



# TWIG TALK

## Newsletter

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### TWIG TALK

A monthly publication of:  
**Muskegon County Genealogical Society**  
 c/o Hackley Public Library  
 Torrent House  
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Celebrating 50 years in 2022

### President's Message

By Dawn Westcomb Kelley -

Wishing all of you to stay safe and healthy and knowing that all of you would like to get back the way it ways. It will take time. It is very hard to be patient. Please encourage everyone that you talk to and see. Well wishes go out to Nancy Spoon, Tom Porritt, Pat Straley, Bill Hansen and the ones that I have missed.

### INFO

#### Collateral Research

Sometimes when you cannot find your ancestors, you need to do a collateral research. A collateral relative is any blood relative who is not your direct ancestor, such as

Monthly Meeting  
June 11, 2020

**CANCELLED!**



cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and siblings.



Just a reminder to back up your computer  
On June 1.

### LIBRARY INFO

Hackley Public Library and the Torrent House and Genealogy Department will closed until further notice.

### GENEALOGY SAYING and Quotes

Some family trees have beautiful leaves, and some have just a bunch of nuts. Remember, it is the nuts that make the tree worth shaking. – Unknown

## MARKING TIME

### From Plot to Grave

By Cristine Bouwkamp  
Superior Monument/Patten Monument Co.

It's no surprise that new traditional family plots have decreased over the years. It's noticeable in just about every cemetery that these plots are no longer being built the way they once were.

Family plots often consisted of 8 -12 graves in a square section. The lots were purchased by the patriarch of a family, and individual graves were used as needed by members of that family. We see many examples of them in cemeteries. They are distinct by the large monument that sits in the center of the plot bearing a family name. These monuments are exquisite pieces of craftsmanship and artistry from a bygone era of hand carving and round raised lettering. Family plots were often framed by coping (granite curbing) that was laid along the perimeter of the plot. The smaller markers that surround the central family monument usually match in size, shape and color of granite. The wonderful thing about these markers is that you will find generations of a family all together. Names and dates inscribed in stone can lead us through their history.

Over the years, the decline of family plots has been impacted by several factors. Family size decreased drastically after 1950, then again after 1990. Cemeteries started implementing more rules regarding the size of markers allowed. And most notably, families are no longer living near each other. At some point it became more common to be buried in the town where a person passed than to be sent back to the town where they grew up.

As cremation rates have grown, we have seen a sad trend of no burial. But after the years pass, people no longer want to hold on to the ashes of family members. So what are families now doing with ashes? They are having them buried with other family members in existing graves. Most cemeteries allow multiple ashes in a single grave so burying ashes in a relative's grave has become the solution. Because most graves are only allowed one stone, names and dates of the deceased are added to

the existing stone if there is any room on the marker.

The stories of families resorting to this practice is what has prompted the newest burial trend: the transition from family plot to family grave. Families are now purchasing graves in cemeteries that have the highest number of allowed cremains per grave. When it's possible to bury between 2-8 people per grave, it seems that the idea of a family grave is pleasing to many people. In addition, cremation transport is easy so distance is no longer a barrier to bury families in the same place. It's also true that fewer people desire the large ornate monuments that once were the glory of cemeteries.

Extended families are purchasing a single grave together for future use. One stone, fitting within cemetery regulations, with space for future names, has become very popular over the last couple years.

There are now many options available to people for burial and for memorization. Both family plots and family graves are a wonderful way to keep families together after death and to honor our family heritage with beautiful monuments. I truly hope both traditions continue.

### **Services Suspended Until Further Notice**

Muskegon County Building 990 Terrace Street  
Muskegon, MI

Parking is on the East end of the building off Pine Street.

Entrance is on Apple Av between the buildings.

### **COUNTY CLERK RESEARCH**



Clerk's office is on the first floor.

Muskegon County Genealogical Society volunteers are needed, on Wednesdays from 1:00pm—4:00pm



The following is a poignant story for our time.

## Arvo's Heartbreak

By Frances Harrington

My 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Aunt, Laura Frank, was born December 13, 1873 in Ylitornio, Finland to Alexander and Maria Greta Frank. In 1887, at the age of 14, she immigrated with her sister Anna. They moved to Duluth, Minnesota and stayed with their other sister, my Great Grandmother, Olga and husband August Johnson who came to the United States in 1881.

