

Winnebagoland Genealogical Society Podcast

Episode 2: Programs

Michael McArthur: For over 30 years the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society has provided it's members with unique programming and guests covering a variety of genealogical and historical topics. My name is Michael McArthur, librarian at the Oshkosh Public Library. In this episode of the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society Podcast, I will be talking with long time genealogical society member and current programming coordinator, Marie Beede about the various genealogical society programming.

So, what are some of the most memorable or interesting programs that the Winnebagoland Genealogical Society has had in the last 30 years.

Marie Beede: Well I think one of the really good programs that we have and repeat quite often, is the one about starting your family tree. Mara Monroe, a charter member of our group and librarian here at Oshkosh Public Library, is a real expert in genealogy resources and so forth. Our collection is quite large and we do pretty much talk about Germany and German people those there's other information also.

We have also had the president of the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society come and speak to us. And she talked about things like the census because there are a lot of intricate things about the census. She also had a bunch of forms she passed out amongst the people to let you know how to record your family history and that was very interesting. They almost through us out of the library because we had a long list of questions.

MM: I imagine if you have someone from the historical society who does this 24/7, 360 so days a year that she has a lot of information to give out and convey.

MB: Yes she did. She had a lot. She was very interesting. Another program we had that I thought was pretty interesting but also pretty emotional, back in 1856 they started this program where orphan children from the New York area who had parents who were either too poor or who had died or couldn't raise their children so they took them to the Catholic orphanage there and the people decided to put them on the train and ship them West and people adopted them along the way.

We did have several people who came to Oshkosh and we have since looked up information about them. That was interesting and had something to do with our own area. On the video there were also interviews with some of these people and they talked about how their lives had gone. Some were adopted by good people and some because mostly they wanted a kid to work. The ones that came here were pretty positive; they had had a good life and they were happy they came but it was

very emotional because everyone who knows about children knows how sad that must have been, that they never went back to their families.

So I thought that was a very good program and people did enjoy it. That orphan train program quite in 1930. But all that long time they had been sending children West.

MM: Out of curiosity, did you discover any new resources for how you traced history for these orphans once they got to Oshkosh?

MB: We did talk about that a bit. I don't know if there are special resources but because resources on the newspapers in the area and all, you could go back and you kind of knew which year you were looking for; there are records at the courthouse about adopted children, so there were some sources mentioned. And of course, there is always talking to local people who may have known those people. So we did find out information on the ones who came to Oshkosh. I would assume other cities; small towns would have the same information if they were looking to see where their children came from and if they still had family somewhere.

MM: The genealogical society here mostly focuses on people of German heritage, but you've also had programming and the library has resources for people of other nationalities, right?

MB: Yes, we do. I myself have a family that is of Norwegian decent for the most part and also relatives still living in Norway. So, we found that the Norwegian people are very proud of their heritage and they have been doing, as a project from their university, all of the church books are being digitized and they do English and Norwegian so you can go online and you can look up your relatives baptism, the date, the sponsors, the farm name; very helpful information if you're looking for Norwegian people.

One of the interesting things about Norwegians is, if your father's name was Ole, then your last name is Olsen, or Olstoder, because they didn't have family names back when you're most likely looking for your people. They do now but they didn't then. And these church books that I was talking about, they give birth, baptism, confirmation, marriage, and death records. On these databases they are putting, as they find them, pictures of the farm and other kinds of information; some probate, stuff like that. So looking up Norwegians is not very difficult.

MM: If you know where to look. Which if you didn't before these kinds of presentations...

MB: Yeah, that would be difficult.

MM: Would you call up Oslo and ask, “Do my relatives live there?”

MB: Yeah, “Pull up census of 1801!”

MM: You have that right? Norwegian government?

MB: And besides Norway, we have had people from other nationalities come and talk with us.

MM: The first actual meeting I attended, they genealogical society was having a program on Brick Walls, which I found kind of interesting. What was that program like?

MB: Well, everybody in looking for their family finds that some roads lead to nowhere. So you found “Uncle Charlie” but you can’t find anything about Uncle Charlie. So, we kind of got together at that particular program and talked amongst ourselves and tried to talk people over the humps. But a lot of times you can solve these problems by going to a database that’s online.

