

*Monmouth County Genealogy Society*  
*P.O. Box 5, Lincroft NJ 07738-0005*  
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~njmcgs/>



## MONMOUTH COUNTY GENEALOGY SOCIETY

### THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

(1988 – 2008)



“Would you be interested in starting a genealogy group?” That was the question proposed by Gary Parks, librarian/archivist of the Monmouth County Historical Association (MCHA), to several people in early 1988. Gary and Carol O’Donnell, Director of MCHA, thought it was time for Monmouth County to have a genealogy group and decided that the Historical Association would be a good organization to sponsor it. On April 1 several interested genealogy researchers met with Gary in the library at MCHA.

During that first meeting, those present discussed what they wanted the group to be, what they wanted to accomplish, and how to interest others. Meetings with speakers who could enlighten the audience about family research were a prime objective. Speakers would require fees. So, the first order of business would be to earn money. Publishing books on Monmouth County subjects was discussed and the Publishing Committee was born. Other Committees proposed that day were Correspondence, Publicity, Programs, and Computer.

The organizational meeting was held on 1 May 1988 at MCHA headquarters in Freehold and was announced through the Association and press releases. The flyer announcing the meeting said that this would be a group where "amateur and professional genealogists alike will be able to congregate and discuss the triumphs and failures of their research. The possibilities for future guest speakers, field trips, and publications are infinite." While the participant need not have Monmouth County roots, he or she would be required to be a member of MCHA. Not knowing what to expect, the Historical Society set up 70 chairs and hoped to fill 50. On the day of the meeting, people began filing in and soon filled all the chairs with many standing in the hall. In all, 85 people attended. From that first group, 55 became charter members.

For the first two years, the Monmouth County Genealogy Group was very informal. There were no officers, only committees and/or committee heads, with the Publications Committee acting as an unofficial executive board and Gary Parks serving as chairman/presiding officer of the group. During those two years, three books and a newsletter were published. Although the group was fortunate to have several knowledgeable and interesting speakers come from within its own membership, it was now possible to obtain paid speakers.

The first issue of the newsletter, *The Monmouth Connection*, was sent out to members in September 1989 when Publications Committee member Miriam (Mim) Bryan volunteered to serve as its editor. "It will serve as a history of our group... and will be our tie to out-of-state members" was printed in the first issue. Some of the items that the editor wished to see were: "programs for upcoming meetings; where to find genealogical materials of interest to Monmouth County researchers; projects underway by committees of our group; family and community histories of general interest; profiles of group members and/or genealogists in our area; new publications of interest to genealogists; queries (as space permits); names of genealogical magazines and associations; and recent acquisitions by MCHA." Many of those items have been published in the newsletter, such as "Spotlight on ...," "Let's Visit," "Look Whose Searching for ..."; and other articles including family histories, and more recently, various series such as extracts of NJ wills, and names on the 1793 Militia Census for Monmouth County. In the second issue it was noted that the Publications Committee selected *The Monmouth Connection* as the newsletter's permanent name which was suggested by Gary Parks, and it would be published six times a year. After only one year of publication, *The Monmouth Connection* was entered into the National Genealogical Society Newsletter Competition and placed third in its category. In 1999 and 2000 it received "Runner Up" awards.

The Speakers Bureau was also started in 1989 when Nancy Heydt spoke at the LDS workshop on "Writing Your Own Life Story" on May 19. Since then the society's Speakers Bureau has sent out at least nine members to talk to various organizations on subjects such as publishing programs, writing one's life story and family history, ethnicity, getting started in genealogy research, family history month, Monmouth County genealogy, Molly Pitcher, tracing family roots, leaving a trail, computer genealogy, getting organized, census records, solving genealogical problems, genealogy software, genealogy websites, genealogy merit badge (for Boy Scouts), First Families of Old Monmouth, courthouse records, New Jersey research, vital statistics, finding immigrant origins, evaluating evidence, city directories, cemeteries and church records, and using timelines in research. While the first speakers spoke gratis, the club's bureau received its first check on 21 April 1991 from the Union Landing Historical Society, Brielle, NJ. Today, the Speakers Bureau is one of the society's most lucrative endeavors.

