



MTGS Messenger
Vol. 19, No. 4
July 2023
Jim Long, Editor

July Meeting – A Field Trip to Buchanan Log House

Our July meeting will take place at the usual day and time – **Saturday, July 15 at 1:00pm Central** – but not at the usual place!

Instead, we will gather at the [Buchanan Log House](#), 2910 Elm Hill Pike in Nashville (near Donelson Pike and the airport, just north of I-40), and remotely via Zoom.

Lu Mobley Hays Whitworth, Operations Director at Buchanan Log House, will share with us the story of James and Lucinda Buchanan, their children, and other families who have lived in this almost 220-year-old home. We will take a tour of the home and grounds, and maybe sneak over to the Buchanan Cemetery nearby.

Hope to see you there! Refreshments and freebie table will be available.

The Zoom link for the meeting is <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83295943928>



Dr. D Is Still Digging Up Ancestors

Longtime MTGS member and DNA guru Dr. Dave Dowell is presenting a free webinar on DNA testing titled, “**How and When Did Our European Ancestors Get to Europe?**” The webinar is hosted by [Legacy Family Tree Webinars](#), and takes place **Wednesday, August 2, at 1:00pm Central Time.**

Says Dr. D. of the talk, “We can trace the paths of ancestors far back into prehistory. We will never know their names or individual vital information. However BIG Y 700 and mtDNA tests now allow us to estimate the paths their haplogroups took as they migrated out of Africa and into Europe.”

The presentation is free to attend live. The recording will be accessible for free a few days thereafter, after which it will only be accessible to Legacy Family Tree subscribers.

Visit <https://familytreeweinars.com/webinar/how-and-when-did-our-european-ancestors-get-to-europe/> to register.



WPA should stand for Wow! Phenomenal Archive!

The Works Progress Administration (**WPA**) was a New Deal agency that funded public works projects in the late 1930s, renamed in 1939 to the Work Projects Administration. Thankfully for genealogists, one of the projects was a **Historical Records Survey** that sent people, pencils and paper into county courthouses to **transcribe early county records**. In 1939, WPA activities were handed off to willing state governments, and Tennessee said, "Sure!" Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, State Librarian & Archivist, sponsored the state efforts, with Mrs. Penelope Johnson Allen as the State Supervisor directing the regional supervisors and WPA workers.

Thankfully for Tennessee genealogists, the WPA project work is **well-preserved at the Tennessee State Library and Archives**. For decades, I have used the **typescripts** in the open stacks at TSLA – you know, those old books typed on *onion-skin paper*? Yeah, those books. It's a trick to photocopy them, but they're full of genealogical gold.

This past week, I have become delightfully acquainted with the WPA records that aren't neatly typed up and in the open stacks, but rather are stored in **hundreds of record boxes within the Manuscripts section at TSLA**. When the WPA projects ended, there were, invariably, transcriptions underway that came to a halt. They were never typed up, and therefore not nearly as accessible to researchers.

There is a fantastic Finding Aid for the collection – known as Record Group 2019-004 (Works Progress Administration Historical Records Survey, 1935-1943). It is on the TSLA website at https://tnsla.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/search/asset/22563/0

I looked at the Finding Aid to see what I might find for my favorite research locale, Stewart County. To my delight, I found:

- The transcription of a lost 1838-1848 marriage book. The typed version has been in the open stacks for years, but this is the handwritten basis for it, so that's better, right?
- 9 transcribed pages of a lost 1810-1820 Circuit Court minute book.
- 174 transcribed pages of a lost 1809-1814 Settlements, Wills and Bonds book.
- A list of the African-American cemeteries in the county.

- An inventory of the courthouse books that were *available* to WPA workers to transcribe. There were books listed that went missing prior to microfilming, and now I want to know where they are!
- The handwritten transcriptions of 3 deed books and 2 marriage books that were completed and typed, and have been available in the open stacks.

It was wonderful to locate “lost” records that no one had seen for decades – except the TSLA staff member who created the great Finding Aid (three cheers for William M. Thomas!)

If you find records of interest in the Finding Aid, you can contact the Reference staff at TSLA to seek more information or ask about copies. If you can visit TSLA in-person, you can use their [WPA catalog entry](#) to request specific boxes from the collection in advance of your visit.

Tennessee Supreme Court Case Files, Revisited



Hopefully you have at least *viewed* the vast inventory of [Tennessee Supreme Court case files](#) that are available at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. If your budget didn’t allow ordering a copy of a particular case file, keep checking the online inventory *anyway*.

Once anyone orders a digital copy of a case file, that case file becomes downloadable to everyone. When you search for cases of interest using the great Search feature, note the **PDFs** column at the right. If you see a hyperlink called “Case PDF,” click it to download that case file. You may also see a hyperlink saying “Opinion PDF,” which is a link to the opinions rendered in the case – typically an excerpt from one of the official Reports published after the Supreme Court session, but sometimes also an original document.

I love that the Supreme Court case files can fill in record gaps that may exist at the county level – either from county records that have not yet been processed, are inaccessible, or have been lost. Montgomery County, for example, lost the entirety of its Circuit Court records in a 1900 courthouse fire, but transcripts of hundreds (?) of its Chancery and Circuit Court case files are in the Supreme Court records.



DNA Prime Time

If you've somehow missed the fact that Amazon Prime Days were yesterday and today, and you were ***waiting*** for a great deal on DNA kits, here at the deals on offer there:

AncestryDNA: \$59.00

23andMe Health + Ancestry: \$98.99

FamilyTreeDNA Family Finder - \$79.00

On a Lighter Note...

Docket Diving

As genealogists, we steer towards the 'big' record sets when visiting a courthouse for research: wills, marriages, land records, birth/death, etc. And I've mused before about my favorite records – loose papers from court cases.

But I want to make a case for looking at the *docket books* in your favorite courthouse. The dockets were typically 'just' a listing of court cases to be heard each time a court met – a few times per year in most counties in the 1800s. A typical docket entry lists the names of the plaintiff and defendant. Sometimes you'll see the reason the case was being heard, the names of the attorneys, and the outcome of the case.



OK, so you're not going to find Grandma's maiden name in a court docket. Full Disclosure: I have found docket books rather *boring* to look at. However, docket books can be an alternative if the corresponding Minute Books have not survived.

Apparently, the Clerk sitting in this particular court room was also bored. Instead of writing out the genealogies of the plaintiffs and defendants, which would have been most helpful to us, he chose to sketch in the back cover of the book "**The Wild Woman of Cross Creek.**"