

# MUSKEGON COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1972

Vol. 21 No. 2

February 2021

## T W I G T A L K

### Newsletter



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[Celebrating 50 years in 2022](#)

### President's Message

By Dawn Westcomb Kelley -

Better things are yet to come, we must be patient and sooner or later our society will meet again in person at our favorite place. Hope everyone is in good health and staying safe.



While I was researching Muskegon City Directories for family history, I found that my grandparents were living in Muskegon in 1913 in a location called White City. As part of my research procedure, I copied each City Directory located in the Genealogy Department, when it was in the basement of the Hackley Public Library. I was surprised to read that their residence was White City. I had never heard of White City. From this research, I knew that in 1913 they were located between Muskegon Lake and Sanford Bayou on River Road off from Ottawa Street. I asked Diana from the Torrent House if she knew about White City and then we went to Damien to find out if he knew about this long lost location. Thanks to Damien we found an article online at GenealogyBank that appeared in the Muskegon Chronicle in 1922. This article mentioned White City and Coney Island were located right where my grandparents lived

with about 6 other families. I made copies of 1930 and 1948 maps as the Torrent House didn't have any earlier maps to show where they lived. You never know what you might find in the City Directories. Good luck on your next hunt in the City Directories.

### **GENEALOGY TIP** by Ancestry

Are you making an assumption about your ancestor's behavior based on life in the twenty-first century? Life has changed considerably in the last 100 years, and changing your perspective may help you overcome a brick wall.

### **DISCOVER YOUR STORY AT ROOTSTECH CONNECT – ROOTSTECH.ORG**

ROOTSTECH – introducing Rootstech connect: a **FREE** online conference experience. For the time ever, the world's largest family celebration event will be entirely and completely free. Get ready to celebrate shared connections with people from around the world. Connect with friends, your family,

your family, your past, and your heritage and homelands-all from the comfort of your home and your browser. Feb 25 – 27 2021 - [RootsTech 2021 will be held as a virtual event February 25-27, 2021](#)

## **A Genealogist's Guide to Newspaper Research**

by Trivia Trudy

From the Publishers of "Your Genealogy", "Internet Genealogy & History" and not to name more of their magazines that you might be interested in. Order online at [www.yourgenealogytoday.com](http://www.yourgenealogytoday.com) or call 1-888-326-2476

The index of the "**A Genealogist's Guide to Newspaper Research**" is what got me so excited. It has Newspaper Findings Aids; Types of Newspaper Articles; 5 Steps to Better Research; What to Do If it's Not Online; Beyond City Newspapers; African American Newspapers; Start with FamilySearch!; Chronicling America; Free US Websites State by State; Google News; GenealogyBank; Newspapers.com; Library and Archives Canada; Findmypast; MyHeritage Newspapers; British Newspaper Archives. You can buy any of the magazines with a year subscription or just buy one magazine.

## **Captain Henry Dobson**

Tug Boat Operator

By Frances Harrington

I previously wrote an article about Dr. Jennie Dobson, one of Muskegon's first women doctors. While researching the article, I found out some information about her husband, Captain Henry Dobson that I thought I would share.

Henry Dobson was born in Canada to John and Annie Dobson ca. 1835. The 1850 census shows him at 15 years of age living with his parents and five siblings in Kent County, Michigan. He eventually settled in Muskegon in 1855 making him one of Muskegon's earliest settlers. While in Muskegon, he made his living as a vessel operator.

In September of 1862, he became part of the 26<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, Company C as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant under Captain James A Lothian with Chauncey Gibbs as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, all of Muskegon, MI. The Company was referred to as the "company of big men" because they were all lumberman over 6 feet tall.

During the Civil War, the 26<sup>th</sup> had a reputation for being the best skirmish regiment in the Army and took part in many hazardous advances. Henry was promoted to the rank of Captain on April 26, 1864. On May 12, 1864, Henry was wounded at the famous battle at Spotsylvania Court House in Virginia where they fought alongside the famous Third Michigan Volunteers (which it is said he was once a member of). He was shot in the chest under his lung by a round-ball that was never removed and caused him problems until the day he died. He mustered out of the Army on September 3, 1864 and returned to Muskegon.



Generic Tug Boat Reminiscent of the "Third Michigan"

Upon coming back to Muskegon, the Captain returned to his previous occupation as a vessel operator using a tug boat that he named "Third Michigan". Tug boat vessels were a crucial part of the logging industry. They were used to tow or push other vessels into harbors, over the Great Lakes, or through rivers and canals that were restricted in

their ability to maneuver on their own, such as, large ships in a crowded harbor. They also towed disabled ships or barges into port for repairs. They were often used to tow "timber rafts". Timber rafts were made of felled logs that were loosely tied or chained together in the back with the front joined together with wooden bars. Some of these rafts contained thousands of logs. These rafts often carried men and supplies from one camp to another while traveling down the waterways to the lumber mills. This was the second least expensive way of transporting timber and it made this a very important and lucrative occupation, especially after the spring thaw. Tug boats had very powerful engines and pumps for their size and some were equipped with water cannons that could be used to put out fires on other ships or platforms. Sometimes, they would fire off the cannons as a show of respect when traveling in front of military vessels. Other times, they were used as a sort of "fireworks" display during a water parade.