By 1990, the Monmouth County Genealogy Group decided it was time to write a set of bylaws (prepared by the Bylaws and Publications committees) and nominate officers. Those first officers were President, Nancy Heydt; Vice President, Janet Borchardt; Corresponding Secretary, Carol Megill; Recording Secretary, Roseann Drew Leute; Treasurer, Joyce Conk; and Historian, Jean Houston. They were sworn in at the general meeting on Sunday, 11 March 1990. The bylaws also called for the group to change its name to the Monmouth County Genealogy Club (MCGC).

Later that month MCGC sponsored its first Family Records Discovery Day at MCHA. Flyers went out and notification was given to local newspapers announcing that anyone who had documents, Bible records, genealogical records, needlework, quilts, photographs, or artifacts would be welcome to bring them in and have copies or photographs taken of them. Prizes would be given for the oldest and/or most unusual. In April of that year, MCGC joined the Federation of Genealogical Societies. It was also in 1990 that the club had its first "Show 'n Tell Picnic." It was held in July in the back yard of the MCHA museum building. Members brought their lunches, chairs/and or blankets and a family keepsake or something related to their genealogical pursuits to talk about.

October 1990 was a busy month. It was then that the club established "Family History Awareness Month" (later called "Family History Month") and had it proclaimed as such by the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders. In 1991 it was listed in **Chase's Book of Annual Events** and mail started coming asking for information, so a brochure was developed to answer most questions. By 1993 Governor Jim Florio had also recognized it with a state proclamation. Seven years later, thirteen states had followed New Jersey's lead in proclaiming October as Family History Month, and an article in "Ancestry Daily News" (2 Oct. 2000) credited MCGS as the originator. The article continued by saying that its "aspiration was that during this month, societies would do something special to draw attention to and promote family history." On 26 September 2001, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) passed legislation that officially commemorated October as Family History Month, and the United States Senate made it a national celebration in 2002. The concept of designating October as Family History Awareness Month was the creation of Nancy Heydt who was given The Distinguished Service Award from the Federation of Genealogy Societies for this idea.

During the first year of this celebration, the club sponsored several special events (many continuing in following years). It held a "Phone-a-Fact Day" at MCHA. Several of the members volunteered to answer phones and search the MCHA library for the answers to research questions from fellow members from all over the country. Also, the club sponsored "Family Tree Climbing Can be Fun," a genealogical workshop presented by Everton's International Genealogical Society. At the end of October, the club had its first publications party to celebrate the publication of four books: **Early Records of the Presbyterian Church of Squan Village, NJ, 1848-1900**, by Joseph & Miriam Bryan; **Bible Records from the MCHA Library, Volume I**, by Carol Fisher Megill; **The Beekman Index, Updated**, by Nancy Oster Heydt; and **Resources for Family Research in Monmouth County**, by Barbara Carver Smith. All authors/compilers were in attendance for book signings. The club's publications were highly acclaimed by reviewers from various states' and national genealogical organizations.

1991 was a year of ethnicity for MCGC. There were programs on "Tracing Your Italian Ancestry," "Researching for our Dutch Personality," "Early Monmouth County Families of Color" and "Jewish Genealogy." The club had a display and sales table at the Monmouth College "Ethnicity Week." It held a "Genie Gumshe" program at MCHA. Once again, member volunteers offered to help anyone who came in with a genealogical problem. Six of our members were instructors on "Writing A Family History" held at the Monmouth County Library headquarters in Manalapan. The club began holding workshops on such topics as "Beginning Genealogy" and "Computers." The January newsletter reported that Kay Welch created the winning logo design (still in use today) which is found on the masthead of *The Monmouth Connection* and on many other club items. Later a quilted version used on the lectern was made by Pat Otterberg. MCGC also bid a sad farewell to Gary Parks who had taken a position in Pennsylvania. In order to make sure he would not forget the club he helped to organize, a friendship quilt was made by several members and given to him at the second annual July picnic.

Also in 1991, the club started attending book and genealogy fairs and conventions in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania where tables were set up to display sale items and information flyers. In 1997 it participated in the Monmouth County Archives and History Day at the Monmouth County Library in Manalapan and has continued to do so every year since. The popular July Show 'n Tell meetings were held at various places; some at the MCHA backyard, and others at Christ Episcopal Church in Shrewsbury and the United Methodist Church in Red Bank.

