsletter@massgencouncil.org)

## **MGC'S SEMINAR SCHEDULED FOR 2011**

Our own Annual Meeting and Seminar is scheduled for 23 July 2011 at Bentley University's LaCava Conference Center in Waltham. Program Director Michael Brophy is putting together our program which will feature presentations on the repositories and records of Massachusetts.

## **MEMBER SOCIETY MSoG MARKS 35TH YEAR**

The first Saturday in November saw nearly 200 Massachusetts genealogists gathered in Marlborough to mark the 35th anniversary of the Massachusetts Society of Genealogists. They marked it with a wonderful daylong conference, two tracks, six speakers, great vendors, the presentation of the writing awards, an annual meeting, and a formal luncheon.

The local state representative and state senator attended the luncheon. MSoG's officers gave the MGC president a place at the table reserved for the legislators and speakers. I had a great talk with Sen. James Elbridge about the last session's bills and about our plans to continue to monitor records access. I think he was impressed by the presence of 200 genealogists and told me he was willing to help us in our efforts. My thanks to Hazel Miele of MSoG for giving me the opportunity for a long discussion with Jamie Elbridge.

## **NERGC 2011 PROGRAM AVAILABLE**

The New England Regional Conference's 2011 program and registration brochure are now available online at [www.nergc.org](http://www.nergc.org). It takes place in Springfield, Massachusetts, 6-10 April 2011. The conference will span two hotels there, the Marriott Springfield and the Springfield Monarch Place Hotel.

Featured national speakers are Paul Milner and John Philip Colletta. Elissa

Scalisse Powell will present a beginning genealogy workshop on the opening day. Each day will feature six tracks of speakers and one track of workshops. The ever-popular Society Fair takes place on Thursday evening together with the opening of the Exhibit Hall.

## **MGC WILL SPONSOR A PANEL DISCUSSION AT NERGC**

Friday, April 9th, from 4:45 to 5:45, MGC will present a panel discussion on "Access to Records for Genealogists: An Open Forum on the Issues at both the State and Federal Level." Block it out now in your calendars. We look forward to seeing you there and to hearing from everyone.

## **CIVIL RECORDS DIRECTOR BERNIE COUMING RETIRES**

About a year ago, our Civil Records Director Bernie Couming warned the MGC Board that he would be retiring from active leadership in about a year and was willing to train an apprentice. He is our second Civil Records Director, having succeeded Shirley Barnes at her retirement. We will all miss Bernie. He knew the legislative system and gave us all great support in dealing with it. MGC has been a lucky organization to have had two such capable people in this important position.

The MGC Board has also decided to procure a student intern to support our legislative agenda. We are actively looking at local universities with government degrees to find the right program and person.

Bernie has given us a job description for the Civil Records Director position. It is printed in this newsletter. We are actively recruiting for the position now. Please let us know about capable, competent people in your organizations who can take on this job or serve on the Civil Records Committee.

## Calling all volunteers: MGC Director of Civil Records position is open & members needed to volunteer for NERGC 2011

# Civil Records Report

## POSITION AVAILABLE: DIRECTOR OF CIVIL RECORDS

This is a volunteer position for a highly motivated candidate, able to organize and encourage enrollment by a team of volunteers, and to lead the Civil Records Committee.

### PURPOSE OF POSITION

Consult with the MGC Executive Board:

- To produce state legislation proposals that enhance the preservation of, and continued public access to, the Vital Records of the Commonwealth.
- To obtain committed support, and pursuit of these objectives on Beacon Hill, in order to garner sponsors to support and to pass proposed legislation and to enforce same. This includes legislators and their leadership, and the Executive Branch, i.e., the Governor, who must sign the new law and also appoints the executive officer of the Department of Public Health (the position responsible for the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics).
- To enlist the Secretary of the Commonwealth and the State Archivist and the Supervisor of Public Records in support of our concerns.
- To generate enthusiastic support among genealogists and their respective societies and organizations, as well as among associated organizations of affiliated stakeholders of these proposals, such as the Massachusetts historical organizations, newspaper publishers, academic institutions, funeral directors, private investigators, and probate researchers.

Note that these responsibilities are shared concerns of the entire Board, as well as most genealogists (not only in Massachusetts), as well as many of our

legislators and many of the affiliated stakeholders. However, the volunteering candidate for DIRECTOR OF CIVIL RECORDS would be the spearhead of the effort.