In 1871, lumbermen John Torrent and Lewis L Arms purchased the old Farr Mill on the north side of Muskegon Lake for \$90,000 and spent several thousand for repairs. The mill was one of the largest and best on Muskegon Lake. The mill started up in the spring of 1872 expecting to cut twenty million feet of lumber by the end of the first season. Before they could reach their goal, tragedy struck on Tuesday, August 20<sup>th</sup> when the mill was engulfed by flames. The alarm went out and the tugs the "Stevens" and the "Third Michigan" raced to the scene. The Stevens arrived first and did all she could to put out the flames. When the Third Michigan arrived, Captain Dobson ordered the hose be put on the Blake force-pump and began throwing a powerful stream, when the plunger burst making it unable to be of any real assistance. The mill was ruined. By Saturday, they assumed the fire was out even though there were still embers burning. Later that day, the winds came up and soon the fire was once again raging. In its path were wooden docks, runways, and large amounts of lumber that hadn't been destroyed by the earlier fire. A blacksmith and storage shop were engulfed in flames and the fire was spreading due to the wind. It looked like everything in its path would be destroyed. The smoke was so thick it was blinding at times. The schooner "Menominee" carrying 200,000 feet of lumber was aground and directly in the path of the flames. It signaled for assistance and was soon answered by a fleet of tugs. Only Captain Dobson with the Third Michigan (that had just been repaired only 30 minutes earlier) headed straight into the flames with all four far-reaching heavy streams of water spraying from the cannons. Captain Dobson and his crew kept the cannons running non-stop for 27 hours until the fire was completely extinguished. They managed to save the cut lumber on the Menominee and some adjacent property. The damage to the mill was well in excess of \$100,000 not including the losses of not being able to fulfill their contracts. Unfortunately, the insurance covered only \$40,000. It is not known what started the original fire but arson was suspected. By October of that year, they started to rebuild the mill about 150 yards from the original site and it became one of the finest new mills around.

Captain Dobson not only came to the aid of other mill fires, but came to the rescue again on November 27, 1893 when the vessel "Pile Driver #1" (owned by the Muskegon Booming Company) sank in 16 feet of frigid water. Captain Dobson and the Third Michigan managed to save the entire crew from a watery grave.

Captain Dobson was not only an early Muskegon pioneer and gallant Civil War veteran but an everyday hero as well. He was highly esteemed by all who knew him. On December 27, 1876 while staying at the Squires Mill (five miles from Bridgeton) Captain Henry Dobson died suddenly in his sleep. The cause of death was determined to be a heart attack brought on by an infection from the bullet wound he received during the Civil War twelve years earlier. He was 41 years old.

Sources: Newspapers.com, Genealogy Bank.com, Ancestry.com, The Centennial History of Muskegon by Henry H Holt

**Longtime Member, Joan M. Gawron**



Joan M. Gawron, age 87, passed away Wednesday, January 13, 2021 at the Poppen Residence. She was born on June 9, 1933 in Muskegon to Joseph and Eloise (Gosselin) Dault and resided in the Muskegon area all of her life. Early on, Joan worked at Shaw Walker, and then as manager of the rectory at St. Jean Baptiste Catholic Church. She then worked for 18 years at the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District as a mental health aide before retiring.

She was very active in the Muskegon community and enjoyed walking with her corporate cup group from South Shores, being one of the top volunteers for the USS Silversides Museum and being a resource and supporter of the USS LST Museum, working with the Muskegon County Genealogy Society and the Lakeshore Museum Center and being the founding member of the Marsh Field Neighborhood Association. Joan also loved attending the Irish and Polish Festivals, and was a proud Union member. A friend of the family said, "We know Joan is giving St. Peter a few lessons on Muskegon's deep and rich history". If you like to put a memory of Joan, go to [Joan M. Gawron Obituary - Visitation & Funeral Information \(sytsemafh.com\)](http://Joan M. Gawron Obituary - Visitation & Funeral Information (sytsemafh.com))

