

# MIDWEST COMPUTER GENEALOGISTS

## NEWSLETTER

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

Volume XXIV

May, 2020

Number 5

### CORONA, COMPUTERS AND GENEALOGY

Marjorie Slavens

Has it really been two months that we have been quarantined in our homes and can only communicate with friends and family members by telephone and computer? (It really seems longer than that, but here we are. Many of us are now finding some time to do projects we have planned but have not had free time at home to complete.

I have been sorting through my CDs, digital books, and computer files. Because of my various volunteer jobs, I have a lot of business-related files and folders on several computers. I have tried to compare the files and folders and eliminate those I no longer need, while preserving the records I must retain and will need to consult again. A friend says she has sorted through her recipes and is trying to organize them. Some recipes we all have come from our mothers or grandmothers, and they cannot be replaced if we do not organize them for our use and to pass on in some accessible form to children and grandchildren.

This year, we are unable to celebrate Mother's Day and Memorial Day in the traditional ways. KCPT will carry highlights from past "Celebration at the Station" programs with fireworks at 8:30 on Monday, May 25. In addition, May 8 was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V-E Day, when the Nazis surrendered, ending World War II in Europe. President Harry Truman said at that time that he regretted that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had died a few weeks earlier, had not been able to see that day. It was President Truman's

birthday, and a good present for him and for the nation.

A friend said the other day she was going to write a story about her mother. As family historians, we frequently write about family members, although the time of our stories is generally in the past and not the present. We know about the present, but our descendants may want to have the information we know but may fail to pass on in written form to future generations. My mother said from time to time, "I wish I had asked Grandpa about that. Her grandfather, Charles Merlin Kerr, lived to be 98 ½ and died in 1962, but she did not begin her serious genealogical research until the 1970s. She was too busy with current family responsibilities while her children were still at home to dedicate more time to family history research. Now, we have more access to records online; we have better cameras and computers; and, at present, we have a little more time to devote to such projects. However, at this time, when we have more time at home and are limited to computer and phone communication, this might be a good time for us to not only search for our ancestors but to prepare our records and stories for younger family members who will want to be able to access the information after we are no longer here.

It is important for us to interview and record our conversations with older family members. We need to write about our parents and grandparents so younger family members, who may be too busy to care at the moment, will be able to access the information in the future. Dates and places are important, but family stories that only we know will disappear if we do not preserve them. MCG President Al Morse and I write each month about various ancestors and events from our family

history. We encourage all of our readers to write or record their family stories, and this time of isolation might be a good time to work on such projects.

## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Al Morse

Dorothy Jean Newcomb and I, Albert Frank Morse, Jr., were married August 18, 1963 in Foster, Bates County, Missouri. On our 50th Wedding Anniversary, our younger son and his wife gave us membership to 23andMe. All we had to do was spit into a small vial and send it in to be analyzed for our DNA results. We did it and became members.

After we received our results, I discovered that I was 98.3% Northwestern European with 56% British and Irish. Dorothy was 98.7% Northwestern European with 55% British and Irish. As other people join 23andMe, they compare their DNA to all others. They then show you people by name, who share some of your DNA and what your potential relationship is to them. You can then contact them.

I have answered some of my second cousins for a little while, but nothing much then happens. However, Dorothy received information about a potential first cousin named Phyllis. She was asking Dorothy for some information on her father, Jewell Franklin McDaniel. Jewell was a brother to Dorothy's mother.

I responded, telling Phyllis that Dorothy had died, but I would try to help her. So we have been corresponding through 23andMe and by email.

James Franklin McDaniel was born October 8, 1891 in Miller County, Missouri. He married Lillie Ethel Burke, born January 24, 1896 in Miller County, Missouri, on August 11, 1913 in Miller County. Their children were Dorothy, Jewell Franklin, Charles Hobert, Warren Everett, and

Wilma Jean. The first four were born in Miller County. Wilma Jean was born in Bates County, Missouri after they had moved there about 1923. Dorothy, with no middle name, was my wife's mother. I have written about Charles, who was in World War II and was killed in the Korean War. I had met and knew Warren and Wilma Jean, but had never met Jewell. Jewell died November 16, 1959.

According to the records we had, Jewell married Nadine McCaslin on January 1, 1946. I knew that they had married, had a daughter, Phyllis, and had divorced, but knew no more than that. My Dorothy had taken McDaniel and Newcomb pictures from her parents house when we cleaned it out. We categorized them and labeled them, as best we could. Most of the pictures were from the 1920's through the 1950's.

