

# Morris Area Genealogy Society History

By Linnea Foster<sup>1</sup>, Ruth Daniels<sup>2</sup> & Lois Platz Kopf<sup>3</sup>



## In the Beginning

The Morris Area Genealogy Society (MAGS) was founded in 1988 to bring together people interested in family history and genealogy. MAGS had its beginnings when Diane Solomon, then head of the North Jersey History and Genealogy Center (NJHGC) of the Morristown & Morris Township Library (MRTL), became aware that patrons were interested in the formation of a genealogical society. In the fall of 1984, Melda Shippey and Linnea Foster were asked to meet with members of the Genealogical Society of the West-Fields.



Morristown & Morris Township Library

The Westfield members were generous in sharing their experiences in starting their organization. Although there was considerable interest in forming a society in the mid-1980s, the decision was made to wait until a meeting room in the proposed addition to the library was completed.

Three years later in the fall of 1987, the library sponsored a series of four programs about various aspects of genealogy. The response left no doubt that there was a desire for a genealogical society in the area. The organizational meeting of the Morris Area Genealogical Society, attended by over 60 enthusiastic genealogists, took place on Tuesday, February 23, 1988.

## Early Days

A Steering Committee, which guided the Society through its first months, met for the first time on Jan. 18, 1988. This group included Laura Lee Barrett, Diane Dellicker, Linnea Foster, Janet Harman, Lee Lewis, Betsy Robinson, Melda Shippey, Diane Solomon, and Judy Weinstein.

By June of 1988, the Charter Membership totaled over 150. Of the Charter Membership, those who were still members in our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year were William H. Barton, Diane Dellicker, Roger Flartey, Linnea Foster, Shirley Goetz, Joan W. Hantel, Marion Harris, Sharon Karow, Joyce King, Claire Kissil, Alice Min, R. Rene Phelan, Barbara Sisko and Frances Sneed.

As we look forward to celebrating 35 years in 2023, our membership is strong with nearly 200 members. Four Charter Members remain on our membership list: Diane Dellicker, Sharon Karow, Claire Kissil and Barbara Sisko.

### Meetings

Our regular monthly meetings are open to all who are interested in their family history and feature a program on some aspect of genealogy. During the first 10 years, we met at the Morristown-Morris Township Library on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month, September through May. Then in September 1999, because of large attendance, we moved to Grace Church in Madison.

In January 2006 the Morris County Library became our meeting place, and the day was changed to the first Tuesday of the month, still September through May. Our regular monthly meetings, open to all who are interested, continue to feature a program focusing on genealogy. For many years, a Winter Workshop at a regular meeting gave members and guests an opportunity to discuss their specific interests within small groups.

Our meetings at the Morris County Library were interrupted by the Coronavirus Pandemic, which closed the library starting in March 2020. In September 2020 after missing the April and May meetings, we began to hold virtual meetings via Zoom, a platform that enabled our members to see our presentations and participate in the meetings from their homes. During the pandemic with much "normal" life shutdown due to the pandemic, we were fortunate to be able to continue our programming with general meetings and SIG meetings online via Zoom.



Grace Church in Madison



Morris County Library

### Publications

Right in the beginning Sharon Meeker volunteered to produce a quarterly publication. The quality of the Newsletter was recognized in 1988 when it won the first-place award for Class I in the National Genealogical Society Newsletter Competition.

While some features in the MAGS Newsletter<sup>i</sup> are unchanged, photos have been added by the editor, Ruth Daniels, who after ten years as Editor moved on to other responsibilities. She handed it over to Eleanor Casagrand and later to Stephanie Reidinger and Mary-Jo Solomon. As of 2022, the newsletter editor is Martha Corson. The Newsletter is available electronically as well as in hard copy.

For many years, Marion Harris produced Gleanings, a single sheet compilation of timely information and items relative to genealogy gleaned from various publications and the internet which was available at each meeting and online. Marion produced Gleanings for over 30 years from September 1988 until the end of 2019.

### Genealogy Days

In April 1999, the Society, in conjunction with MMTL and with support from the Salmon Family Fund, sponsored A Genealogy Day with Meldon J. Wolfgang III, who was the speaker and supplied a display of genealogical books and materials. In September 2002 John Konvalinka was the featured speaker, as was Michael L. Strauss in 2004. In 2006 our speakers were: Cathy Thomas, Charles F. Kerchner, Jr., and Lisa Kerr Ilowite. In 2008 we had three speakers for our Genealogy Day: Larry S. Fermi, Ruth Lufkin and Lisa Kerr Ilowite. In 2018, Judy Russell, the Legal Genealogist, was the speaker. These daylong events were attended by more than 100 genealogists.

### Indexing

The Society's Indexing Group has grown to about a dozen members who meet monthly. Indexes have been prepared for various manuscripts and published material in the North Jersey History & Genealogy Department's collection. The group also indexes the Newsletter.

### Special Interest Groups<sup>ii</sup>

Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings give members an opportunity to discuss individual research concerns in a small group setting. We had Interest Groups right from the beginning. Marion Harris (New England) and Tom Peters (German) were our first leaders. Although by 1993 we had grown to six interest groups, attendance was weak, and meetings were infrequent.