**Past Member Eileen Wojewodzki**

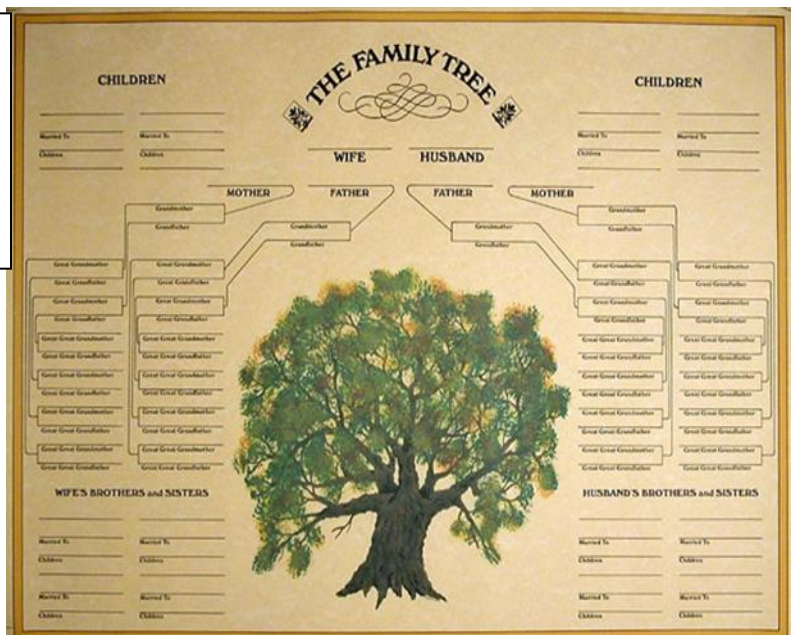


Eileen Kay passed away Wednesday, December 23, 2020 in Muskegon. She was born in Muskegon on May 23, 1955 to Harold and Harriette (Nelson) Kassner. Eileen. She loved to travel, she was the "family genealogist", and she always maintained a positive attitude in life. Was very active in the society's projects at the time she was a member.

Eileen was on the History Book committee Vol. 1. Eileen was also helping to collect more military stories for Vol 2. Kathy stated Eileen sent her well over 75 more military stories, before her passed away. you like to read more, visit [Eileen Wojewodzki Obituary \(1955 - 2020\) - Muskegon Chronicle \(mlive.com\)](http://Eileen Wojewodzki Obituary (1955 - 2020) - Muskegon Chronicle (mlive.com))

**FOR SALE**

This beautiful "Family Tree Chart", can go into a picture frame, size of chart is 18"high x 24"wide for \$7.00. This is a wonderful gift to give to someone. Sold at the Torrent House, call 231-722-8016, Tues. thru Fri. 10am to 2pm  
If you need to have shipped the S & H is \$3.50. It is easy to ship, because it comes in its own round tube.



