

November 2010

*A monthly publication  
on behalf of the*



## Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 418 • West Springfield, MA 01090

Web Site: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mawmgs/index.html>

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In Memory of **Jim Birchall**

1926 - 2010

WMGS President & Friend

Jim Birchall, current president of the Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, passed away on Thursday, October 21. He was 84 years old and a resident of Agawam. During Jim's tenure as our president, he was very pleased to see the development of the WMGS website, and establishment of an electronic newsletter.

Jim was very active in our community. In addition to serving as our President, Jim also served as the President of the Agawam Historical Society and as Treasurer of the Agawam Golden Age Club #2.

While Jim enjoyed genealogy and tracing his roots, he had a true passion for pictures. As a result, Jim and his son Russ created and maintained a website displaying historical pictures from cities and towns throughout Western Massachusetts. Jim also spent numerous hours scanning and uploading all of the Agawam High School yearbooks. His most recent project focused on preserving land documents for homes in Agawam. It was Jim's hope to create a "time capsule" so that future generations could look at these records in 100 years to view the land values and pictures of property in 2010. You may view Jim and Russ's website at <http://imagemuseum.smugmug.com>.

To celebrate Jim's life, the WMGS would like to post your pictures and fond memories. Please send them to us at [WestMassGen@gmail.com](mailto:WestMassGen@gmail.com). Jim will be greatly missed by the members of the WMGS. We express our deepest sympathy to Russ and the rest of Jim's family.

## Calendar of Events

### **November 3, 2010:**

The next meeting for the Western Massachusetts Genealogy Society will be on Wednesday, November 3, 2010. The meeting will run from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center, 954 Main Street, Agawam, Massachusetts.

Steve Sorrow will be the guest speaker. He is a well known local historian and has a wealth of information about the Windsor Locks Canal.

### **November 13, 2010**

**Identification and Care of Photographs Workshop (9:00AM - 4:00PM)**  
NEHGS Research Library, 99-101 Newbury Street, Boston, MA

Instructor: Monique Fischer, Senior Photograph Conservator, Northeast Document Conservation Center

This hands-on workshop, an introduction to the preservation of photographs, will focus on historical photographic prints, including their identification, deterioration, and conservation. Participants will learn to recognize various photographic formats and will study the preservation problems associated with each format type. The workshop will culminate with a discussion of storage concerns and an examination of photographs brought in by participants. For more information visit:

<http://www.americanancestors.org/Event.aspx?id=21858&dt=11/13/2010>

### **Thursday, November 18, 2010**

The Western Massachusetts Genealogy Society will host a genealogy computer class. Classes are offered on the third and fourth Thursday of the month from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center, located at 954 Main Street in Agawam, Massachusetts. Classes are free for members. There is a \$10 fee for non-members.

### **December 1, 2010:**

The Western Massachusetts Genealogy Society will hold their next meeting on Wednesday, December 1, 2010. The meeting will be from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center, 954 Main Street, Agawam, Massachusetts.

Last meeting before Christmas. Come to the "Pot Luck" dinner and enjoy Christmas music while you eat. After dinner watch a video and take a trip through Forest Park's "Bright Nights" for the holiday season. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and have a safe "Holiday Season".

## **Genealogical Workshops at the National Archives at Pittsfield**

<http://www.archives.gov/northeast/pittsfield/public/workshops.html>

November 1	2:00 p.m.	Beginning Your Genealogy Research at the National Archives
November 4	10:00 a.m.	Researching Irish Ancestors
November 8	2:00 p.m.	Using Federal Census Records
November 9	10:00 a.m.	Researching French Canadian Ancestors- Part 1
November 9	1:30 p.m.	Researching French Canadian Ancestors- Part 2
November 10	2:00 p.m.	Researching German Ancestors
November 15	2:00 p.m.	Using Military Records at the National Archives
November 16	10:00 a.m.	Genealogy on the Internet
November 17	2:00 p.m.	Working with the Old German Script
November 22	2:00 p.m.	Finding Your Immigrant Ancestors at the National Archives

The workshops will be offered at the Regional Archives building, located at 10 Conte Drive in Pittsfield MA. The workshops are free and are approximately one hour in length. Call (413) 236-3600 to register.

## **News**

Did you miss our October meeting? Look under our October 6, 2010 meeting for links about Leslie Huber's lecture:

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mawmgs/newsletter.html>

Just a reminder: Our October Newsletter is now available on our website. Copies are located at the top of our "Newsletter" tab.