The effort must include regular and persistent trips to the State House to engage many state representatives and senators, and their staff members, especially Chiefs of Staff. These will include frequent, even weekly visits, such that you become recognized by those who can see to the passage of our proposed legislation and prevention of wrongful proposals. You represent the genealogical community as an advocate for the rule of law that governs continuing and future access to and preservation of state records.

### JOB DESCRIPTION FROM MGC BYLAWS

Civil Records Director as directed by the Council shall:

- a. Act as representative to present legislation and recommend adoption of policies in the interest of genealogists at legislative and administrative hearings, special meetings, seminars and such other assemblies.
- b. One of the members of the Civil Records Committee shall be a member of the Special Vital Records and Statistics Committee established by Chapter 46 of the Mass. General Laws (M.G.L.).
- c. Act on behalf of the Council when immediate decision and alternate action must be taken at said hearings and assemblies.
- d. Keep abreast of national, state and local proceedings governing the concerns of genealogists.

- e. Obtain and file all legislation and policies recommended.
- f. File a written report of the action taken and the results of such action.

Contact MGC President Barbara Mathews, [president@massgencouncil.org](mailto:president@massgencouncil.org).

## Volunteers Needed for NERGC 2011

*Christine Bard, Volunteer Chair for NERGC 2011, is recruiting volunteers and has sent this request:*

Please sign up now to volunteer by contacting me directly (see contact information below). State that you wish your volunteer time to be allotted to MGC and identify for which of the following task(s), with the day(s) and time(s), you want to volunteer.

- Registration
- Hospitality
- Hall Traffic Control
- Signage
- Session Door or Introduce Speaker\*
- Workshop Introduce Speaker\*
- Evaluations before & after sessions
- Society Fair Assistance
- Meal or Hosted Meal\* Ticket collection
- Audio Visual (need a general knowledge of computers, LCD projectors, and general A/V is recommended)

If you are bringing a spouse, family member, or friend along for the ride they can help out as well. They don't have to be registered for the conference to volunteer for most volunteer opportunities except those noted by\*.

For each hour volunteered you will receive a raffle ticket for daily raffles.

Thanks,  
Christine Bard  
NERGC 2011 Volunteer Chair  
11 Brickyard Drive  
Litchfield, NH 03052  
[bardc@comcast.net](mailto:bardc@comcast.net) – email preferred  
(603) 493-8767 (cell)

# NEWSLETTER



## Spotlight on Member Societies: Friends of NARA-Pittsfield

by Janet Rogge (*Friends' President*)  
and Barbara Mathews, CG

The western half of Massachusetts is represented in the genealogical world by the Friends of NARA-Pittsfield. The group was established in 1995 as the Friends of the Silvio O. Conte National Archives in order to support the new Pittsfield office of the National Archives. At that time, Pittsfield had been open for one year and had only two staff members, Walter Hickey and Jean Nudd. The facility still only has two staff members but the volunteer corps is the largest in the regional system of the National Archives.

Through membership fees, sales at conferences and in a small on-site store, donations, and an annual full-day genealogy conference held in September, the Friends raise funds which are used in the following ways:

- to increase the holdings of the Pittsfield branch by purchasing books and films at the recommendation of Friends' advisor, Archivist Jean Nudd
- to purchase online access to AmericanAncestors.org
- to maintain memberships in various organizations and societies
- to publish a quarterly newsletter, *Archival Anecdotes*
- to sponsor events of interest to genealogists, such as Irish day, Ethnic Day, and a lecture by Steve Morse
- to co-sponsor the annual Flag Day program
- to provide two annual parties and gifts to honor Pittsfield's volunteers and to provide gifts for the volunteers at the Waltham facility in recognition of their work
- to maintain a website, [www.narafriends-pittsfield.org](http://www.narafriends-pittsfield.org) (see site for further information)

- to fund special projects, such as the creation of a CD, *The First Ten Years of Archival Anecdotes*

A full-day conference, "Life in the Past Lane," celebrated its seventh year in 2010. The conference draws genealogists from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York. It included four lectures and a vendor hall in addition to lunch.

Recognizing and rewarding Pittsfield's volunteers is a very important function of the Friends. In a day when many records are available online and accessible from home, our patrons discover that their research, including that done online, is more productive when working with a volunteer. Volunteers and staff have tips for getting better search results and they are familiar with the ways various sites function.

