

# MUSKEGON COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1972

Vol. 21 No. 9

September 2021

## T W I G T A L K

### Newsletter



[Celebrating 50 years in 2022](#)

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### President's Message

By Dawn Westcomb Kelley -

There will not be a MCGS meeting at the VFW due to the new Delta-Covid variant. Do you think we will ever meet again in person? Yes we will! We just need to think positive that we will get through this together. Please stay healthy and safe.

My husband and I have been so busy since April. We tore down the old shed to build a bigger shed through rain and heat. We finely finished it. I painted the outside twice. Now to finish the ground area around it. That will be soon.

What has everyone else been doing this year?

### Local History & Genealogy Dept.

The Torrent House, Local History & Genealogy Department hours will stay the same. Remember to call ahead, 231-722-8016, to use a computer or reader printer. They are open Tuesday through Friday from 10 am to 2:00 pm.

We will not have any Family History Workshops on Saturdays as a group, but we can meet one on one. For help with your research Tuesday through Friday from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm contact us at [1972mcgs@gmail.com](mailto:1972mcgs@gmail.com) to make an appointment.

The Muskegon County Clerk's office is open to the public to do research Monday through Thursday from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm.

Check out more updates on their website at [County Clerk | Muskegon County, MI](#)

### **Research is open at the Muskegon County Clerk**

Wednesdays 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Phone 231-724-7140

Muskegon County Genealogical Society

Volunteer – Karen Frazier

## **Michigan Pre-Statehood and First Families Certificates**

Michigan Pre-Statehood and First Families certificates are offered by Michigan Genealogical Council as a way to honor our ancestors who settled the Great Lakes State. Recipients will receive either the PreStatehood or the First Families certificate, depending on the arrival date of their earliest Michigan (or Michigan Territory) ancestor. Pre-Statehood before January 26, 1837 First Families January 26, 1837 to December 31, 1880. Personalized certificates and a pin bearing the emblem of the certificate will be presented to recipients, and their ancestor's name will be added to a database of early Michigan pioneers. How can you prove early settlement in Michigan? There are a number of resources available that can help you prove that your ancestors were early Michigan pioneers. Applications should provide copies of primary sources, when available.

These can include: "

- Vital records (birth, marriage, death)
- Church, mortuary, cemetery records
- Probate records
- Land records
- Tax records
- Census records
- Military records
- Court records (wills, deeds)
- Official school records



1839 Map of Michigan

These records can be found in a variety of places, including local county clerks' offices, or through websites like Ancestry, Family Search, and Michiganology. Assistance with genealogical research can be found with your local genealogical society or sometimes at your local library. Please visit <https://mimgc.org/> for more information about accepted documentation, or email [certificates@mimgc.org](mailto:certificates@mimgc.org) with any questions.

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## **Muskegon's First and Only Female Lighthouse Keeper**

By Frances Harington

Jemima M. Atkinson was born in Ireland on May 20, 1834. She came to the United States at the age of 15 in 1849. She married William M. Monroe and had two children, a daughter, Emma, and a son, William F. Monroe

In 1851, a small lighthouse was erected at Port Sherman (Pere Marquette) at the end of Beach Street, a short distance from the opening of the channel. Port Sherman, at the time, was a small settlement of about 500 native Americans and half a dozen white settlers. The Lighthouse Keeper's dwelling was a one and a half story dwelling made of wood that stood not far from the tower. I found conflicting reports as to what the tower was made of but basically some parts wood and some brick or rubblestone. The Keeper's dwelling was 36 feet by 18 feet. The tower reached 26 to 30 feet high (again, depending on which report you read). The tower had no fog horn or bell but did have a fixed light of 6 lamps with 14-inch reflectors, known as Lewis Lamps, in the eight-sided lantern room. By 1854, repairs already had to be made to the structures. Between the environment and the sometimes-cheap construction, something was always needing to be fixed. The "fixed light" in the Lighthouse was replaced in 1856 by a sixth-order Fresnel lens which was much better at capturing all the light coming from a lamp, then magnifying and steering it in one direction. It was said that the light could be seen for 10 miles.