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mawmgs/newsletter.html>

We hope you enjoy these updates. Please continue to share your suggestions for improvement with us. We're looking forward to seeing everyone at our next meeting on Wednesday, November 3, 2010 at the Agawam Senior Center.

## **Our E-mail Address Has Changed**

The e-mail address for the Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society has been updated. Our new e-mail address is [WestMassGen@gmail.com](mailto:WestMassGen@gmail.com)

# Genealogy Hint

By Fran Malone

## How to Obtain a Copy of Your Ancestors Social Security Application Form

The first SS-5 applications of a social security number were distributed to citizens on Tuesday, November 24, 1936. This means that a lot of our ancestors born in the 1880's and 1890's had to sign up for Social Security through their employers at this time.

In 1973 the Social Security Administration started to keep track of deaths of individuals age 65 or older in the Social Security Death Index which contains about 95% of the reported deaths. There are individuals with Social Security Numbers whose deaths are not recorded in the index and they are Professionals (Doctors/Lawyers), Farmers, Government Workers, and Railroad Workers. However there is an indexed specified as Railroad Workers that has most of those individuals listed. The Social Security Death Index can be found at the following websites.

[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) (free)

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (paid)

[www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com) (free)

Once you've found your ancestor in the Social Security Death Index, you may want to request a copy of your ancestor's original Social Security Application which is also known as the SS-5 Form.

The application/SS-5 Form used by our ancestors is an excellent record/resource for genealogical information on our ancestor and is part of the "Paper Trail" discussed in the September Issue.

The SS-5, or simply stated the application form for a Social Security Number includes the following 14 items:

1. Full name and Alternate name
2. Full name at birth, including maiden name
3. Present mailing address
4. Age at last birthday
5. Date of birth
6. Place of birth (city, county, State)
7. Father's full name

8. Mother's full name, including maiden name
9. Sex
10. Race as indicated by the applicant
11. Whether the applicant ever applied for Social Security or Railroad Retirement before
12. Current employer's name and address
13. Date signed
14. Applicant's signature

As long as a person is deceased, the Social Security Administration will provide a copy of this Form SS-5, Application for Social Security Number to anyone who makes a request under the Freedom of Information Act. They will also release this form to the registrant (the person who belongs to the Social Security Number) and to anyone who has a release-of-information statement signed by the person about whom the information is sought.

#### HOW TO REQUEST A COPY OF THE SS-5

The easiest way to request a copy of the SS-5 form for your ancestor is to apply online through the Social Security Administration: "Request for Deceased Individual's Social Security Record SS-5".

A printable version of this SS-5 Application Form is also available for mail-in requests

Alternatively, you can send (1) the person's name, (2) the person's Social Security Number (if known), and (3) either evidence of death or a release-of-information statement signed by the person about whom the information is sought, to:

Social Security Administration  
OEO FOIA Workgroup  
300 N. Greene Street  
P.O. Box 33022  
Baltimore, Maryland 21290-3022

Mark both the envelope and its contents: "FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST " or "INFORMATION REQUEST."

If you supply the Social Security Number, the fee is \$27.00. If the SSN is not known, the fee is \$29.00, and you must send the person's full name, date and place

of birth, and names of parents. If you have a Social Security Number from family records or a death certificate, but are unable to locate the individual in the SSDI, then I strongly suggest you include proof of death with your application, as it will likely be returned to you otherwise with that request. The usual wait time for receiving a copy of a Social Security Application Form is 6-8 weeks, so be prepared to be patient! Online applications are generally a bit quicker - often with a turnaround time of 3-4 weeks, although this may vary based on demand.

Good luck and please send us your questions. You can contact us at:  
[WestMassGen@gmail.com](mailto:WestMassGen@gmail.com)

## Genealogy Websites

By Fran Malone

I would like to thank Daphne Thompson for writing us on October 3rd and suggesting this month's website the "USgenweb Project". The USgenweb Project is a group of volunteers working together to provide free genealogy websites for genealogical research in every county and every state. There is a National Coordinator, State Coordinator, and then each County within the states has Coordinators.