The Friends and Pittsfield's staff have won national recognition for service to the genealogical community:

- *Archival Anecdotes* placed second in the National Genealogical Society newsletter competition in the Major Genealogical or Historical Society category in 2001 and again in 2009.
- Vice President Gore's "Hammer Award" in 1997 went to the Friends and the Pittsfield NARA staff for outstanding service and for reinventing government operations through their close collaboration while saving \$70,000.
- The Friends nominated Jean Nudd for a National Genealogical Society Award of Merit in 2010 which she was awarded last April.

## Renovation Underway at NARA in Waltham

by Barbara Mathews, CG

At an open house held August 26, 2010, NARA's Regional Administrator Diane LeBlanc explained the upcoming construction plans for the National Archives at Boston located at 380 Trapelo Road in Waltham, MA. Attending were over two dozen genealogists representing societies in Massachusetts, including MGC's president and vice president Melinde Sanborn, CG, FASG. Several other attendees were MGC delegates.

The construction will increase the size of both the research room where original records are used and the processing room where staff and volunteers work on original records. It will also re-gear what was formerly the microfilm reading room/reference room to create more

flexible space to be used for exhibit space, school programs, and programs for the general public. The number of computers in the reference room will also increase. Begun in November 2010, the construction is scheduled to be completed in April 2011.

Because the construction will curb or limit reference room access, Administrator LeBlanc advocated for a temporary Modular Classroom building to be included in the plans. The good news for New England genealogists is that she was successful. A Modular Classroom was installed in the NARA parking lot at Waltham, necessitating a two-day visitor closure—the only closure scheduled during the entire construction project. Through the classroom, we

*Renovation Underway continued on p. 6*

Check out the partial inventory lists of naturalization records and military records available at NARA–Waltham using their free access to Footnote, Ancestry, Heritage Quest, and ProQuest

## The Benefits of NARA's Computer Resources: Rich, Varied, Free

What if I told you that, in one room, with free parking, you can have unlimited free access to four critical and expensive subscription databases used for genealogy? Would you be willing to listen more? Please, then, listen on.

Every NARA facility has computer terminals now. They have replaced nearly 75% of the old microfilm readers in Waltham alone. The subscription databases you can access for free on the NARA computers at Waltham are:

- Footnote
- Ancestry

- Heritage Quest
- ProQuest

During the renovations discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, a double-wide classroom built in the parking lot will continue to give genealogists and researchers access to the records in Waltham. NARA staff members suggest you call ahead first in the case of archival materials so that those records can be pulled for your arrival.

To aid genealogists in the use of the subscription databases, NARA staff has prepared several finding aids. These aids

focus on those topics we have come to associate with NARA's holdings—naturalizations and military records, to name two. Footnote and Ancestry tend to have more materials in these areas. This is not to belittle the Heritage Quest and ProQuest materials, which have superior strengths in other types of documents.

*Note:* All of the subscription database companies are continually adding records to their treasure troves. As a result, the listing below can only be considered the tip of the iceberg.

### PARTIAL LISTS OF AVAILABLE NATURALIZATION RECORDS

#### On Ancestry

##### Indexes:

- o Connecticut (some records) 1790–1906
- o New York City Courts to 1906

##### Records:

- o Massachusetts, U.S. District Court, 1906–1929
- o New York City's U.S. District Courts in Manhattan and Brooklyn, index to petitions, 1865–1929
- o Pennsylvania, Middle (1906–1930), Eastern (1795–1930), and Western (1912–1929) Districts
- o Maine, U.S. District Court, 1912–1929

#### On Footnote

##### Indexes:

- o Naturalization petitions, Massachusetts, U.S. District Court, 1906–1966
- o Naturalization petitions, Massachusetts, U.S. District and Circuit Courts, 1906–1929
- o Naturalization petitions, New York City, all city, state and federal courts, 1792–1906
- o Declarations of intention, Manhattan, 1917–1937

##### Records:

- o Naturalization records, Massachusetts, U.S. District and Circuit Courts, 1906–1929
- o Petitions for Naturalization
  - Eastern District of New York [Brooklyn] (1865–1937)
  - Southern District of New York [Manhattan and Bronx] (1897–1944);
  - Western District of New York (1907–1966)
- o Pennsylvania, Middle (1906–1930), Eastern (1795–1930), and Western (1820–1911 or 1930) Districts