According to an 1854 Senate document, the Keeper of a single lighthouse made \$350 per year. A typical Keeper's job meant going to the oil shed and filling one or two 5-gallon containers with oil for

the lamps, each weighing approximately 37 pounds. Then they had to carry the containers up all the stairs to the lamp room. Sometimes, this had to be done more than once in a 24-hour period, depending on the weather (foggy, cloudy, rainy, snowy, etc.) which would necessitate the light also being lit during the day and not just at night. Some of the lights were large enough that a man could stand inside the lens. The lens had to be kept clean at all times so they had to make sure to polish the lens and fittings or they could be fired if they were found dirty. You see, a dirty lens doesn't reflect much light. The Keeper had to light the wicks each evening or when conditions warranted it and make sure they stayed lit. The inside and outside windows had to be kept clean in all kinds of weather too. Cleaning the windows could be extremely dangerous during high winds. They were also responsible for ordering supplies and possibly caring for a garden and animals for food for their families (if they had one). Keepers with families, usually taught their older children or their wife how to perform the duties in the event the Keeper was too ill to do them for any period of time. Such was the case with William and Jemima.

William M. Monroe became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lighthouse Keeper at Port Sherman on September 23, 1859. He, Jemima, and their two children made their home at the Lighthouse. William died three years later leaving Jemima to carry on the duties of the Keeper until she received an official appointment. On November 20, 1862, Jemima M. Monroe became the first and only woman Lighthouse Keeper for Muskegon. In 1865, she was making \$520 per year, considered very good wages for a woman. It didn't matter if the Keeper was male or female, the pay and duties were the same. The only difference being that a woman did not have to wear a uniform. In 1867, Congress allocated money to build a new lighthouse because the old one was said to be "no longer repairable". The new Lighthouse was a wooden dwelling topped by a square tower. It was finished in 1871, complete with a fog bell. (See attached photo from 1883)

Jemima did the Keeper's job for almost 10 years while raising her children alone. After resigning from the Keepers job on May 5, 1871, Jemima married James C. Brittain. He was a vessel captain



on the Great Lakes and lived near Jemima (according to the 1870 Census). James struggled with asthma so they moved to Seattle, Washington, where he was very successful in the vessel business, as he had been in Muskegon. Jemima out-lived both her children. Emma married Louis C. Anderson on March 24, 1886 and died on November 19 of that year, 13 days after giving birth to a daughter, Genevieve. Jemima and James adopted Genevieve and after James died, Jemima raised her by herself. Jemima's son William became a ship's captain and died in 1888 at the age of 33. James died in 1892 while he and Jemima were spending the winter in California, hoping to improve his health. Jemima died October 31, 1910 in Seattle and is buried with her family in Lake-

view Cemetery. To this day, she holds the distinction of being the first and only woman Lighthouse Keeper for Muskegon.

*Note: Since no known picture of Muskegon's very first lighthouse has been found and each article I found about it has a slightly different description and time-line, I have tried to combine what I found to give an overall picture.*

Sources: National Park Service (Cape Lookout), Muskegonlights.org, Genealogybank.com, Ancestry.com, US Coast Guard website, photo from the National Archives, lighthouse friends.com, Beyond The Windswept Dunes by Elizabeth B. Sherman.

## Notes from National Genealogical Society Delegate Council - August 2021

By Gail Taggart

I'll spare you the business portions of the meeting, but an announcement and some interesting conversations took place that I thought I should share with you.

NGS is excited about plans to launch a new online member community "FORUM" on their existing website, exact date not yet certain, in September 2021. It will include conversation threads as well as multiple discussion topics, libraries, member organization access, and an event calendar. To me this looks similar to activities on Facebook, but without the need for a Facebook account. You can find lots of good research help from them at: [www.ngsgenealogy.org](http://www.ngsgenealogy.org).

### Ideas for Genealogical Societies:

#### Possible member-only benefits:

- Programs & handouts
- Newsletter
- Website [we have public access – is there any member-only material?]
- Archive deceased members' websites
- Wiki or other storage of presentations
- Holiday party & 'getting to know you' style relationship building
- Webinars recorded and available on members section of website
- Shareable Zoom account access
- Facebook page

#### Engaging other in the community:

- Work with boy & girl scouts on genealogy badges – does 4H have one too?
- Website – tribal pages
- Table at museum events [maybe Lakeshore Museum Center]
- Work with school districts – which grade level has kids work on their own family tree? – or have kids research a name from a war memorial or other source – 'local hero'
- Library [work with Alison at MADL?]