Laura (Frank) was a beautiful woman and in 1893, at the age of 19 married 24-year-old John Matt Miettunen who had come to the US the same year as she. In 1894, their daughter, Aili (pronounced Allie) was born. Eight years later, their son Arvo was born.

At the age of 24 years Aili married Lieutenant John Saari in June 1918. John was a doctor assigned to the Medical Readiness Corp and they were living in Chicago, Illinois awaiting orders.

In 1918, Arvo's mother, (Laura), Arvo's father (John), and Arvo were living in Brookston, Minnesota (a town 27 miles west of Duluth). They had a small store where Arvo worked with his father. The main industries in that area were lumbering, iron ore mining, and farming. The railroads were busy with shipments of ore and lumber and daily passenger runs. The tracks of the Great Northern railroad ran outside of town. At milepost 62, lumber contractors would stack piles of pulpwood, cordwood, fence posts and telephone poles on either side of the tracks to be loaded on the railcars as they stopped there. Because of the lumbering, the forests were littered with lumber waste, (saw dust, wood chips, twigs, branches, etc.). This waste was supposed to be cleaned up periodically but it wasn't always done properly. At the time of this story (fall of 1918) conditions in the area had been extremely dry for two years. It was the driest in over 40 years. The dry weather, and dry wood, and sparks from trains, were a disaster waiting to happen.

Locomotives burned coal and sparks were common. On Thursday, October 10th, several small brush fires started along the tracks due to these sparks. This wasn't uncommon. Most of the time, the people in the area along with the railroad workers would extinguish them when they saw the smoke. On Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, several of those small fires had started along the tracks with a larger fire near milepost 62. Several men and railroad workers from the area, along with John Miettunen and his bookkeeper Ray Paukka, worked through the night to put the fire out. They returned to their homes and jobs exhausted leaving the smoldering embers to die out on their own. Later Saturday morning, October 12th, a cold front came through and drastically lowered the humidity. Then the winds slowly started to pick up. Soon those smoldering embers turned into flames. This time the fire grew so large the men weren't able put it out. All the lumber products stored at milepost 62 were on fire. The winds kept increasing and soon the area was covered in black smoke and flames. The fire quickly spread in different directions with most of it heading right toward Brookston.

Around 3 p.m. Laura, John, Arvo, and Ray Paukka, decided it was time to leave so they hopped in their vehicle and headed to Cloquet, about 17 miles South East of Brookston where they thought they would be safe. Arvo, 16 at the time, was driving. Laura was in the front with him and the 2 men were in the back. The fire seemed to be coming in all directions and they could hear it roar. The high winds were blowing trees down and the thick black smoke was everywhere. Arvo was driving about 50 mph and didn't see the tree that had fallen across the road and the vehicle plowed into it. Laura went flying through the windshield. The 2 men in the back were also thrown from the car and landed in a patch of fire. It was the steering wheel that kept Arvo from being thrown out like the others but he was still injured. Dazed, he got out to look for his mother. He was devastated when he found her 30 feet away dead from a broken neck. Even though badly injured, the 3 men managed to make it to the nearby St. Louis River. The woods on either side of the river were on fire and even the logs coming down the river were burning. The men made their way into the water to escape the fire. They not only had to dodge the flaming logs but also the debris that came with the high winds. They stayed in the water until night and then went on shore. They huddled together by a big rock trying to avoid the winds and the ground that was still burning. In the morning they made it to the railroad tracks where they were rescued. The three men ended up in the hospital in serious condition. Eventually, they were well enough to be released. (I would have said, "well enough to go back

home” but they had no home to go back to, Brookston was burned to the ground.)

Throughout that Saturday the fires had grown and spread out connecting with other fires. The winds grew to around 70 miles an hour. Houses exploded from the intense heat sending burning wood everywhere. Pieces of flaming wood, sparks, and fireballs flew through the air and landed on houses or in fields and started more fires or struck and killed people as they tried to escape. Survivors later said the fire was so huge that it looked like a wall of flames 100 feet high and at times was 10 miles wide. The heat from the fire was so high some survivors had blisters without actually being touched by the flames. Many tried to escape the flames by driving their vehicles or horse drawn wagons loaded with family and neighbors right into lakes and rivers – not all survived. Entire families hid in root cellars and down in wells hoping to be safe from the flames only to be smothered by the smoke. People lost track of family and friends who only moments before were right next to them, never to be seen again. On one road, 15 vehicles full of people piled up on each other when the drivers couldn't see a sharp turn. They died when smoke and flames overcame them. By the time the winds finally died down around 11 p.m. the fires had just reached the outskirts of Duluth. Luckily most of the city was spared. Small fires continued to burn for days until it finally rained.