So, when I got the request from Phyllis, who lives in California, I became excited about helping someone that I did not even know, but was also hesitant. I did reply. She replied back, asking other questions. And only looking at genealogy records, I could not answer any further questions. I did indicate that her Aunt Wilma Jean was still alive. Phyllis asked for Wilma Jean's phone number, which I sent to her. She called Wilma Jean and talked to her and, I am sure, helped answer questions that I would have no idea about.

I have sent Phyllis some copies of actual photographs that showed her father. I am finding this to be an interesting correspondence, which now leads me to reach out to some of my second, or third, or first cousins once removed. During this Coronavirus time, I have time to do some of this.

So, thank you, Phyllis, for asking your cousin, Dorothy, for some information. It is not just dates that make genealogy interesting but finding out about their lives as well.

## RECORDED MEMORIES OF THE EARLIEST SCHOOLS IN MISSOURI

Glynnna Elliott Morse  
and Julia Morse

When those who settled the Midwest in the first half of the 1800s later recorded their memories, they often reflected on their school experiences. We regularly find these accounts in the old county histories and also in local newspapers.

The *History of Johnson County, Missouri* (1918) provides a good description of early schools in that county. "Early Schools:

For a number of years after the first settlement of this county was made, there was no such thing as a public school maintained by public taxation. However, as the country was settled, the pioneers provided schools by what was known as the 'Subscription School' system. The plan was to employ a teacher, and each family who lived within a reasonable distance would pay a certain amount for each member of the family who attended school.

"The early teachers were generally men, or as they were known in those days, "school masters." There was no fixed standard as to their qualifications other than an ambition to teach school. But, among these early teachers of Johnson County, were many very well-qualified men, college graduates and those who were otherwise well educated.

"At first, there were no distinct buildings for school purposes, and the first "subscription schools" were held at the residence or cabin of some pioneer. It was not long, however, until the log school house began to make its appearance. In architectural design, these primitive temples of knowledge did not differ materially from the average pioneer cabin of those days. They were usually built of hewn logs, with puncheon floors and usually a portion of one of the logs on the side of the building sawn out to admit light. There was no such thing as a blackboard, and the benches

were made of split logs, supported by wooden legs, driven into auger holes." School houses, like home dwellings, were made of logs because there were no sawmills nearby. All furnishings, (tables, seats, etc.) were also made of logs. Sawn lumber had to be hauled by oxen in from Boonville in the early 1830s, and most of the settlers could not afford the money or time to haul sawn lumber.

The puncheon floors were rough logs split in half with the flat side up. Puncheon floors were one step up from packed dirt floors sometimes used for log cabin homes of the period.

In the same county history book, the biography of Judge T. L. Kimzey described the "subscription school" he attended in the mid-1850s:

"The seats were placed around the three sides of the room and the fireplace was on the fourth side. The 'master' or "schoolma'am" sat in the center of the room and called the children up to "say their lessons." On one side of the room was a sort of shelf made of a split board and high enough to write upon and in front of this was a puncheon bench, which was for the older boys and girls. When they wished to write, they turned their backs toward the teacher and wrote upon the shelf. The little children could not reach the shelf, but that was not necessary, for of course they could not write. They sat on the puncheon benches and studied their "a-b-c's" all day long. Spelling was the principal subject and frequently "spelling bees" were held, which occasioned much interest, for the men and women could spell in those days, if they did not know how to draw or paint pictures. The pupils sometimes grew very tired in the old fashioned school, but the "master" always kept a number of large switches in sight to urge the laggard on the road of learning. The children had many happy times, however, at school and they had the whole prairie for their playground."

Below is a copy of an early Missouri teacher's contract used in Johnson County in 1836:

"The said [Teacher] doth agree upon his part to teach a common school in a school house in the neighborhood of [Name of landowner]. Branches taught: spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic. The term proposed to be taught is three months, or one quarter, containing sixty-five days, five days in a week. The hours of school for commencing, at an hour by sun in the morning: dismiss at an hour by sun in the evening, and allow a reasonable time at the middle of each day for recreation.

"Said Teacher binds himself to keep good order in school to the best of his power and ability. If it should be the desire of the subscribers that the school be under the inspection of trustees, the teacher has no objection on his part. The trustees are to be three disinterested men, two chosen by employees and one by the teacher."