#### If meetings are held using Zoom

- virtual scavenger hunt in breakout rooms. For example: who had: a witch in their tree, a horse thief, largest list of children in a census, verified Native American, etc.

Our Society has been in a stall due to COVID, but with a little help we could be 'meeting' and helping one another from home. Do you have a skill that might help fill in some of the missing pieces that would get us rolling again? – some Zoom experience, ideas or resources for presentations or mini-workshops...

We're listening!

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### Michael John Neill Genealogy Tip

Provided by Frances Harrington

(c)2021, Michael John Neill and originally appeared on [www.genealogytipoftheday.com](http://www.genealogytipoftheday.com). The specific date is shown above the title line and can be found by following the link provided [here](#), and then scrolling through the pages.

**michaeljohnneill** 10:54 pm on August 24, 2021

#### Ask Yourself "Why?"

Upon occasion, one hears fellow genealogists being slightly judgmental about a specific ancestor. Instead of getting bogged down in that line of thinking (which doesn't help your research any), think "why?"

Putting yourself in your ancestor's shoes gives you a different perspective. If you were twenty-six years old, widowed, the mother of two small children, unable to speak English and living where you had no relatives, what might you do? You might marry the first German speaking single male around—one who would not have been your choice if you were twenty years old and still living at home with no children to support.

If your great-grandfather “disappeared” consider where he might have gone and what he might have done in an attempt to find him. Was there a war he might have enlisted in? Did he have some type of psychological problems? Maybe it was even better that he left, despite the disruption it caused in the family.

If you never personally knew the ancestor, leave the judging to someone else. Focus instead on your research.

On the flip side of this, I know one researcher who thought it was “romantic” that her great-great-grandmother found the “love of her life” and left her husband and headed out West on some grand adventure. The researcher was completely enamored with the story. Now if HER mother had done the same thing, I'm certain her response would have been somewhat different.

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Allen County Public Library—Indiana  
Genealogy Center of Fort Wayne  
Monthly listing of Webinars  
(ctrl + click to use the title as a link)

### **[Moving Beyond Hit or Miss Genealogy to a Genealogical Plan](#)**

Thu, Sep 09, 6:30pm - 7:30pm

### **[Genealogical Research in Colonial New England](#)**

Tue, Sep 14, 2:30pm - 3:30pm

### **[Making Your Family Legacy Permanent](#)**

Thu, Sep 16, 6:30pm - 7:30pm

### **[Genealogy Research in the New Orleans City Archives - & Special Collections](#)**

Tue, Sep 21, 2:30pm - 3:30pm

### **[Fireside Chat: The Importance of Social History in Genealogy](#)**

Thu, Sep 23, 6:30pm - 7:30pm

### **[Creating Your Family Photo Archive](#)**

Tue, Sep 28, 2:30pm - 3:30pm

### **[Finding Ancestors Without Going in Circles: - The WANDER Research Method](#)**

Thu, Sep 30, 6:30pm - 7:30pm



**IMPORTANT MESSAGE**

**MCGS MEETINGS**

2nd Thursday at 6:30 p.m.

**VFW Post 319**

**5209 Grand Haven Rd.**

**Norton Shores, MI**



**No Meeting In September**

**Genealogy Family**

**History Workshops**

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

No news yet

**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.

Check 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

Facebook ..... Norman Dagen  
Michigan and National Genealogical Societies.... Gail Taggart, Delegate  
Newsletter Editor...Tom Porritt

**Committees**

- History Book Project .. Kathy DeCormier
- Pioneer Program..... Barb Martin
- Programs & Publicity ..Ingrid Porritt
- Tom Shepherd
- Gail Taggart



**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***

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c/o Hackley Public Library  
Torrent House

315 W. Webster Avenue  
Muskegon, MI 49440-1208

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

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