**Research at the Muskegon County Clerk Office — Services Suspended Until Further Notice**



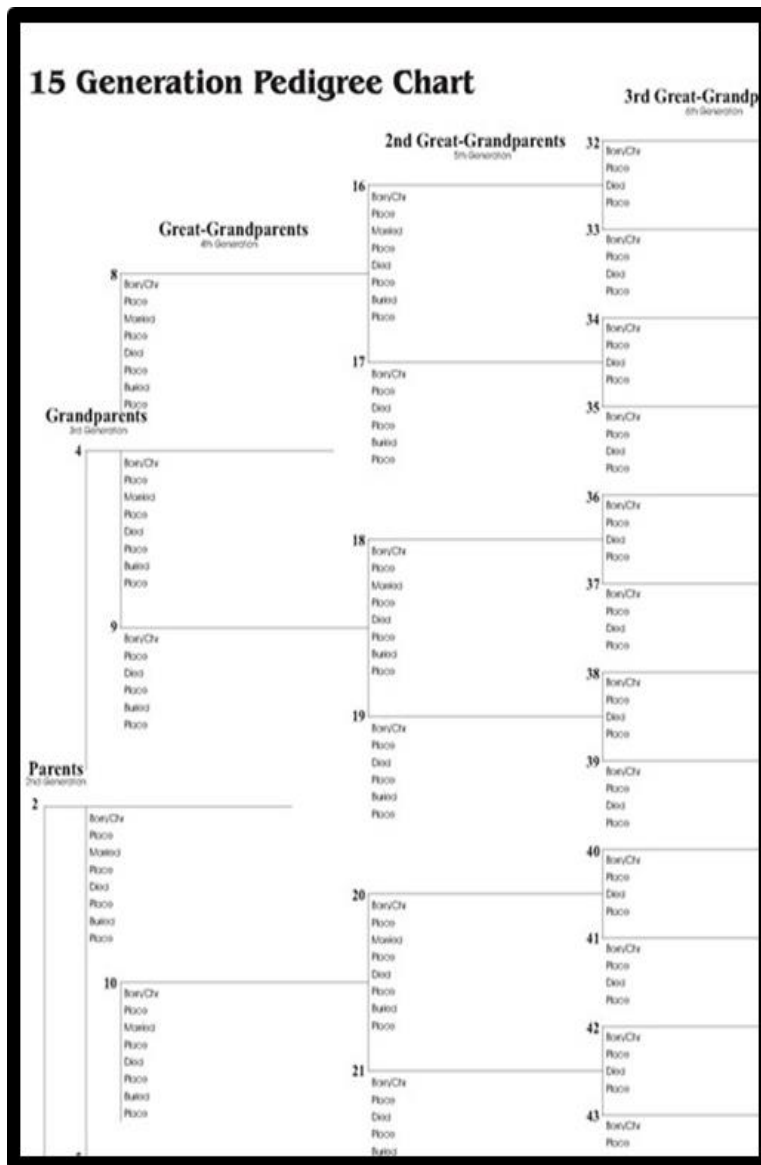
Also for Sale

15 Generation Pedigree Chart that folds out into a working chart. It can go right into a 3 ring notebook or just carry with you when doing your research. Cost \$4.00 sold at Torrent House. To ship is \$2.50. Folds out to 18"X24"

Southern California Genealogical Society Webinar Series The **LIVE** broadcast is **FREE** and open to the public.

Register at [www.scqsgenealogy.com](http://www.scqsgenealogy.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.

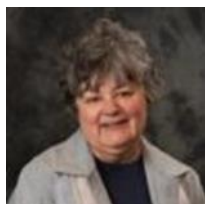


**NEXT UP:**

[Unscrambling the New Orleans Passenger Lists](#)

by **Beth A. Stahr, MLS CG®**

Saturday, February 6 1:00 PM - Eastern



The port of New Orleans was the second largest U.S. port of immigration in the early nineteenth century. This lecture explains the origin and derivation of overlapping indexes and passenger lists for the port. It provides a chronological approach with examples to using the microfilmed and online resources to find immigrants.

**Beth A. Stahr, MLS, CG®** is a recently retired academic librarian and instructor with over forty years of genealogical research experience. She has lived and worked in the Midwest, Louisiana and now Tennessee. She has been certified by the Board for Certification of Genealogists since 1990.

[10 Things a Genealogist Should Do Before Leaving a Library or Archives](#)

by **Melissa Barker**

Wednesday, February 17 9:00 PM - Eastern



Have you ever gotten home from a genealogy research trip and said to yourself "I forgot to do that!" Learn the 10 things a genealogist should do before they leave a library or archives to make a research trip a success!

**Melissa Barker** is a Certified Archives Manager at the Houston County, Tennessee Archives. She is a professional genealogist and lectures, teaches and writes about genealogy research.



**MCGS MEETINGS**

2nd Thursday at 6:30 p.m.

**VFW Post 319**

**5209 Grand Haven Rd.**

**Norton Shores, MI**



**Meetings cancelled**

**January thru March**

**At least for now.**

**Genealogy Family**

**History Workshops**

Torrent House Local History & Genealogy Department  
315 W. Webster Ave.

**All workshops are cancelled until further notice.**



**LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY DEPT.**

Changes to the Local History & Genealogy Department. PLEASE call ahead of time at 231-722-8016 Tuesday thru Friday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. To make sure they are open or check out the Hackley Public Library website for new updates on opening and closing at <https://hackleylibrary.org/> Click the Local History & Genealogy button on top of the page and check out the Research Resources .



**2021 OFFICERS & COMMITTEES**

- 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
- 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

**HISTORY BOOK VOL. 2**

We care what happens to our members, their families, and everyone around us. Our History Book, Volume 2 will be extend until further notice. It is very important to start working on your stories now. Do not wait.

If you have any questions or need help, contact us at our [1972mcgs@gmail.com](mailto:1972mcgs@gmail.com) or send your information to Kathy DeCormier at [middlaker@frontier.com](mailto:middlaker@frontier.com)

In the subject area put "History Book Volume 2".

***TWIG TALK***

*A monthly publication of:*  
**Muskegon County Genealogical Society**

c/o Hackley Public Library  
Torrent House

315 W. Webster Avenue  
Muskegon, MI 49440-1208

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

[1972mcgs@gmail.com](mailto:1972mcgs@gmail.com)

MUSKEGON COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION for 2021

*\* Our membership begins January 1 through December 31 \**

- New Membership     Renewal Membership
- \$25.00 Single in the USA     \$30.00 Single USD\$ outside the USA
- \*Membership cards are available on request. Send a small SASE with your membership payment.*
- We are a non-profit organization 501 (c) (3)  
If you wish to make a donation, please fill in the amount    \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*PHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\*NAME \_\_\_\_\_

\*ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\*CITY \_\_\_\_\_ \*STATE \_\_\_\_\_ \*ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check or money orders payable to MCGS

**MAIL TO:  
MCGS**

**Attn: MEMBERSHIP**  
C/O HPL - Torrent House  
315 W. Webster Ave.  
Muskegon, MI 49440-1208

**MCGS USE ONLY**

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