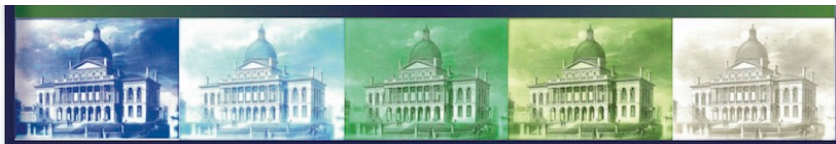




MASSACHUSETTS GENEALOGICAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER



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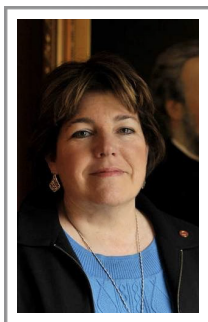
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President's Column



MGC has been occupied with legislative issues all year long. In the fall we testified on Beacon Hill in opposition to Massachusetts bills HB-603 and HB-609 which threatened to

close vital records. Happily, those bills still remain in the study stage.

Nationally, threats to the Social Security Death Master File have repeatedly surfaced. The tone in hearings at the Capitol has been discouragingly dismissive of genealogists, but this insult only served as a catalyst for activists to keep public records open. MGC re-established communications with the Records Preservation and Access Committee (RPAC), and appointed a Massachusetts state liaison. We have publicly advocated for open access on the national level by writing to committees, congressmen and concerned citizens to clarify where identity fraud actually originates (not with genealogists!) I've spoken on FGS radio and Blogtalk Radio about these issues and about MGC in general.

Finally, we've harnessed the power of social media to educate and recruit genealogists who will speak out on these issues. Our presence on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn is growing and word is getting out to greater numbers of genealogists.

In order to educate the public about these issues we are searching for ways to increase our membership. We started on the administrative front by refining the infrastructure of the organization: bringing our bylaws up to date, adding features to our website that allow us to reduce the time involved in administrative tasks, and streamlining communications. Our finances were audited and we are considering incorporation as a first step to becoming an official non-profit. We've taken some cost-cutting measures, such as providing the seminar syllabus as a free download. Now that our ducks are in a row we are ready to bring in some organizational members.

We started a new blog, the *MGC Sentinel*, which provides timely updates on legislation and other MGC news.

For many years MGC has produced wonderful annual seminars. This year we reached out to sponsors in order to provide more sessions *and* keep costs down so that we managed to offer registration at an even lower price than last year!

In an effort to encourage genealogical and historical societies, libraries, and others to join MGC as organizational members, we intend to introduce some benefits. All suggestions from member societies will be considered. What can MGC do for you?

All in all it has been a busy year and we look forward to a successful year to come.

Polly FitzGerald Kimmitt, CG

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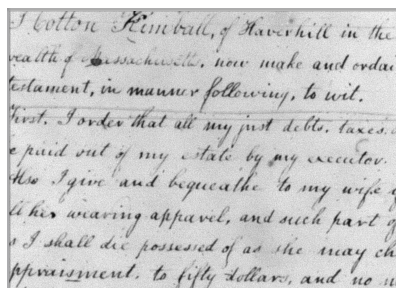


2012 Seminar Sponsored By...

For many years MGC has produced wonderful annual seminars. This year we reached out to sponsors in order to provide more sessions *and* keep costs down. We were thus able to expand the number of tracks to five and include two for-pay workshops, thanks to Gold Level sponsors NEHGS, NEAPG, Ancestry.com, the BU Certificate in Genealogical Research Program, and the Mt. Vernon Group; Bronze Level sponsor TIARA; plus sponsorship of individual talks from NEHGS, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston, fold3 and the Friends of Ruth Barber. With that experience under our belts we hope to use any profits we realize to reduce the cost of attendance for next year's seminar. Though we offered a reduced member rate this year at only \$60, we would like to bring the cost down even further next year. Thanks to our generous sponsors we may be able to achieve that goal!