### PARTIAL LISTS OF AVAILABLE MILITARY RECORDS

#### On Ancestry

##### Revolutionary War:

- o Bounty Land Warrants used in the U.S. Military District of Ohio
- o Ledgers of Payments, 1818–1872

##### War of 1812:

- o Index to pension application files
- o Bounty Land Warrants, 1815–1858

##### Civil War:

- o General Index to Pension Files, 1861–1934
- o Index to Case Files of Disapproved Pension Applications
- o 1890 U.S. Census Schedules Enumerating Union Veterans and Widows
- o Consolidated Index to Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers

##### Military:

- o Index to general correspondence of the Record and Pension Office, 1889–1904
- o Register of Enlistments in the U.S. Army, 1798–1914

#### On Footnote

##### Revolutionary War:

- o Pension Publications
- o Final Payment Vouchers Index, 1818–1874

##### Civil War:

- o Confederate Soldier Service Records
- o Union Soldier Service Records
- o Confederate Amnesty Papers
- o Confederate Citizens File
- o Index to veterans of Civil and later Wars
- o Widows' Pensions
- o Matthew Brady's Civil War photos
- o Civil War maps
- o Lincoln Assassination Papers

##### U.S. Navy:

- o Survivors' Certificates
- o Widows' Certificates

# NEWSLETTER

## Brophy's Corner



Michael Brophy  
program@massgencouncil.org

With the success of the two recent big genealogy TV shows—*Who Do You Think You Are?*, from NBC via the United Kingdom, and *Faces of America*, from Henry Louis Gates and PBS—genealogy has never been more popular. Consider the following—the behemoth of the industry, Ancestry.com, reported these statistics:

- Subscribers totaled 1,377,000 at the end of the third quarter of 2010, a **34% increase** over the end of the third quarter of 2009 and a 5% increase over the end of the second quarter of 2010.
- Gross subscriber additions were 252,000 in the third quarter of 2010, a **58% increase** over the third quarter of 2009 and a 13% decline from the second quarter of 2010, reflecting the continued success of marketing programs in the quarter and the difficult sequential comparison due to strong subscriber additions from the airing of *Who Do You Think You Are?* early in the second quarter.
- Total revenue for the third quarter of 2010 was \$79.3 million, an increase of 39.2% over \$57.0 million in the prior year period.

## Genealogy is Hot!

- Operating income for the third quarter of 2010 was \$19.3 million, compared to \$7.9 million in the prior year period.

Speaking of Ancestry, our own New England Historic Genealogy Society in Boston (NEHGS) teamed up with the Utah big guys to put on two highly successful Boston Family History Days this year. The first was at the Boston Westin Copley Place in the spring and the second in October at the World Trade Center on the South Boston Waterfront.

Both events sold out in a short period of time and according to everyone I spoke to, they were wildly successful. I attended both events and acted as a consultant to attendees to offer advice on their brick walls and general research questions. The volume of traffic was enormous and the shows were well organized. I can assure you I was busy from the beginning of the day until the end!

In April of this year, the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) announced that membership surpassed the two thousand member mark for the first time in its thirty-plus year history. "This milestone comes at a time when interest in genealogy is mushrooming, as both a pastime and a profession," said APG President Laura Prescott. The organization now has twenty-three chapters worldwide and even an online chapter on the web site Second Life. This one has to be seen to be believed.

So why all the buzz? A sudden rise in interest in family medical history? A membership drive by the DAR? I think not.

I love what one of Henry Louis Gates' subjects replied: Genealogical study gives us a new perspective on ourselves. It connects us to a part of ourselves that has laid dormant for many of us for most

of our lives. It opens up conversations between family members that otherwise would not happen.

The most memorable quote from the *Who Do You Think You Are?* series? It came from the least likely of subjects—football star Emmitt Smith. "We are standing on the shoulders of giants," he said, recalling his journey back to Africa. The man was obviously deeply affected by the discoveries of his African-American heritage that gave him a whole new perspective on himself.

Sometimes wisdom can come from the least likely of sources—a Hall of Fame football player.

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### *Renovation Underway continued*

will be able to continue to access the computerized materials of the Waltham facility and to use a few microfilm readers.

The services that NARA/Waltham provides will continue in place throughout construction. If you plan a visit, be sure to read their Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list online at <http://www.archives.gov/northeast/boston/renovation-faqs.html>.