The first workshop held by MCGC and organized by the Education Committee, entitled "How to Start Your Family History," was presented in December of 1991 at Monmouth County Library's Eastern Branch in Shrewsbury. With 25 people in attendance, a panel of five club members discussed such topics as starting one's genealogy, organizing materials, finding and using federal, state and local governmental records, and researching in libraries and other locations. It was held in response to a request from the county library system. Two to three workshops continue to be held yearly.

Due to renovations being made at MCHA and the club's growing membership, MCGC was forced to look for other locations to hold its meetings. At about this time, it was also decided to alternate the general meetings by holding some in eastern Monmouth County and some in western Monmouth County. Over the next few years, the club held general meetings at the Christ Episcopal Church in Shrewsbury, Monmouth County Library in Manalapan, and the United Methodist Church in Red Bank.

In 1993 volunteers from the club helped with a Cemetery Survey of Evergreen Cemetery in Farmingdale, and a calendar created by Nancy Heydt won a Certificate of Excellence in a contest sponsored by the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey.

In October 1995, a luncheon was held at the Squire's Pub to honor the Fifth Anniversary of Family History Month. Every year the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders continued to issue a proclamation for this event, and it was gaining recognition in other counties and states across the country. The first Family History Month Essay Contest was held in the summer of 1996. The subject was "Our Family's Cherished Traditions" for 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades, 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades, and adults. It was co-sponsored with the Monmouth County Library and Barnes & Noble stores of Freehold, West Long Branch and Holmdel. In 2000 the essay contest was revived (limited to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders) and has continued to the present.

In the spring of 1998, MCGC donated six reels of films, "the old Freehold Transcript newspaper" to the Monmouth County Historical Association on the occasion of their 100th anniversary. In August of that year, the club separated from MCHA, renamed itself the Monmouth County Genealogy Society (MCGS) and elected its first Trustees: Kay Welch, Bea Howley, and Mabel Sweetnam. While MCGS has had a web site for many years, the latest version was established in 1998

(<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njmcgs/>), and the society went digital that year by posting the "Return of the Militia, May 14<sup>th</sup> 1793, State of New Jersey – Monmouth County," on its site.

In 1999, MCGS co-sponsored a state seminar with The Genealogical Society of New Jersey which was held at the United Methodist Church, Red Bank. By this time, a Memoir Writing Group had been formed with meetings once a month at the homes of its members. Each month, a new topic is chosen, but members are not obligated to write on it if the topic does not interest them, and the only rule is: no criticism.

The creation of "The First Families of Monmouth County, New Jersey" was announced in the November 2000 issue of *The Monmouth Connection*. This is a lineage society and anyone with an ancestor who settled in Monmouth County by 1725 is eligible to become a member. In 1725 the population of Monmouth County was estimated at 4,446. It is these pioneers that MCGS wished to honor, and by January 2003, First Families had awarded certificates to 30 charter members.

In June 2002, a joint meeting of the Genealogical Society of NJ and the Monmouth County Genealogy Society was held at the Monmouth County Library in Manalapan. In October of that year, the society decided that the Eatontown Community Center, Eatontown, would be the permanent meeting place for the general meetings. In January 2003, prizes were awarded for the Family History Month Essay Contest, and a donation of \$1,000 by MCGS was made to Monmouth County Archives Restoration Project to help restore the 1875 Monmouth County State Census.

The programs presented at the general meetings have been varied and interesting. From informational topics such as "Resource Materials in the MCHA Library/Archives," and "State Archives & What You Will Find in Them," to the unusual, "Murder and Mayhem in Monmouth County" and "Haunted Houses of Monmouth County," to tours of such places as The Old Tennent Church, Tennent, and Old Brick Reformed Church of Marlboro.

Over the years, the club/society has sponsored many trips. In its first year (November 1988), members filled a bus for New York City where they could visit either the New York Public Library or the New York Historical Society Library. Some of the other trips taken for research purposes have been to New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, New Jersey Historical Society, New Jersey State Archives, and various cities such as Philadelphia & Washington D.C. There have also been fundraising trips to Drumthwacket, Culinary Institute of America, Sleepy Hollow country, Bethlehem PA (in December), Fraunces Tavern, Pearl Street Museum, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Winterthur, West Point and Constitution Island, Oyster Bay, NY, and Sagamore Hill (home of Theodore Roosevelt), and the Lambertville House Tour.