FamilySearch Advisory Group

MGC is coordinating with the FamilySearch Content Strategy team to create an advisory group whose purpose will be to advise FamilySearch on which Massachusetts records they digitize. This will help preserve some currently endangered Massachusetts records, and will ensure that Massachusetts genealogists have input into these important decisions. A few of our member organizations (NEAPG, NEHGS, TIARA, MSOG) have already appointed representatives to this committee which we expect will meet soon for the first time.



BOSTON STATE HOUSE

The Massachusetts State House, or the "New" State House, is in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston, and sometimes also referred to simply as Beacon Hill.

The State House is where the offices of the governor of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts General Court can be found.

Although completed in 1798, well after the end of the Revolutionary War, this red brick building embodies the self-governance ideals for which the Patriots fought.

Paul Revere and Samuel Adams laid its cornerstone on July 4, 1795. They envisioned this neo-Palladium style building on top of Boston's Beacon Hill as a temple to democracy.

The oldest building on Beacon Hill, it was designed by Charles Bulfinch who also designed the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. The huge golden dome and white Doric columns are best viewed from Boston Common and Park Street. The dome was re-gilded in 1997 with 23k gold at a cost of \$300,000.

Despite being used by the Massachusetts state government, it contains many museum-quality treasures inside and out.



MGC Has a Blog!

We're very excited to introduce our new blog, the *MGC Sentinel*. In case you are not familiar with the term, a blog is a page on the internet which can be frequently updated in order to provide news to readers when it happens. If you have an internet connection, you can go to the Massachusetts Genealogical Council's website at <http://www.massgencouncil.org> and click on the blue "MGC Blog" tab. That will bring you to a page with the header you see here. With this new vehicle of communication we hope to provide another source of information on issues concerning legislation that threatens access to public records.

The *MGC Sentinel* will not be restricted to legislative issues, however—we will also provide updates about our annual seminar and anything else we think might interest members of the genealogical community. It will be free and open to the public.

You will note that our new blog's logo has repetitions of the Boston State House in different colors and intensities. This is meant to reflect the different reactions that we all have as individuals to one fact. We all see things differently. We will showcase a variety of authors, each writing in his or her individual voice, mostly MGC Executive Board members, but occasionally we would like to host guest bloggers as well. It is my fervent wish that readers will leave comments telling us their own experiences in making their voices heard on Capitol Hill and in their local state governments. It is our aim to make sure that by displaying all of the colors and letting all voices be heard we will come out with a true representation of the facts.

MGC Supports House Bill 3043

MGC supports legislation designed to expand the resources and accessibility of materials used in historical research, but it is much more common to encounter legislation that blocks public access, hence we often find ourselves in battle mode.

It is always a pleasure to be able to support rather than oppose a bill, for so many reasons. First, it is just a more positive activity. Much more importantly, we become allies in the legislative process, rather than foes. And isn't it preferable to work *with* legislators than against them? If we are supporters then our influence seems much more natural, we come across as the experts we are, and we gather respect rather than disdain.

So it is with delight that MGC announces support of Massachusetts House Bill 3043 - An Act Relative to Records Open to Public Inspection. Our Massachusetts Civil Records Director, Mary Ellen Grogan, constantly monitors bills proposed at the Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill. Thanks to Mary Ellen's diligent efforts, we are today sending out the following information to all of the members of the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight.

MGC strongly supports HB3043 which is currently before the Committee. The bill concerns access to records in the custody of the Secretary of State of Massachusetts. In practice, this refers to materials held by the State Archives. This bill clarifies some questions that have been raised concerning access to old records held at the State Archives. The bill simply confirms that "all records in the custody of the state secretary which are ninety years old or older will be open for public inspection". This is a reasonable standard for access to information. More recent records are open for inspection with certain defined limits (MGL chapter 4, section 7). HB3043 will require no additional cost to implement. In fact, it will free staff time at the State Archives to address issues of access to more recent documents of interest to government agencies and the press. It will permit them to be more productive and effective in their work.

We strongly urge the members of the Joint Committee to report HB3043 favorably; the bill ought to pass. Our members are in favor of this bill and will actively support its passage.