Family Search, which is run by the Mormon Church in Utah, is a big free database. They have a lot of information. They go out and find the stuff and that really helps when you start looking because you can find stuff about your family. The really nice thing for most people is that’s a free database but it has a tremendous amount of information and you can look at that all night at home in your jammies with your coffee. Whatever, you know. But there you might find an answer to your question.

Or you might want to go to Ancestry. Now, Ancestry is free at our public library here in Oshkosh, but if you have it at home, and you can; there is a fee for that. So, you might go there. They have a lot of information. Might be that Uncle Charlie is there somewhere. I know I’ve looked on there and it’s amazing some of the stuff they actually have.

So hopefully we can solve your brick walls, either because one of us knew a way you could go, or one of those databases helped you out. But, you know, everyone’s got the brick walls, and you just got to get over them somehow.

MM: I also understand that the Genealogical Society has had some presentations by some of the local authors here in Oshkosh.

MB: Yes we have. And we always get a big crowd for those because people in Oshkosh are very interested in the town of Oshkosh and the history of some of the things that have gone on here.

We did have one author. He came in a talked about the bars and the saloons. At one time there were a lot of them here because that was kind of a common thing in

Germany, to have a little corner bar and so a lot of people's families had been involved with one or the other and that's why the bog crowd. People wanted to hear about their family and the bars.

MM: It's sort of an integral part of traditional German culture is the corner bar. The tavern.

MB: They're kind of like the social centers. People get together there and eat and have some drinks and play cards and have a good time. So, a lot of people came to hear that program.

Another man came and he had written about the grocery stores and other small businesses around Oshkosh. Of course that was interesting too because, like the bars, the little grocery stores at one time were neighborhood stores and so people remembered when they went there as children and things they bought. So that was fun.

Then another person who has written quite a few books, I think most people who know about Oshkosh, know about Clarence "Inky" Youngwirth. And he loves Oshkosh and has written about almost everything that could have gone on here. He has the happiest face when he talks because he's also on TV sometimes. Now he hasn't been to the Genealogy Society in a while because he's in his nineties now and he doesn't get around as well as he used to.

MM: He still making it into Truck every once in a while.

MB: Yes. He was just very interested in everything and he'd talk about the trains and just all kinds of things that went on.

And right now we have a lady from our genealogy group who is writing a book about the Germans from Russia. She finishing up the last chapter and is hoping to get that published sometime in the coming year so we're hoping to have a program from her talking about these Germans from Russia that came to this area at one time.

MM: So, the programming is mostly focused on research methods, using different tools or methods, and ways you can jump start or overcome brick walls. But the genealogical society is more than just study and databases and searching, right?

MB: Yes, right. We always take time out at Christmas, for instance, to have nice refreshments. At different programs we have brought different things in to talk about. Sometimes we have brought in items that were cooking items that people aren't using anymore but that your relatives, your grandma, your great-grandma, had, you know.

One time we did costumes, which really German costumes so much as old fashion clothes that we had here. Sometimes we've done recipes and things like that and talked about that kind of thing. It's always a fun night. Maybe we make up some games. One time we brought in old Christmas ornaments. That was pretty interesting. IT's always a fun night and we look forward to that.

In May we've always had potluck supper because we don't really have meetings in June and July. Usually we are out reading a cemetery or some other project we want to do for our research purposes. So, in May, it's kind of a windup for what is our year. We have a potluck supper and a lot times there is not really a program for that. We kind of sit around and get acquainted because when you have a lot of research related programs you don't have a lot of visiting time. But it always makes for a nicer organization if people know each other. And so we like to sit around and talk a little bit. And some of the people in Oshkosh are really related to a lot of the other people. So, sometimes they do talk genealogy but sometimes it's just fun.

MB: I would like to invite you to one of our meetings at the Oshkosh Public Library. I think you would enjoy it. People are nice and we certainly have interesting conversations and programs. We have a website where you can get information on dates and program topics. It's always nice to know what's going to be going on. The website is <http://winnebagogenealogicalsociety.blogspot.com/>. It can also be reached from the library homepage. You can also enquire at the Reference Desk and someone will be glad to help you. Our librarians are always friendly and helpful. If you have already started research on your family tree they'll be happy to help you find resources both online and in the library.

So what I really want to do is welcome you and ask you to come to our programs. I wish you goodnight and happy hunting.

This podcast was recorded at the Oshkosh Public Library.