



Past and Present

Newsletter of The Southern Genealogist's Exchange Society
August 2025
sgesjax.org

Upcoming Meeting Information

August 9th – Research and an Informal ChatGPT Conversation

Curious about artificial intelligence or ChatGPT? Drop by the **SGES Library at 6215 Sauterne Dr., Jacksonville, FL 32210 on Saturday August 9, anytime between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm** for a casual, small-group conversation moderated by Georgia Pribanic. Whether you're new to AI or wondering how ChatGPT might help with genealogy, come learn, ask questions, and share your thoughts. Not into AI? No problem—come by anyway and continue your research.

September 13th - Climbing that Brick Wall

When: Saturday, September 13, 2025 from 10:00-11:30 am

Where: Mandarin Branch Library, 3330 Kori Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32257

Speaker: Alana Masters, President



Alana Masters is the current President of SGES and has served in various positions on their Executive Board for the past 8 years. She has been doing genealogy about 10 years now and enjoys digging deep into research. Unconventional research methods, "self-taught" skills and technological knowledge have aided her on her genealogical journey.

Topic: Climbing that Brick Wall

Join us for an enlightening program as Alana takes us through her process to “scale that brick wall.” Based on a real brick wall given to her by one of our members, you will learn how to familiarize yourself about the area you are researching, how to locate the records you need, newspaper sources, and how to edit and organize the records you find using programs such as Microsoft Word and Evernote.

Society News

A TRIBUTE TO MIKE LAWSON by Carol Clay



The Southern Genealogist's Exchange Society has had many dedicated, hard working members in it's 60 year history. Mike Lawson was one of those individuals. Mike joined SGES in 2008. It did not take long for him to be a dedicated active member of the society.

In 2009 Mike began serving on the Executive Board of Directors as the Recording Secretary and continued to serve as a board member until 2019 at which time he moved back to his home state of North Carolina. In 2010 and 2011 he served as 1st Vice President. In 2013 and 2014 he served as 2nd Vice President in charge of seminars. His tenure as President began in 2015 and continued through 2019. He also served on several committees included Building and Grounds, Editorial Staff and Seminars.

Mike never passed up an opportunity to present a genealogy program to other clubs, societies and interest groups in the greater Jacksonville, Florida area. He made long lasting connections which were beneficial to SGES. He was on the planning board of the North Florida Genealogy Conference several years and also was one of the class presenters in 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2018.

His willingness to help anyone with their family history research led him to man the SGES library on Wednesday, Thursday and every other Saturday along with Jon Ferguson and other volunteers.

As President of the society Mike secured a reservation at the Kori Road Public Library for the monthly speaker meetings. When this facility was unavailable, he reserved the club house of The Edgewater Condominium community where he lived. The annual Christmas luncheon was held in the Club House each year.

The City Council of Jacksonville had enacted the Blue Ribbon Cemetery Commission to locate abandoned and neglected cemeteries in all districts of the city. SGES was contacted requesting it take the responsibility of preparing a report that cataloged these cemeteries. Mike Lawson and Jon Ferguson spent two years walking cemeteries for this report. SGES was prominently recognized for the societies participation in the project.

In 2010 Mike received from The Florida State Genealogical Society "The Florida Genealogy Outstanding Achievement Award" in recognition for his contribution to the field of genealogy and/or history for 3 or more years.

The publishing of the SGES Quarterly was edited, compiled, printed and mailed due to his work and his financial contribution. He worked tirelessly with other members to get this publication out to SGES members and other genealogy societies in the United States.

Most members of SGES never knew of all the ways Mike contributed financially to our society. He did this quietly and never wanted attention for doing so. His first financial contribution came when he purchased a computer and tower for the library in 2009. He purchased all the computers, laptops, a screen projector, screens, microphone and other equipment to be used at the monthly meetings or for presentations at other locations. He purchased all the computers and laptops used in the library today except one. When it was decided that the society needed a new host for the SGES website he paid for that. He helped pay for the painting of the building. He contributed thousands of dollars in donations to the society over the years. He was a true philanthropist.

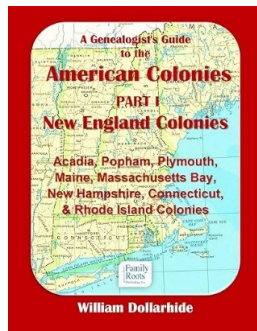
We were saddened to learn of his passing but grateful for all he did for SGES.

Collection Highlights by Georgia Pribanic



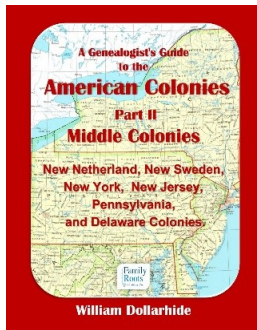
Selection of July donated books:

Several generous donations of books have recently been added to our genealogy library. These valuable resources expand our collection and support members' research. We especially give thanks to Jeanne Carter who has donated multiple contributions to help preserve history and make family discoveries possible for generations to come.



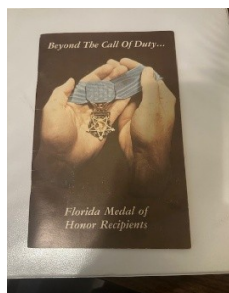
A Genealogist's Guide to the American Colonies: Part I – New England Colonies (2024) by William Dollarhide

This title identifies the important New England resource centers with over 900 links to Internet websites. In addition, there are samplings of the databases available for the New England colonies. County boundary changes throwing towns from 1 county to another are highlighted.