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The Death Master File (DMF), known to genealogists as the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) is a list of Social Security numbers of people now deceased whose numbers may never be used again. It was created by the Social Security Administration to address pension and benefit fraud, and when used properly, it does just that. It is considered a public document under the Freedom of Information Act, and is sold only by the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) of the U.S. Department of Commerce to commercial entities, of which only 1% are genealogical in nature.

What You Can Do About Threats to the Social Security Death Index

There is legislation afoot to close public access to the Death Master File (DMF). But since fraud is curbed by consulting it, taking it away isn't going to help! That's like publicizing a list of convicted predators, and then taking it away because not everyone consulted it and someone was victimized.

Arguments Against Open Access

There are two main objections to the DMF remaining public. The first is the illegal use of the SSNs of deceased children to claim deductions on income tax returns. What the criminals are doing is reprehensible, but does not warrant removing this important tool from our hands, especially since there are much better ways to control it. There is no indication that the numbers were taken from genealogical websites. More likely they were sold "out the back door" by unscrupulous workers. Several articles in the *Huffington Post*, including "Why Thieves are Stealing Childhood

Cancer Victims' Identities," explored the problem in detail and offer potential solutions such as heavy punishment for those who knowingly use the social security number of another person.

Parents should question the advisability of obtaining numbers for newborns, a practice that was encouraged starting in the 1980s. The United States forbids national identity requirements, and SSNs are not needed until used for employment and tax purposes. In addition, the Social Security card itself requires a signature, which means that parents are holding on to unsigned cards for fifteen or more years!

The only time the DMF does not stop fraud is when it is not used. Certain governmental agencies, the IRS in particular, are not consulting the DMF. If the IRS did actually examine it, the problem of criminals using the Social Security numbers (SSNs) of deceased children to claim tax deductions would not exist. The

DMF is, in fact, the *only* control we have against criminal use of SSNs.

The second reason given for closing the DMF is that numbers of *living* people are erroneously being entered into the Death Master File. When this happens, everything stops for that poor individual: no benefits, no driver's license, no mortgage, no identity. We've all heard the "I'm sorry, Ma'am, but you're dead," stories, and they are horrifying. It takes these unfortunate people years to reclaim their identities. But this is a result of a lack of quality control within the Social Security Administration (SSA) that has nothing to do with public access. Errors in inputting could be introduced at any point in a long chain of processing, and as genealogists we know the increased likelihood of error each time a number is transcribed or copied. How does eliminating our access to the DMF stop this problem? It doesn't. It just means that we can't discover what the problem is on our

own. It creates a curtain between us and records about ourselves that should not exist.

Some say the government could grant access to other entities. Financial institutions, hospitals, universities, funeral directors, credit agencies, attorneys and yes, genealogists all use the DMF on a daily basis. But who will decide which of these deserves access?

Most casual genealogists are researching far into the past and do not need the social security entries for anything other than establishing correct identity before moving backwards in time. As vital records in more and more states get restricted, the SSDI becomes an ever more important tool to beginning a genealogical search. Professionals work as heir-searchers, helping to settle estates, clear titles and testify as expert witnesses in court cases. Others work on repatriation cases for the US military. The recovered remains of previously unaccounted-for servicemen need to be identified via DNA obtainable only through proven family members. And primary next of kin is determined by genealogists. Case workers in repatriation cases use the SSDI every day, over and over again. Without it they will become much less efficient at what they do.

How You Can Help

If this were all about me, I probably wouldn't care. I'd just take a lot longer to research each case, make more money and forget about it. But it isn't about me. It's about keeping our government transparent, efficient and sensible. I work under contract for the US Army, and as such am paid by them, albeit indirectly. The taxpayers are paying me, and I don't want to waste our money.

We all need to get to know our congressmen and women and let them know that genealogy stimulates

business, brings patrons into libraries and archives, generates millions of tourist dollars, and is an important field to a nation composed largely of immigrants. Without open access to public records we cannot research our past. I'm hoping genealogists at all levels will get involved.

Follow RPAC, the Records Preservation and Access Committee, a joint committee with representatives from the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), the National Genealogical Society (NGS), and the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS). RPAC's legal team works behind the scenes with politicians and legislators to help ensure that access to public records remains open. They are looking for some state liaisons in order to be able to reach out and educate genealogists across the country on issues of public access. Is your state one of them?