To ease this period for both staff and researchers, please heed the FAQ's suggestion to call ahead if you are planning to access archival materials. Because the Modular Classroom is separated from the building, the staff appreciates having sufficient time to retrieve materials for you. That contact information is:

National Archives at Boston  
380 Trapelo Road  
Waltham, Massachusetts  
02452-6399

Phone: (781) 663-0130

Fax: (781) 663-0154

E-mail: [waltham.archives@nara.gov](mailto:waltham.archives@nara.gov)

# *Exploring New Paths to Your Roots*

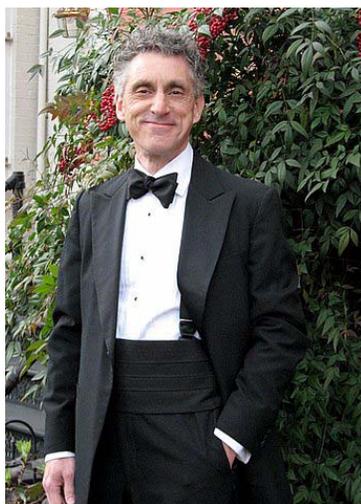
11th New England Regional Genealogical Conference



**6-10 April 2011**  
**Springfield, Massachusetts**

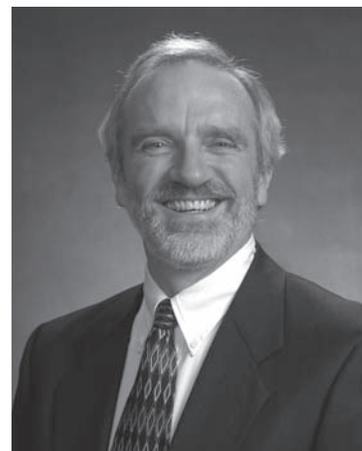
Featuring over 50 genealogical experts and 100 informative lectures, workshops, the Ancestors Road Show, Librarians and Teachers Day, and popular Special Interest Groups.

## **National Speakers**



### **John Philip Colletta**

Entertaining, knowledgeable and experienced, John Philip Colletta is a popular lecturer. For 21 years he taught workshops at the National Archives and courses for the Smithsonian Institution. Dr. Colletta is a faculty member of the Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research at Samford University and the Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy. His publications include articles, two manuals, and one “murder-mystery-family-history.”



### **Paul Milner**

Paul Milner, a native of northern England, is a professional genealogist and lecturer. Paul has specialized in British Isles genealogical research for 30 years. He is the author of several books on English and Scottish genealogical research. He has been designing workshops and lecturing to a wide variety of audiences for over 35 years.

***More information at***  
***[www.nergc.org](http://www.nergc.org)***

# Massachusetts Genealogical Council



## Membership Form

*In this time of assault on access to vital records, the Massachusetts Genealogical Council shoulders the burden of defending the interests of the genealogical and historical community and of enlightening our legislators. It is a hard fight, which we all must support.*

Membership Status (Membership Year runs January 1 - December 31):

- New
- Renewal

**Join us or renew your membership today!**

Membership Category:

- \$10 - Individual (newsletter subscription, *Annual Seminar* discount)
- \$15 - Family (must reside in same household, 1 newsletter subscription, 2 eligible for *Annual Seminar* discount)
- \$20 - Organization (available to not-for-profits such as libraries, genealogical and historical societies)

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZATION (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

PRESIDENT \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

DELEGATE TO MGC \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

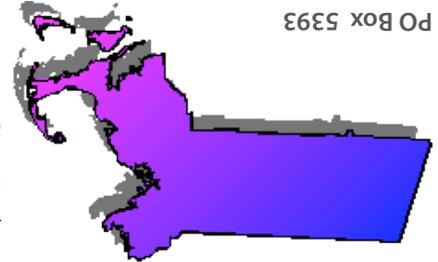
**Save a Tree**  
(and save MGC postage)  
By default, the quarterly newsletter will be emailed.  
If you prefer a paper copy, please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_.

Make checks payable to: **Massachusetts Genealogical Council**  
Mail to: **MGC, P.O. Box 5393, Cochituate, MA 01778-5393**

**MGC has a number of committees that work on various projects. If you are interested in getting involved, please indicate your interest(s) and we will contact you!**

\_\_\_\_\_ Legislative (vital record access issues) \_\_\_\_\_ Publications (newsletter, website)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Education & Events (annual seminar) \_\_\_\_\_ Membership & Publicity

# Massachusetts Genealogical Council



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