The contract specified how parents were to pay the teacher. "The subscribers on their part bind themselves by these presents to pay said Teacher two dollars per scholar per quarter at end of said quarter, which may be discharged in corn, pork, oats or beans, to be delivered at said Teacher's house that is to say, if paid in corn, on or before the first of November next; or if the pork, on or before the first day of December next. Both articles will be received at the market price.

The subscribers doth also bind themselves to furnish their scholars with necessary books and paper and to keep school house in good repair during said term. The school shall not consist of less than eighteen nor more than twenty-five scholars, and to commence the sixth day of June, 1836. In testimony whereof we have here set our hands this 31<sup>st</sup> day of May, 1836."

The school rules as set forth in 1836 were:

"The ones that come first in the morning say first." ("Saying" was the reciting of lessons before the schoolteacher. For example, poems were memorized and recited before the teacher. Thus, those students arriving first would begin the school session by "saying" or reciting their lessons.)

No scholar will be allowed to swear or make use of any profane language.

There will not be allowed any singing, wrestling,

quarrelling or fighting among any of the scholars." (This meant that no singing would be done while other lessons were being recited. Singing would sometimes be added as part of the school curriculum; for some schools, singing lessons were provided by a traveling singing teacher, perhaps once a week.)

"No scholar will be allowed to tag, nickname, or make fun of the clothing of any other scholar.

When any person not belonging to the school comes into the school house, the scholars will rise from their seats and make a gentle bow.

Large scholars will be allowed no more privileges than small ones.

"The scholars will not be allowed to cut or grease the benches.

"There shall but one scholar go out at a time without permission. No scholar will be allowed to go out more than twice before and twice after play-time, without permission." (This apparently refers to pupils using outhouse (restroom) facilities.)

The *History of Johnson County, Missouri* stated that the "old log school house was succeeded by the more convenient and commodious frame buildings, and the subscription school became a thing of the past. However, the public schools of Johnson county were not out of the struggling stage when the great Civil War came on (in 1861) and paralyzed the public school system of the state. Many schools in the county were suspended, and a number of school houses in the county were burned... Upon the return of peace in 1865, attention was again turned to the building up and the betterment of the schools and of education in general."

Subscription schools had begun to disappear when funding for public schools began appearing in the 1850s as the state provided for the sale of swamplands and other designated lands to be used for educational purposes. By the 1850s and 1860s, the number of settlers and their families had increased in the area. Many schools had 25 or more students.

With the coming of the railroad in the 1860s, lumber was much more available and more affordable. In the post-Civil War period, rail service made available nearly all kinds of merchandise, including materials for constructing sawmills. Most districts constructed frame schoolhouses with glass windows when sawmills began to appear in the area or when sawn lumber and window glass could be transported from the nearest rail freight destination.

Fireplaces had gone by the way of the log schoolhouse as stoves became available on the frontier. After the Civil War, most of the wooden frame schoolhouses had a wood burning or coal stove, usually placed in the center of the structure or at the back of the main school room. The rough split log benches and tables of earlier decades were replaced by more modern wooden school desks. Other educational amenities, such as chalk boards, maps, and pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, were now found in many post-Civil War school houses.

Source: Ewing Cockrell, *History of Johnson County, Missouri*, Historical Publishing Company, T o p e k a , C l e v e l a n d , 1 9 1 8 , <https://archive.org/details/historyofjohnson00cock>.

## IMMIGRANT ANCESTORS

### Marjorie Slavens

Most of our ancestors arrived here before 1750. We have records for arrival for some of them, but not for all. Early records are difficult to find at times. However, we know they , most of them from Germany Scotland and Northern Ireland, were here by 1750. However, the Westmeier and Gillman families of my paternal grandmother, Edna Marie Westmeier Slavens, came from Germany to Indiana in 1841.

Edna Marie Westmeier Slavens (1883-1966, the fourth child of Christian Henry Westmeier and Caroline Wilhelmine Gilman, was born November 13, 1883 near Aurora, Indiana. On November 29,

1906 in Seymour, Indiana She married William Howard Slavens, 1883-1940). He was born in Missouri and was the son of Laura Martin Hesler Slavens Hesler 1863-1946 and John Reuben Slavens (1859-1887).

