

Winnebagoland Genealogical Society Podcast

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Thirteen volumes of vital records indexing, over 50 cemeteries transcribed, 100 plus years of newspaper obituary indexing, 112 quarterly newsletters published, over 250 programs presented, 700 certificates issued and hundreds of people helped. And that's just the highlights of what the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society has accomplished in its **first** 30 years.

Hi, I'm Mara Munroe, and I'm a proud charter member of the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society. In fact, I'm the one who made the signs inviting people who were interested in being part of such a group to a meeting in the fall of 1984. The results have made Winnebago County one of the most genealogy friendly counties in Wisconsin. We hope this series of podcasts will help you in your search for family history, as well as encouraging you to join us, for informative programs, friendly suggestions and more.

Helping folks figure out where to look for family information has been a theme from the early days of the society. Two of our members put together a packet with basic genealogy forms and some information on area sources. When they showed it to other genealogists at a statewide gathering, they were encouraged to focus on the listings of local records and sources. This turned into the Research Guide to Winnebago County, now in its third edition. The Research Guide lists the offices, libraries, and historical societies which hold the records; it lists the cemeteries, churches, and newspapers (and there have been many over the years). There are maps of former rural post offices, place names and Civil Town boundary changes; all things which were part of our ancestors' lives, and which affect our search for them. And we're proud to say that it inspired a similar book by the Waupaca County Genealogical Society.

For example, the Research Guide tells you that despite the name, in Wisconsin the Register of Deeds office handles not only land ownership records, but also Vital Records. The Winnebago County Register of Deeds was one of our early speakers. She asked if some of our members might be willing to volunteer in that office, helping others who are searching for birth, death or marriage records in old-fashioned handwriting. Prior to the Society's work there, vital records at the courthouse were not fully indexed. Each volume of records had index pages labeled by letter, and the names were noted on the appropriate page. That meant you could have to run your finger down a lot of hand-written names to find the page number you needed. And one of the volumes of marriages had no index for brides at all, only grooms. In 1994 we published the first volume of vital records indexing, covering marriages 1848 through 1874 in Winnebago County. We now have six volumes of marriages indexes. Birth and death certificates were not required until later, so we have published only four volumes of deaths, and two of births. There is also a volume indexing divorces in county and circuit courts.

When official vital records don't exist or don't give enough information, church records can serve as a supplement. But church offices are not always open full time, and the staff, while friendly, needs to concentrate on the current congregation. So the Society arranged and paid for the microfilming of the baptismal, marriage and funeral registers of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. This is the oldest church in Oshkosh founded as a German-speaking congregation. The records are in old-style German handwriting, and even more difficult to read than old American handwriting. But the microfilm is now available at the Oshkosh Public Library, where one can readily make a copy of the relevant page and then puzzle out the exact spelling at leisure. The success of this project has led other Lutheran churches in Oshkosh to microfilm their own records, and place copies of the film at the Library. In 1885, over 20% of the residents of Winnebago County were born in a German-speaking country, so access to a large group of records calls for reading and understanding the old German script. The Society has arranged classes to teach this skill on two occasions.

The City of Oshkosh celebrated its sesquicentennial in 2003, the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society encouraged people to claim their family's part in the city's growth by documenting their local ancestors. Those who descended from individuals here by the time of the city's incorporation were awarded Pioneer certificates. Others, who did not reach that mark but could document 100 years of residency, were given Century certificates.

Let's take a closer look at that quarterly newsletter I mentioned. Named Winnebagoland Roots, it first appeared in the fall of 1986, back when our editor had to use a typewriter. It's more polished now, and the emailed pdf version even has color photos on occasion. A variety of material has been included over the years. Some has been what we call source material, the publication of information not available elsewhere. For instance, the September 1990 issue listed 50 burials as recorded by undertaker William Spikes in 1883. Since death certificates were not required in 1883, these records might solve a family mystery for someone. Another kind of article has concentrated on research techniques. In the days when census records were only available on microfilm, we published lists of what communities were on which pages, to simplify finding those folks. Modern online census indexes allow us to search not only by last name but also by other clues, such as first name and date of birth but sometimes page by page searching is still the only way to spot some badly mis-spelled families. Other articles have discussed the types of information available in probate records, how to use land records, and using the Wisconsin State Gazetteer and Business Directory.

In 1994 we began a series of articles each focusing on a different civil town in Winnebago County. By now each has been covered at least twice, with one article focused more on history and the other on research suggestions. For example, we pointed out that folks living in Town of Nepeuskum are actually closer to Berlin than to Oshkosh, and might have

attended church and been married and buried there, rather than in Winnebago County. We've featured small communities, too. The March 1990 issue contained four pages on Waukau, for instance, and the September 2010 issue had an article on Delhi.

Joining other genealogists from around the state, we hosted the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society fall conference in the fall of 2009. And more recently, a number of our members have been working with the new genealogy group in Menasha, coaching these beginners. There have been occasional bus trips to the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison for additional research opportunities.

This series of podcast is only the latest step in our long partnership with the Oshkosh Public Library. For most of our 30 year history, our regular meetings have been held at the Library. We have made it the official repository of our projects, including not only that microfilm of church registers and the vital records indexes, but also copies of the cemetery transcriptions, and the obituary indexing we've done. Further podcasts will explain some of these projects and how to use them in more detail.

We'd love to have you join us for future meetings of the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society. Our regular meeting night is the second Thursday of the month, at 7 pm, usually in the lower level meeting room of the Oshkosh Public Library. You can check our website for any changes and for the topic of the upcoming program, at winnebagogenealogicalsociety.blogspot.com/