Subscribe to the MGC and RPAC blogs to stay current with what is happening.

Another place for genealogists to gather around this cause is the Occupy Genealogy group on Facebook. An

enthusiastic group, it is still relatively unstructured but has lots of members who are passionate about this issue. Social networking is a fantastic way to get the word out to many, many people.

Although there is no critical legislation at this moment, there *are* things you can do now. Get to get to know your members of Congress ahead of time so that you already have a relationship with them *before* you call them about particular bills. Let them know you are a constituent and that you are passionate about this issue. Tell them your concerns now, and they will remember you when they encounter laws that close access to public records. We all want to prevent identity fraud, but in a way that remains true to American democracy. Let's keep these records open for ourselves and our descendants!

*"The only time
the DMF does
not stop fraud
is when it is not
used."*

MGC's Member Societies

Allen County Public Library

Beverly Historical Society

Boston Public Library

Cape Cod Genealogical Society

Central Massachusetts Genealogical Society

DAR Library

Falmouth Genealogical Society

Genealogical Roundtable

Greater Lowell Genealogy Club

Irish Ancestral Research Association

Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston

Massachusetts Society of Genealogists

New England Chapter, Association of Professional Genealogists

New England Historic Genealogical Society

Old Colony Historical Society

Waltham Historical Society

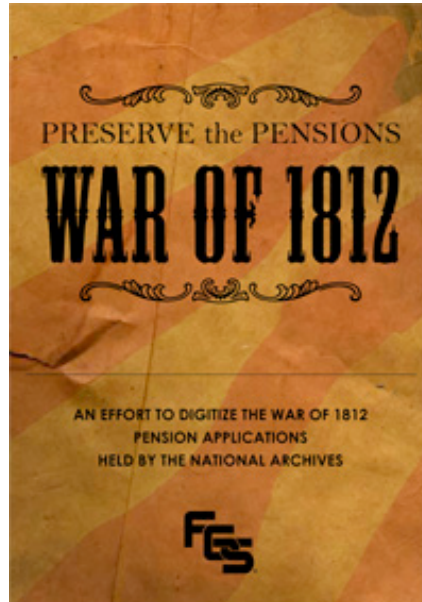
YOUR SOCIETY!

Remembering the War of 1812

Did you know that June marked the 200th anniversary of the start of the War of 1812? If you are like most Americans you have very little knowledge of the circumstances of that war, but as genealogists it behooves us to learn more! We can be especially appreciative of the efforts of the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) to digitize and provide free access to the 1812 pension files.

In conjunction with the National Archives & Records Administration (NARA), fold3, and Ancestry.com, FGS is helping to digitize 180,000 pension applications representing an estimated 7.2 million pages of War of 1812 Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files. The collection will be available for free on fold3's website. FGS has targeted the War of 1812 Pension Applications as a high priority project based on the value of the content for genealogists as well as the importance of preserving the fragile records.

FGS is actively seeking donations from genealogical and historical societies, patriotic and military heritage societies, as well as interested corporations and individuals. Ancestry.com and fold3 are providing a dollar-for-dollar match of each donation through a provision of services. To learn more and contribute to the Preserve the Pensions project, visit www.fgs.org/1812.



FGS announced the donation of a generous gift in the amount of \$135,000 from the estate of the late Jon Stedman in memory of his mother, Ardath Stedman.

Another exciting announcement was made that in recognition of the importance of this digitization effort, the Illinois Genealogical Society has issued the ISGS \$10,000 War of 1812 Pension Match Challenge. ISGS will MATCH any donation up to the first \$10,000 that is made before December 31, 2012. This means that if you donate \$10, ISGS will match your donation with another \$10; if you give \$100, ISGS will give \$100. In addition, Ancestry.com has announced it will also match the overall amount donated by ISGS, which means that the \$10,000 raised plus the \$10,000 in matching donations will become \$40,000! Your \$10 donation actually becomes \$40 to help digitize these files!

The Massachusetts Genealogical Council wants to do our part, so we will start collecting donations for the Illinois Genealogical Society fundraising effort the day after our Annual Meeting and Seminar on July 21st, 2012.