The information on each state website varies on how much work is put into it. Some states and counties have excellent information and records that are not even seen on ancestry or the LDS family search site. Likewise there are states and counties that offer the minimum information. You may not find the record you are looking for but in most cases each state and each county will offer you a list of resources to contact that you wouldn't have thought of otherwise.

I have used the USgenweb Project a number of times in my research and the research for others. I've researched in the states of Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Mississippi, Virginia, New York, North and South Carolina, Arkansas and Tennessee to name a few. Again some states will only give you a list of resources while some have given me complete cemetery plots with all the family members buried in there.

Daphne states that the Usgenweb project helped her document the divorce of her Great Grandparents in Iowa in 1901. She also stated that she found excellent web

projects in Tioga Co., PA., Chittenden Co., VT., and Hardin Co., Iowa. The Chittenden Co. website is especially beautiful and has won some awards for website design.

There is a web site for Hampden County and the coordinator is Dawn Newton. It can best be described as "under construction" and needs more volunteers and more submissions of materials from interested parties to help grow the site.

The kinds of information that can be found on the county websites are unlimited. Examples are: county histories, biographies of prominent citizens, maps, birth and death indexes, marriage registers, census records, cemeteries including burial records, and lists of libraries, newspapers, and court houses. The USgenweb Project can be accessed at the following website: [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org)

Another web project that you could use is the worldgenweb project. Like the USgenweb project it's set up with coordinators for the different countries and depending on the country you'll have a county coordinator or a region coordinator. I have only used the Ireland genweb project, England genweb project, and the Canada genweb project.

I have had good success on all three in finding information, records, and contact resources. Where to write to if you have to is very important. The countries like the states can have a wealth of information or just minimum information. It depends on what is available and how many volunteers are available to upload information.

The worldgenweb project can be accessed at: [www.worldgenweb.org](http://www.worldgenweb.org)

We value your genealogy questions and suggestions. Please contact us at: [WestMassGen@gmail.com](mailto:WestMassGen@gmail.com)

## Surname Project

As we continue to expand our website, you might be interested to know that we are currently developing a “Surname List.” All of our members are researching at least one last name. This information was collected on our 2010-2011 Application for Membership. Our goal is to connect people who are researching the same family names. We will develop a chart on our website listing the following information: Surname, Name of WMGS Member and e-mail address.

Once the information has been summarized in a chart, each WMGS member will receive an e-mail or phone call to confirm that we may publish this information. If for any reason, you would prefer not to have your information listed on our website, just let us know. Please contact Susan Levenson at [WestMassGen@gmail.com](mailto:WestMassGen@gmail.com) if you have any questions or are interested in working on the “Surname Project.” Volunteers are needed to compile the information on the computer and to handle confirmations via e-mail and phone.

## Membership Update

Just a reminder: WMGS annual membership dues should be paid by October 15<sup>th</sup>. Dues can be submitted at our next meeting on November 3rd, or mailed to our PO Box listed on the Application for Membership.

Please be sure to submit an “Application for Membership” with your dues. This will ensure that we have all of your current information on file, especially those ever-changing e-mail addresses.

The “Application for Membership” can be printed from the “Join” tab on our web site. Or, follow this link to print your application:

[http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mawmgs/images/WMGS\\_application.pdf](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mawmgs/images/WMGS_application.pdf)

## Welcome New Members

Please welcome the following individuals who joined our society this month:

**Roland Jacobs**  
**Richard and Joan Johnson**  
**Sandy Morin**

## About Us

### Meetings

We meet on the first Wednesday of each month, September through June from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center, located at 954 Main Street in Agawam, Massachusetts.

Our genealogy computer classes are offered on the third and fourth Thursday of the month from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center.

### Membership information

Annual membership runs from September 1 to August 31 each year. Individuals may purchase a membership for \$20, while institutions may purchase a membership for \$25. Applications for Membership can be found on our website.

## Newsletter Deadline

Did you enjoy reading our newsletter? Do you have suggestions for articles, or have an article you would like us to publish? Our next issue of the newsletter will be December 2010. Please forward your information by November 18, 2010 to Susan Leverson and Fran Malone at: [WestMassGen@gmail.com](mailto:WestMassGen@gmail.com)

### **Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society 2010-2011 Executive Board Members**

President: Jim Birchall  
Vice-President: Fran Malone  
Vice-President: June Cook  
Co-Secretary: Elsie Hamilton  
Co-Secretary: Marilyn Powers  
Treasurer: Susan Leverson