There are many more tragic stories from this fire. Stories of mothers and fathers who could only identify their children by their shoes or buttons or other pieces of clothing that weren't completely destroyed by the fire. There were loved ones who were never found or who just couldn't be identified. Entire towns had been burned to the ground. At least 600 people died and 1500 square miles were burned including: 38 communities, 41 schools, 4,000 homes, 6,300 barns and over 1,000 farm animals died. It is estimated 52,000 people were affected, injured, or displaced by this tragedy. The survivors who had no place to live overran hospitals, public buildings, private homes, farms or any other place they could find for miles around. Some people were even taken in by residents in nearby Wisconsin.

Many of the survivors later died because of their weakened conditions due to smoke inhalation and/or burns. Besides the fire, the Spanish Flu pandemic was going on. Its deadliest months were October and November that year and with the overcrowding many became infected. Dead bodies had to be piled on top of each other waiting to be identified and buried. Some that could not be identified or had no family left to claim them were buried in mass graves.

Because of the pandemic, public funerals and open caskets were not allowed. Laura Miettunen's body was never recovered. She was the first official casualty of that ungodly fire. They held a memorial service at my Great Grandmother Olga's house a few days after her death.

Arvo's cousin, Hilma, who had gotten sick was unable to visit him in the hospital, so she wrote to him instead. She asked what had happened that tragic day. He wrote back on October 28th explaining the death of his mother. In the letter he also mentioned that his sister Ailie, who was in Chicago, had gotten sick but was “almost completely well”. He ended his letter by writing “you never know what a friend you have in your mother until you lose her”.

Arvo's sister, Ailie, and her unborn child died of the Spanish Flu two days after that letter was written on October 30th. Her body was sent to Duluth to be buried next to the grave that was marked for her mother. Three days later, his cousin Hilma died of the same dreaded disease. My Great Grandmother Olga lost her sister, her niece, and her own daughter, all within 3 weeks time.

At only 16 years old, Arvo experienced that massive wall of flames chasing him and his family down, had been in an accident that killed his mother and seriously injured him and his father, was left homeless, and then had his only sister and his beloved cousin die from that deadly pandemic within days of each other. Even though it was not his fault, he felt responsible for his mother's death because he was the one driving. Arvo and John moved in with my Great Grandparents until they could get back on their feet. Arvo later went back to school and even on to college. Try as he might, including changing his name to Earl Mitner and getting married, he was never able to put that nightmare and the heartbreak he suffered behind him.

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from page 4)  
Arvo's Heartbreak*

Arvo died of alcoholism at the age of 34.

**Information for this story came from the PineJournal.com, Waymaking.com, Minnesotagoodage.com, mnopedia.com, the Duluth Tribune, "Minnesota 1918 When Flu, Fire, and War Ravaged the State" by Curt Brown, "The Fires of Autumn" by Francis M Carroll and Franklin R. Raiter, Arvo's letter and other personal family correspondence.**

### **Michigan Genealogical Council**

Notes from Gail Taggart, Virtual Delegates Meeting – May 14, 2020

Archives of Michigan Update – Kris Rzepczynski

As per Governor's announcement yesterday May 14<sup>th</sup>. Archives staff will be furloughed one day per week for the next 10 weeks. Staff will rotate so that Reference Desk will be covered.

They are working on adding a Live Chat feature, which will likely operate by appointment – approx. 8 appointments per day. Hope to have it available upon re-opening.

They are working out details of re-opening or partial re-opening – no student support staff, no Saturdays.

July 10-11, Brown Family History Seminar will be held virtually. Judy Russell will not make her presentations but will reschedule for 2021.

Work is nearing completion on indexing naturalization records. Verification is stalled as Family Search staff are working from home.