In 2005, after a few years with no groups meeting, Al Zimmerman took the initiative and reestablished the German group. The following year he headed a committee to discuss the possibility of forming additional groups. From that meeting the Eastern European, Computer Genealogy and Family History Writing groups were started. The latter two groups decided to meet jointly. The Eastern European groups agreed to meet via internet, but eventually combined with the German group for regular in-library

---

<sup>i</sup> Membership-MAGS-public.weebly.com>Search/Newsletters, <https://mags-public.weebly.com/newsletters.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Morris Area Genealogy Society>Special Interest Groups, <https://mags-public.weebly.com/special-interest-groups.html>

meetings. In 2007, the Beginners group was formed, which later became Beginners and Beyond to include members with more experience who want to find help with research problems.

By 2013 we had six groups meeting regularly at the Morris County Library, four groups in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. By 2014 our groups included Brick Walls, Italian and West Europe Genealogy, DNA, Crossing the Pond, and Evening Computer Genealogy. Many SIGs have their own Group to share information.

As of 2022, we had 5 groups regularly meeting via Zoom. The Italian and West Europe Genealogy group merged with the Crossing the Pond group and renamed itself Crossing the Pond.

### Websites<sup>iii</sup>

Anna Nagy created the first public website at [Rootsweb.com/~njmags/](http://Rootsweb.com/~njmags/) and administered it for eight years. It includes general information about the Society and meetings and also features some Morris County records and links to other Morris County and New Jersey sites.

Susan Kehr took over the position in 2012 and has revised and updated the site to match the growth of the information now available. It has also been moved to a new platform at Morris Area Genealogy Society - Morris Area Genealogy Society ([weebly.com](http://weebly.com)). It continues to include general information about the Society and meetings and also features a growing collection of Morris County records and links to other Morris County and New Jersey sites. Indices produced by the MAGS Indexing Group are added to the website as they are completed. The site also links to a "Members only" Group<sup>iv</sup> where photos, Newsletters, minutes, and other items of interest are posted.

### Other

In 2012 MAGS participated in the Family Search 1940 Census Indexing Project. Our contribution included 68,075 items indexed, and 88,507 items arbitrated, the latter all by Susan Kehr.

MAGS continues to maintain a special relationship with MMTL and NJHGC. The Society usually provides a yearly financial gift to MMTL to be used for the benefit of the NJHGC. Historic records of MAGS were transferred to the archives<sup>v</sup> of the NJHGC in 2008. Periodic updates are made to the finding aid as records are added annually.

---

<sup>iii</sup> Morris Area Genealogy Society, [Morris Area Genealogy Society - Morris Area Genealogy Society \(weebly.com\)](http://MorrisAreaGenealogySociety-MorrisAreaGenealogySociety.weebly.com)

<sup>iv</sup> MAGS-Members.Groups.io/g/All-Members, <https://mags-members.groups.io/g/All-Members>

<sup>v</sup> MAGS Area Genealogy Society>Useful Links>Morris Area Genealogy Society Archives, <https://mmtlibrary.org/HCFindingAids/MAGS.xml>

In 2022 MAGS is participating in the Family Search 1950 Census Indexing Projects. Our participation is being coordinated by Susan Kehr and Martha Corson.

### Notable Members

Over the years many members have contributed their time by serving on the Board, teaching segments of genealogy courses, providing refreshments, indexing material for the NJHGC – MMTL, contributing to the Newsletter and coordinating Special Interest Groups. The names would make too long a list to record here but can be found on the MAGS Organizational Chart<sup>vi</sup> on our members-only group site. However, we will mention the past Presidents: Linnea Foster, Diane Dellicker, Joan Armour, Barbara Davidson, Bogert Holly, Alan Zimmerman, Robert Stein, Jim Short, Martha Corson, Susan Simon, Susan Kehr, Ruth Daniels, and Mary-Jo Solomon. Also, we would like to mention the designer of our MAGS logo, Fred Sisser, III.

Claire Kissil, formerly a member of the staff of the NJHGC of MMTL, is our liaison with the library. Ruth Grimm, for many years, had seen to it that refreshments were served at every meeting. More recently Gini Anderson and then Carole Flatley have taken on the responsibility. There have been many others over the years of our Society, but what remains the same is the commitment of both talent and time by many dedicated people.

.....

Updated 2019 November 20 to reflect changes in link locations for both MAGS Public Website and MAGS-Members Group sites.

Updated August 2022 to reflect events and changes since 2019.

---

<sup>vi</sup>MAGS-Members.Groups.io>g/All-Members>Files>MAGS Officers and Leaders>MAGS Organizational Chart, [All-Members@MAGS-Members.groups.io](mailto:All-Members@MAGS-Members.groups.io) | Files

## Biographies

---

<sup>1</sup> **Linnea Foster**, Founding President of MAGS, also served as President during 2002-2004, and two terms as a Trustee of the Society. She served as Coordinator of Research, the Indexing Group, and the Beginners and Beyond Special Interest Group. In 2009 the MAGS Board appointed her President Emeritus. Linnea passed away on March 1, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> **Ruth Daniels**, current Special Interest Groups coordinator, Groups Administrator, the Computer Genealogy and Family History Writing SIG leader, Indexer, and meeting photographer, also served as Recording Secretary, Trustee, two stints as Newsletter Editor totaling 10 years and two terms as President of MAGS.

<sup>3</sup> **Lois Platz Kopf**, current President of MAGS (2021-2023) and past Recording Secretary (2019-2021).