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DOCUMENTING THOSE LOST

'Powerhouse of information' expands

Painted Hills Genealogy Society moves into Livingston County

By Bob Glover

Genealogy is currently the second most popular hobby in the United States, after gardening, according to reports by ABC News and USA TODAY.

It is also the second most visited category on the Internet after only — are you ready? — pornography.

Not that long ago, researching family histories meant walking endlessly through cemeteries looking for the graves of ancestors and spending many hours going through records archives at a local courthouse or church. But those locations are likely far away from where the researcher lives and thus the pursuit of family history often didn't get too far.

Now, with the expansion of the Internet, researchers can find millions of records and even tombstone photos online without leaving their homes.

The area leader in genealogy is the Painted Hills Genealogy Society which recently expanded to add Livingston County to its original group of Allegany, Steuben, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties in New York; and McKean and Potter counties in Pennsylvania.

"Our mission is to make as many records available as possible," Painted Hills Genealogy Society's mission statement reads according to the organization's website, paintedhills.org, "covering the entire seven counties in Western New York and North Central Pennsylvania. Our society also strives to introduce young and old to the fun and rewards of the field of genealogy."



Stones of those early settlers buried at the Old Dansville Village Cemetery were dumped in the weeds at Greenmount Cemetery where they still remain. The American flag is in honor of the first death and burial in Dansville, Capt. Nathaniel Porter, a Revolutionary War hero. PHOTO PROVIDED

Mary Bryant founded the organization and served as its longtime president. She passed away on May 7 of this year in Olean.

"In 1999, this lady who lives in a small town and knew nothing about websites had a dream — to put as much information as possible about our area on the Web — free to any interested readers," Barb Hyde, Painted Hills Genealogy Society president, said. "Today we are the heirs to that dream. The original tiny website has grown into a powerhouse of information for our seven-county area — arguably the best and most complete on the web."

The sad fact is that cemetery records are often incomplete, if they exist at all, and tombstones over the years become unreadable, are vandalized or disappear. Cemetery associations across the state face severe budget problems and

towns and mandated by the state to take over as best they can where associations go out of existence. Thus, accurate record keeping is not a high priority for most cemeteries and the added importance for volunteers to document burials to preserve history.

I first became involved with the Painted Hills Genealogy Society in 2009 when I volunteered to update the online records for the Rogersville Forest Lawn Cemetery in South Dansville, where my mother and five generations of her Burger family are buried, and where my grandfather Carl Burger had served for years at the sextant.

That soon led me to relatives buried at Greenmount Cemetery in my hometown of Dansville. Each tombstone in both of these cemeteries has been photographed and the records documented, along with several from Holy

Cross Cemetery in Dansville, Woodlawn and Hillside cemeteries in Canisteo, and several small cemeteries in the Town of Dansville. When possible, the records include full name, full date of birth and death, name of spouse and parents. This is to assist those looking for accurate information about their ancestry.

There had been no online presence for Livingston County cemeteries so Paul Giometti, coordinator for Steuben County, agreed to "cross the border" and include Dansville, Livingston County under Dansville, Steuben County. Deanne Knapp and others agreed to help with the cemetery research.

Since she lives in Ossian and her husband Dwight is the Ossian Town Supervisor, Knapp asked if the Ossian cemeteries could be included in the project.

"Sure, if you will take on

coordinating all of Livingston County," Giometti replied.

"Livingston County borders both Allegany and Steuben counties to the north," Hyde said. "Families don't pay much attention to county lines in life or in death. So we are delighted to announce that Painted Hills Genealogy Society is now adding Livingston as our seventh county served by our organization and that Deanne Knapp has agreed to be the coordinator."

Painted Hills Genealogy Society currently lists 32 towns served on its Steuben County page, ranging from Addison to Hornell to Woodhull, involving hundreds of cemeteries. The service to Allegany County is much the same, ranging from Alfred to Grove to Wellsville. Frankie Stonemetz is the coordinator for Allegany County, as well as the society's vice president and serves with Giometti as webmasters.

Painted Hills Genealogy Society is all volunteer with assistants all over the country. Distance is no barrier to getting involved. Mary McAllister recently volunteered to upgrade Village Cemetery in Wayland. She grew up there but lives in South Carolina.

I'm the current contact for Dansville (both Livingston and Steuben counties) and Canisteo (where my wife Shelly Florence grew up). We live in Sleepy Hollow in Westchester County. Knapp is finishing up on Ossian cemeteries and is starting on Springwater. Both Knapp and myself (our fathers are from Canaseraga) are about to update the great work of Mary Rhodes, Marge Mastin, Irene Harvey and others for the Canaseraga cemeteries.

A very special challenge for Painted Hills Genealogy Society was the Old Dansville

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Village Cemetery project. My 90-year-old father, H. Ross Glover, had long been involved as a board member of the Forest Lawn Cemetery in South Dansville and, representing the Dansville American Legion, at Greenmount Cemetery.

For years he helped the late Jack Kinney and other Legion members place flags on the burial site of veterans in Dansville area cemeteries for Memorial Day. And that included one placed way up the service road, along a side hill at Greenmount where many discarded stones still lie. He never knew why the stones were there. We found tombstones there as well as many on private family plots with death dates prior to the 1847 opening of Greenmount Cemetery. So where did they come from?

Jane Schryver, a Dansville history enthusiast, supplied the answer in articles in the Dansville Breeze by the late historian Wutz Rauber. He detailed his efforts to properly honor those interred at the old burying grounds across from



The adjoining Rural and Hope cemeteries in Hornell are among the hundreds of cemeteries with records listed on the Painted Hills Genealogy Society website. PHOTO PROVIDED

the F.A. Owens plant, but then forgotten in history.

Further research found an 1888 village decree that all stones and bodies from the old cemetery were to be removed by family or else. This so the village "beautification" committee could make it into a nice park for the neighborhood. Thus grave markers not moved to Greenmount by family (several were but most were not) were either plowed under or carted to Greenmount and tossed up on a side hill along a service road where they remain today, 172 years later.

Among those discarded

stones in the weeds are those of Revolutionary War hero Captain Nathaniel Porter, the first to die and be buried in Dansville in 1797, and Thomas Macklem, Dansville's first schoolteacher, who died in 1822. These names were taught to us in our ninth grade New York State history class.

It will never be known how many, if any, bodies were actually moved to Greenmount, but it is believed that as many as 300 may still lie under the earth at the old cemetery site.

A meeting between Schryver, Pat Kreiley of the Dansville Village Board, Giometti, my father and myself resulted

in two parallel missions: the researching of all burials at the old cemetery to be posted on Painted Hills Genealogy Society's website, and renaming the old burying grounds "Pioneer Park" and erecting a proper memorial. The Old Village Cemetery record can be found at paintedhills.org/LIVINGSTON/DansvilleVillageCemetery.html. The Pioneer Park memorial monument project, spearheaded by Schryver and many others, is now almost completed and is in place in Dansville one block from Route 36 on School Street.

Hyde noted that the need for more volunteers is constant.

"Painted Hills Genealogy Society strives to place on the Internet the burials at all cemeteries and our counties to assist family history researchers and to preserve history," Hyde said. "If you have family and friends at Livingston, Steuben, or Allegany County cemeteries, or the other counties served by the society, and their information is not listed, or if you would like to volunteer to be a researcher at your favorite cemetery or to scan current obituaries for burial information, contact paint@paintedhills.org."