The donation to the Preserve the Pensions – War of 1812 Pension Digitization Fund will be used to help preserve and digitize War of 1812 Pension records.

Want Perks?

In an effort to encourage genealogical and historical societies, libraries, and others to join MGC as organizational members, we intend to introduce some benefits, including those that follow. All suggestions from member societies will be considered. Let us know what MGC can do for you! Together we are much more effective! Here are some of our current ideas.

- Affiliate programs with discounts on products and subscription databases
- A free presentation by MGC at your society meeting on MGC's activities in legislation
- Publicizing member organizations on our website
- Creation of a Speakers Bureau where speakers can post their specialties and societies can go to find interesting and different speakers
- Potential for your society to participate in the FamilySearch Advisory Group.



MASSACHUSETTS GENEALOGICAL COUNCIL

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MGC MEMBERSHIP FORM

Thank you for your interest in the MASSACHUSETTS GENEALOGICAL COUNCIL

For over 30 years, MGC has safeguarded researchers' access to Public Records in Massachusetts and has provided educational programs for the genealogical community. With your help, our mission will continue!

Your MGC membership gives you the opportunity to make a **real difference** by making your voice heard when efforts are made to restrict access to Public Records in Massachusetts.

Membership privileges include:

- Direct updates on legislative action
- Participation in MGC's Board meetings
- MGC's Newsletter
- Discount on MGC Seminar Registration when you **join/renew by DECEMBER 31ST**

Organization Membership also includes:

- Spotlight Column about your Organization on MGC's website and in the Newsletter
- Your events in MGC's online calendar
- One vendor table at MGC's Annual Seminar

Membership Type

☐ \$10.⁰⁰ - Individual ☐ \$20.⁰⁰ - Organization ☐ \$15.⁰⁰ - Family

Note: Membership Year is from **January 1 to December 31**. MGC dues are not tax deductible.

Individual & Family

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Email* _____ Phone _____

Organization

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
President _____ Email* _____
MGC Delegate _____ Email* _____

Save a Tree!

(and save MGC postage)

By default, the MGC Newsletter is emailed. If you require a paper copy, please initial here: ☐

***IMPORTANT!** Please include an **email address**. MGC shares updates on legislative action and our Annual Seminar almost entirely through email, our website and social media. We use MailChimp, a no-spam email service for our *Calls to Action*. Put **president@massgencouncil.org** on your approved list in order to receive MGC's Bulletins. Friend and follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Twitter](#).

Make check payable to: **Massachusetts Genealogical Council**

Print form and mail to: **Treasurer - MGC**

P.O. Box 600565, Newtonville, MA 02460-0005

Interests

MGC is an all-volunteer organization. Please tell us which areas you are interested in volunteering.

☐ Monitoring Legislation ☐ Education & Events ☐ Publicity ☐ Newsletter



Massachusetts enacted its first law ensuring that public records be open in 1641. The 1641 Massachusetts Body of Liberties stated:

"Every inhabitant of the Countrie shall have free libertie to search and veeue any Rooles, Records, or Regesters of any Court or office except the Councill, And to have a transcript or exemplification thereof written examined, and signed by the hand of the officer of the office paying the appointed fees therfore."

What is MGC?

The Massachusetts Genealogical Council (MGC) was founded in 1980 and is the umbrella organization representing Massachusetts genealogists, historical societies and all those concerned about records preservation and free and unfettered access to civil records.

All historical researchers owe it to themselves to advocate for open public records. MGC serves as the records access watchdog and provides a counterpoint to the Massachusetts Legislature regarding access issues. Thanks in large part to efforts by MGC, genealogists are able to access all Massachusetts vital records located in the State Archives and Registry of Vital Records.

MGC holds a yearly seminar packed with multiple tracks of genealogical lectures and workshops, networking and book sales. This is our way of connecting the genealogical community. We hope you will become more aware and active in the cause of keeping public records open and accessible.

Please consider joining the Massachusetts Genealogical Council, whether as an individual, genealogical society, library, historical society or family association. Anyone interested in preserving open access to public records is welcome!



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