Michiganology.org will begin data migration & some updates May 15<sup>th</sup> & will take approx. 30 days to complete.

Library of Michigan – Tim Gleisner

Library Archives staff will be furloughed.

Library of Michigan library cards are available, which include access to online data sources. Unfortunately, they are not able to make Newsbank accessible online.

They are working on plans for a partial re-opening after May 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **EDUCATIONAL CORNER**

**Southern California Genealogical Society Webinar Series** - SCGS is there for you, no matter where you live. The live broadcast is free and open to the public.

Register at [www.scgsgenealogy.com](http://www.scgsgenealogy.com). You **MUST** Register to participate.

Click on the Webinar Title you want to attend listed below.

Register with our partner website, GoToWebinar.com.

Enter your name and email address and answer a few questions. You will receive confirmation of your registration by email.

You will also receive reminders before the webinar. The reminder email will have information on accessing the handout material.

On the day of the session, click the link that you received in your invitation to GoToWebinar.com to join the online session.

#### **NEXT UP:**

**Wednesday, June 17 9:00 PM - Eastern  
The Other Census - US State Censuses  
by Thomas MacEntee**

**Frequently genealogists will focus strictly on the US Census records and forget that many of the US states and territories conducted their own census at some point. Learn which states and territories have these amazing records, how to access them, and how to incorporate them into your genealogy research.**

**Wednesday, July 15 9:00 PM - Eastern  
Julian to Gregorian: When and How our Calendar Changed  
by Seema Kenney**

**Dates are very important to genealogists but how well do you understand the relationship between the dates recorded and the calendar in use at the time? The switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar started in 1582, but lasted into the 20th century. Understanding the adoption process may impact your 18th to 20th century research**

# GOLDEN RULES OF GENEALOGY



## "SPELING DUSN'T COWNT"

**1** Back in the day folks couldn't spell and many could barely write, so how a name sounds is more



important than how it's spelled. Use wild card or Soundex searches to help find variant spellings of names.

## ASSUME NOTHING

**2** Check all your facts, don't assume that any particular document is right or wrong, and always try to find other independent sources to corroborate your facts as much as possible. Verify, verify, verify. For instance, don't assume that:

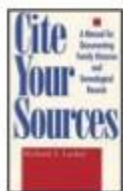
- your ancestors were married
- census information is accurate
- vital (or other) records were correct
- your ancestor's life events were recorded
- ancestors had the same name as their enslaver

## USE DISCRETION

**3** **Never lie** in your genealogy reports, but use discretion when reporting family information, especially when it involves living relatives.

## ALWAYS DOCUMENT YOUR SOURCES, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER

**4** Over time, you will compile more data and those once seemingly contradictory pieces of evidence may prove to be just the pieces of the puzzle you need to prove or disprove your theory. Be consistent as you cite your sources. There are standard citation formats, but



even if you just make up your own format for listing your sources, be consistent with it. You want your descendants to be able to retrace your steps, so you always cite your sources.

## MOST DATES ARE APPROXIMATE

**5** It's okay to state that someone was born "abt. 1845," or died "May 1915" if you don't have an exact date or where various documents have different dates. Which date is "correct?" They all are.



## IF UNSURE, SAY SO

**6** Future researchers will thank you for being honest if you simply say that you cannot prove a specific fact, yet you "suspect" such and such is true. Don't fudge the facts. Ever.



## YOU CANNOT DO IT ALL ONLINE

**7** Yes, we love doing research online and there's nothing better than using the computer to find new sources, view digital images of original documents and even connect with relatives. For genealogists, the internet will never replace the wonderful work of libraries, county courthouses, archives, and historical societies. Do as much as you can online, then turn off your computer and hit the bricks!



## JUST BECAUSE IT'S ONLINE DOESN'T MEAN IT'S TRUE

**8** The internet is a wonderful thing but it's filled with oodles of bad information. Don't make the mistake of believing anything you find online at face value. Verify against other sources, even if you paid for the information you found online. Consult the original source whenever possible.

## PASS ALONG YOUR RESEARCH

**9** No matter how many decades you spend researching your family, your research will never be done. Plan on passing along your research to the next generation's



researchers. Leave excellent notes, cite all your sources, explain your shorthand ... in essence, leave your research the way you'd have liked to have found it.