Besides the above mentioned books, MCGS has published Volumes II through IX of the Bible Records series (compilers Carol Fisher Megill and Beverly Seward Yackel); **All the Addresses You'll Ever Need, a Genealogy Resource Guide** compiled by Beverly Seward Yackel; **Let's Visit**, a collection of columns from *The Monmouth Connection*, 1989-1997, by Kay Welch with the help of Miriam S. Bryan, Gary Parks, Janet Borchardt, Nancy Heydt, and Carolyn Heuser; **Monmouth County Articles in The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, 1925-2000, Summary & Descriptions** compiled by Judith Green Watson; **Monmouth County and the Spanish-American War: Newspaper Articles from The Monmouth Democrat Index** by Donna Diamant.

Today, the Monmouth County Genealogy Society claims over 300 members, it has more than fulfilled the hopes of its originators who wrote in May of 1988 that "the possibilities for future guest speakers, field trips, and publications are infinite." The society's highly regarded publications, educational workshops, speakers bureau and other activities have earned it an excellent reputation among genealogical, historical and other organizations. To many the society is known as "the teaching society." Its members are hardworking, enthusiastic and creative as shown by the achievements of the society's first twenty years.

Carol Fisher Megill  
June 2008

*Author's Note: While it is impossible to include everything the Monmouth County Genealogy Society has accomplished in the last twenty years, I have endeavored to convey its story in these few pages. I am grateful for all the historians of the society (Jean Houston, Betty Applegate (deceased), Dr. David Beggs (deceased), Jean Fiske, Kay Welch (deceased), and Audrey Maxymuk), and Beverly Yackel for her many lists. Without their diligence, competence and organizational skills, this would have been a more difficult task.*

Monmouth County Genealogy Society  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee

Janet Borchardt  
Judy Bretzger  
Carol Fisher Megill  
Jerry Smith  
Beverly Seward Yackel

## Officers and Committee Chairmen

	<u>1990-1991</u>	<u>2008-2009</u>
<b>President</b>	Nancy Heydt	Debbie White
<b>Vice President</b>	Janet Borchardt	Jerry Smith
<b>Recording Secretary</b>	Roseann Drew Leute	Gail Hahn
<b>Corresponding Secretary</b>	Carol Fisher Megill	
<b>Treasurer</b>	Joyce Conk	Lou Friedersdorff
<b>Education</b>	Mike Truex	Beverly Yackel
<b>Historian</b>	Jean Houston	Audrey Maxymuk
<b>Hospitality</b>	Kay Welch	Donna Diamant
<b>Membership</b>	Carol Fisher Megill	Linda Patterson
<b>Newsletter</b>	Mim Bryan	Judy Bretzger
<b>Newsletter Circulation</b>		Bob Breen
<b>Publications</b>	Joe Bryan	Carol York
<b>Publicity</b>	Nancy Luckenbach & Kevin Shelly	
<b>Publicity Webmaster</b>		Linda Patterson
<b>Research</b>	Jane Peck	
<b>Sales</b>	Mike Truex & Nancy Heydt	Debbie & Mark White
<b>Sales Mail Orders</b>		Henry & Ann Butow
<b>Greeter</b>		Joan Shipley
<b>Speakers Bureau</b>		Beverly Yackel
<b>Family History Month</b>		Carol Fisher Megill
<b>First Families</b>		Lynn Wilson
<b>Trustees</b>		Mabel Sweetnam
		Mike Truex
		Dolores Olson

### Charter Members who are still dues-paying members today

Richard Anderson	Pat Ely	Jean Houston
Janet Borchardt	Doris Forman	Carol Fisher Megill
Lora Tilton Capozzoli	Joyce Friedersdorff	Nanette Pezzutti
Dorothy Conway-Comeau	Nancy Heydt	Mike Truex

### Past Presidents

- |                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Nancy Heydt | 6. Nancy Heydt & Beverly Yackel |
| 2. Mike Truex  | 7. Dolores Olson                |
| 3. Jim Raleigh | 8. Gail Hahn                    |
| 4. Bea Howley  | 9. Judy Bretzger                |
| 5. Carol York  | 10. Beverly Yackel              |