

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

June 1994

Computers / 5th Birthday

Another good turnout, almost twenty, came out for beginning computers and genealogy on a very warm evening, one that would prove to be the beginning of an early summer heat wave.

Hank & Joan Bruni, guests at Pine Lake Manor, visited us once again. In fact, Joan had her genealogical charts ready to show, but, more of that later.

Don, who led the program, first acknowledged the work of genealogists before the advent of the computer. Organized, meticulous, and creators of well documented work, many genealogists produced work that can be passed along. But GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out) still rears its ugly head. Computers made it possible that GIGO can happen even faster, so all the rules of good genealogy still apply today.

But computers can make us more efficient. Don pointed out three types of computer programs:

- word processing: similar to typewriters but with many "bells and whistles"
- spreadsheet: rows and columns of numbers that businesses often use
- database: information kept in categories

One example of the database is the computer file that makes out the mailing labels for your mailings. Each of you have a place in the computer that asks for name, address, post office, state, zip and subscription ending date. Push the right buttons and, presto, labels for subscribers to this newsletter are produced. (And you thought I typed each of your labels?)

Genealogy programs are a form of a database. For each person in a genealogy, a program asks for name, parents, birth date and place, death date and place (or residence information, if still alive), marriage date and

place, and depending on the program, many other pieces of information.

Two types of genealogy programs are widely used. The lesser used one is called an event-based program. This means the computer will not link people together; instead, it lists names and events. So, if you want to find all the people named Wright in your file, the computer could show you all the people named Wright. The Mormons' recording of events and people was exhibited and is the best example of this type of database.

The dominant type of program used is called lineage-linked, meaning that by naming a person a father or mother of another person, the computer will keep track for tens of generations who's related to whom, drawing charts, printing genealogy and descendent charts, etc. Tens of companies sell their own version of this type of database. Don brought ROOTS IV and PAF, the two biggest sellers in the world.

And then came the demonstrations. Harriet Rasmussen showed her notebook of non-computer-generated genealogy, meaning that it's all handwritten and organized the way she wants it. The best part was Harriet trying to explain she wasn't a genealogist. What is obvious from Harriet's work is that she has some of the most detailed work of the local scene.

Cris Ketcham showed her work, much of it produced from a word processor. Indentations or other marks indicating the next generation are done by the author.

Joan Bruni brought an example of her family tree done on PAF (Personal Ancestry File), the name of the family I have forgotten. Joan's charts showed all the descendents of the selected ancestor. This is typical of many genealogy programs.

Don, with the help of Harriet, demonstrated a sample that had been created during the previous week. Don brought in his computer to demonstrate what it can do for us. Don used Harriet's information on her mother's family, typing in about thirty people, a couple of which went back four or five generations from Harriet. During the program, two more people (or records, as we're impersonally known in computer language) were entered. Don printed out several reports, ranging from a book style genealogy report, to a descendent list (family tree), to a pedigree chart, to a family group sheet, to a heredity statistics. Each program may do something a little different. Often, price is an indicator of a program's sophistication, although the Mormons' PAF program is the big exception, selling for 10%-20% of what similar programs cost. Obviously, the Mormons (correctly called the Church of Latter Day Saints) do away with the profit motive.

During Don's demonstration, several mistakes were made and caught by the computer. The computer warned us that we were marrying Harriet's father to his own mother, that someone's mother was not old enough to be a mother, that a mother must be female, and other such things that are easy to make a mistake about when typing information into the computer.

Questions were asked and answered along the way. Maybe the more adventurous might be tempted to look at using a computer sometime. One topic barely mentioned was the modem, where one can use the phone to transfer one's information to someone else.

The final event of the night was the celebration of the Greenville Local History Group's fifth birthday. It was in June 1989 that a handful of individuals met, decided that such a group was worthwhile, and then acted upon that decision. Over the past five years, much information has been recorded and many items of local history have been shown, set aside, or saved from the garbage heap. Possibly, a recap of our five years can be done along with the January summary. We could have tried to do it this night but the computer program went to nearly 9:30, and darkness was beckoning.

Since no one countered Don's threat to bring refreshments, those present were forced

to put up (it's a good thing I'm writing about myself!) with cake and cookies, soda and juice.

Notes & other niblets:

* The next meeting will be a share session on July 11th. Bring some thing or story along, or just pull up a chair.

* John Earl drew attention to a blacksmithing demonstration. Information is as follows:

First Annual Blacksmith Days

Location: Hancock Shaker Village

Routes 20 & 41

Pittsfield, MA

Date: June 25 & 26

Time: 10am to 5pm

Cost: \$10 per day

Lunch available on premises

Information: Bill Senseney

ph# days (413) 698-2891

Program: 10 Artists / Blacksmiths

Demonstrating / Exhibiting

* The new Greene County history is out. I'll bring my copy to next meeting. Some local pictures and mention are included.

* I'll be nagging about dues next month. For the early birds, four dollars (if a check, make payable to Don Teator) will do the job again.

* Carol Bryant gave a copy of "New York in the Revolution" for the files. This 1898 publication is a classic reference, and will be shown at the next meeting.

* I'll be asking about next year's schedule of meetings. This year we cut out meeting for December, January and February. We experimented with a Saturday meeting in March but no one who said such a meeting would make a difference in their attendance came. So, I'll propose that we not meet December through March and concentrate on meeting April through November. If you want your two cents put in, come out next month and voice your opinion. If you can't attend, call me and I'll pass the message along.

* Our fifth year of existence is one of those pleasant reminders of how much work has been done. As Town Historian, I owe each of you a **thank you** for your interest, your sharing of knowledge, your active support, and your helping me be a better historian. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Don