## DON'T DIE WITH YOUR STORIES STILL IN YOU

**10** Giving credit to Dr. Wayne Dyer for his "Don't die with your music still in you," we want to remind you to tell the stories as completely and as accurately as possible. Genealogy isn't about just doing research. Genealogy is about telling the stories and ensuring that your ancestor's legacies live on for generations to come. Without the stories, the research won't do anyone much good. The legacy of your ancestors rests in your capable hands. Doing the research is fine, but always remember that you have been chosen to **tell their stories**.



## DNA IS NOT A TRUMP CARD

**11** DNA is just one of **many** possible sources of information you can use to verify or deny a relationship. Human error occurs when the results are transcribed, thereby providing false information. DNA results should **always** be used in concert with other sources.

## ANYTHING YOU POST ONLINE WILL BE "BORROWED"

**12** You need to accept the fact that any family information you post online will be "borrowed" or outright stolen, and you will probably not get credit for all your hard work. This is the nature of the beast... the internet. Get over it.

### SPREAD THE WORD

You have our permission to use/publish these Golden Rules as much as you like. Just give us credit for them, okay?

GotGenealogy.com  
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Oakland, CA 94610-0805  
(510) 333-6933

# 2020 Dates to REMEMBER



## MCGS Meetings

2nd Thursday at 6:30 p.m.  
**VFW Post 3195**  
**5209 Grand Haven Road**



January 9  
 February 13  
 March 12  
 April 9 (cancelled)  
 May 14 (cancelled)  
 June 11 (cancelled)  
 August 13  
 September 10  
 October 8  
 November 12  
**NO meetings** in July & December

## Genealogy Family History Workshops

Hackley Library-Torrent House  
 Local History & Genealogy  
 Dept., 315 W. Webster Ave  
 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
*Space is limited, so please pre-register, by calling the Torrent House, Local History & Genealogy Dept. at 231-722-8016 Tues thru Sat, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:45 p.m.*

January 11  
 February 8  
 March 14  
 April 11 (cancelled)  
 May 9 (cancelled)  
 September 12  
 October 10  
 November 14  
**NO workshops in**  
 June, July, August & December

## WHAT TO BRING!

Any genealogy items you would like to donate for the FREE table.

## YOU CAN BUY!

15 Generation Charts—\$4 ea.  
 Tickets for the Book Drawing



## Muskegon Genealogical Society

### 2020 Officers

**President:** Dawn Westcomb Kelley  
**Past President:** Jane Appleton Schapka  
**Vice President:** Ingrid Porritt  
**Secretary:** Tom Shepherd  
**Treasurer:** Nancy Clark Spoon

### Committees

Facebook ..... Norman Dagen  
 Historian ..... Board Members  
 History Book Project..... Kathy DeCormier  
 Hospitality.....Jane Weber  
 .....Maria Chemelarova  
 .....John & Phyllis Slater  
 Library ..... Barb Martin  
 Membership ..... Paula Halloran  
 ..... Chris Nowak  
 Newsletter Editor..... Tom Porritt  
 Pioneer Program..... Barb Martin  
 Programs & Publicity..... Ingrid Porritt  
 ..... Tom Shepherd  
 ..... Bill Hansen  
 ..... Gale Taggart  
 Special Projects ..... Dawn Kelley  
 Website ..... Board Members  
 County Clerk Office ... Members  
 Michigan Genealogical Council.  
 .....Gail Taggart, Delegate

## Something New to Watch on ABC TV

CeCe Moore, the Genetic Genealogist, is getting her own show in May!!! "The Genetic Detective" debuted on May 26 at 10 pm. Check out more up-to-date details on Abundant Genealogy's website:



<https://abundantgenealogy.com/debuts-tonight-new-television-series-the-genetic-detective-featuring-cece-moore/>

## HISTORY BOOK UPDATE

We care what happens to our members, their families, and everyone around us. So the deadline the History Book, Vol 2 will be extended. We will let you know of the new date in the next few months.

Just a reminder that Society cannot pickup any mail at this time at Hackley Public Library as it is closed. This is very difficult time for everyone.

If you have any questions, you can still email us at any time at [1972mcgs@gmail.com](mailto:1972mcgs@gmail.com)

Kathy DeComier—History Book Committee