Jesse F. Westmeier, fifth child of Chris and Minnie Westmeier, published a book on the Westmeier family in 1953. He had some records and organized and/or attended family reunions to gather additional information about the family. Chris Westmeier (1852-1925) was the son of John Frederick Westmeier, who was born on October 21, 1813 in Hanover, Germany. He emigrated to the United States and settled in Caesar Creek Township, Dearborn County, Indiana. He arrived from Bremen on the ship Johannes November 3, 1841 in Baltimore, Maryland. He married Clara Maria Elizabeth (Mary) Nolte on October 16, 1845 in St. John's Lutheran Church., Farmers Retreat, Indiana. She was born September 13, 1826 in Germany. They lived on a farm one half mile south of Farmers Retreat, Indiana. And had 9 children

Christian Henry Westmeier was born July 11, 1852 Caesar Creek Township, Dearborn County, Indiana. He spoke German and did not learn to read and write English. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and worked at a furniture factory in Seymour, Indiana . He married Caroline Wilhelmine (Minnie) Gilman on November 30, 1876 in Dearborn County, Indiana. She was born on June 24, 1858. They moved to Seymour, Jackson County, Indiana. They had nine children. Uncle Jess also published a book about the same time as the Westmeier book on the Gillman family.

My grandmother and her family spoke German at home. She did not learn to speak English until she went to school. All of the children began working as soon as they could, and, as long as they lived at home, they were required to bring their earnings to their mother, who distributed the funds according to what she believed to be their needs. My grandmother remembered going to the back door

of the saloon to get beer for her mother on days they washed. My father said his grandmother was always in charge of the family, and her husband depended on her; whatever Minnie said was right.

After they were married, Edna and Howard Slavens first moved to Indianapolis, where he worked for a grocery store. Following the death of his grandfather, George Washington Slavens in Clinton, Henry County, Missouri in 1908, he used his small inheritance to buy a small farm near Wicks Arkansas. The farm was in a very remote area, and they could not earn enough to continue to live there, so they moved to Pittsburg, Kansas, where my father grew up and graduated from high school in 1926. They went to Oklahoma, where both men worked for Phillips Oil Company. My grandfather died in November, 1940, and my grandmother moved back to Pittsburg, where she lived until 1952. We knew her better than our mother's parents, Edward and Hattie Welty, who lived in Kansas City, Kansas.

My grandmother liked to play games with us. She made cookies and had little dishes in which she sometimes put pudding and jello for us. She was never happy for the 26 years following our grandfather's death, but she enjoyed entertaining her four grandchildren, generally one at a time.

We moved to southeast Missouri about 300 miles from Pittsburg when I was 9, and we did not see her as often then. I spent a month with her in the summer when I was 11. She like to quilt and crochet for other people, and she also quilted with the ladies at her church, although she preferred to quilt alone because her work was better and more consistent. I was rather bored with the gossip of the ladies at the quilting sessions. She loved music, especially band music, and we attended the evening concerts each week at Lincoln Park. My father had played the cello in the high school orchestra and the drums in the college marching band. During that summer, the Band Director was M. O. Johnson, then a music teacher at the

Pittsburg High School and a Foxwood Springs resident when I moved here.

One of my grandmother's favorite activities was to go downtown and park on Broadway to watch the people go by, not too interesting for me either. She took me to some movies, and I won our tickets one day when a man on the street from the local radio station was asking questions. I was supposed to tell him without looking what color the top light on a traffic signal was; I knew but, of course, could not look. She had flower gardens, and we took flowers to the cemetery there where my grandfather was buried each Wednesday afternoon.

We talked about her family in Indiana, and she taught me a few German words, although she had been away from her family most of the time for the past 50 years. She gave her grandchildren their first Bibles and picture albums of the years we lived near her. I have the large German Bible she was given when she was confirmed in 1893.

In 1952, she moved near us again. When Sarah Settles Brown Slavens, widow of my great great grandfather, George Washington Slavens, died at 105 in Clinton Missouri, my father and grandmother inherited a small amount of money from the sale of the house, and my grandmother bought a TV, the first in our family. We spent some Saturday evenings at her house watching the "Show of Shows" and the wrestling matches. My younger sister, Carol, enjoyed spending some time with her in addition to those evenings. She later moved to Lutheran homes in St. Louis, and my older sister, Beverly used to spend some Sunday afternoons with her. She died September 4, 1966, and we took her back to Pittsburg to be buried next to the husband she had lost in 1940.

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