A Genealogist's Guide to the American Colonies: Part II – Middle Colonies (2025) by William Dollarhide

This book identifies the important New England resource centers with 1,481 links to Internet websites. In addition, there are samplings of the databases available for New Netherland Colony, 1625-1655; New Sweden Colony, 1638-1655; Province of New York, 1664-1775; Province of New Jersey, 1664-1775; Province of Pennsylvania, 1681-1775; Delaware Colony, 1682-1775

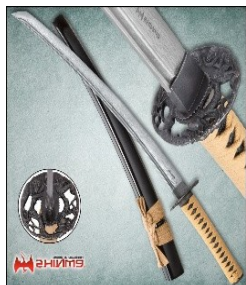


Beyond the Call of Duty: Florida Medal of Honor Recipients (1982) written by Seniors at Lee High School and published by Haskell Company.

The title reflects the contents of this student written publication with Charles J. McKenny, as the author. It was dedicated to the Duval County School Board and includes several men from the local area.

Highlights from the SGES Reference Desk

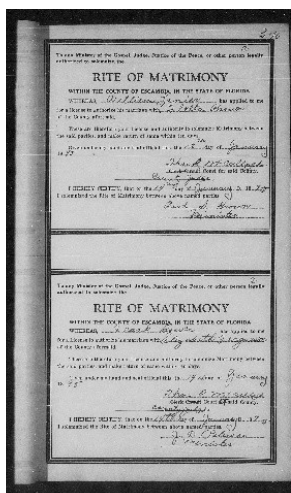
by Georgia Pribanic



☎ Ring ring! The SGES library phone lights up—not with your typical “Who was my great-grandfather?” question, but something a little more...*sharpened*.

A caller wants help with a mysterious family heirloom. Not a dusty photo or a birth certificate—no, *a sword*. Possibly samurai, but more likely a World War I battlefield souvenir. Could SGES help?

Well, it's not *exactly* your average genealogy puzzle—but hey, we love a good plot twist! I recommended a high end local antique shop and backed it up with some solid Google sleuthing. He must've liked what he heard—he called back three times with follow-up questions.



A member recently reached out for help uncovering details about his great-grandmother. Our search led us to a fascinating find: a wedding license listed in the “colored” section of a Pensacola newspaper from 1895. Digging deeper, we used the Florida Marriage Collection on FamilySearch, which revealed not only the names of the bride and groom—but also the minister and church where the ceremony took place.

From our members:

Would you like to see your story in one of our future newsletters? Then please submit your article to:

By email: sgesjax@att.net – Subject Line: Newsletter

By snail mail: PO Box 7728, Jacksonville, FL 32238-7728

In person: Library is open on Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Dora Malkoff Rubinstein's Story – Conclusion

By Dora Malkoff Rubinstein

Boris Lev and Ann Newmark - my grandfather and grandmother

Boris and Ann Newmark were married in Kiev Russia, came to the United States when Fannie, their oldest daughter was five years old, lived in New Bedford, Massachusetts where Fannie (My mother) was raised. I used her "Chaucer" in college, so did Judith and when she went to the university of Miami. She still has mama's book.

At the high holidays, my mother came to her mother's home. On one of these trips we came north by boat, ran into a hurricane. I remember Bertha, the black maid, wrapping me in a blanket, my arms straight by my sides, and rolling me under the cot or bed in our state room. I rolled back-and-forth with the motion of the ship, hitting both legs as she knelt beside the bed and prayed. Mama took care of Max and Lou. I have been afraid of the water ever since.

Boris and Ann Newmark

Grandmas house was different - her yard was full of flowers - northern flowers. - White wood, Delph blue and white kitchen that went with her Delph China, white ruffled curtains. She made us hot chocolate topped with marshmallows, served in the blue and white cups. Poured from the blue and white pitcher. I felt so safe in bed as mama talked with her father and mother still at the kitchen table.

My grandfather - my grandmother called him Barry, was elegant. I never saw him without his gold rings and gold watchchain across his chest. He never raised his voice, was a gentlest man I ever knew. We all admired him. Mama was just like him.

Grandma was special - 5 foot tall, when she talked - you listened. She too, was interested in business, quietly discussing problems with my grandfather. She also told me "Dora if you can afford only one dress be sure it's black silk. Must always look like you are prosperous. No one should ever know if or when you're having hard times."

Grandpa passed away about the time I graduated from Pitt. Grandma asked me to come and stay with her for a while, I came. She had her backpack and we started off by train to Chicago to visit her sister. Her married name was Swerdlow. They owned the Crystal Leather Goods of Chicago - manufacturing, leather, purses, etc. I was carrying one of their purses that I had bought in Kaufman's department store!

Their home was beautiful. Period furniture, a baby grand piano that stood in a corner of the living room on a raised platform. We went to two other beautiful homes - their children's then left from Mamas home, then back to Grandma's.

She thanked me for making the trip with her. Told me she was going to Barry. She died just two months after grandpa passed away at age 64 mama passed away at age 66.

Mama's Brother - Louis Newmark

Lou was not satisfied being a jeweler. He wanted excitement, adventure, decided to become a cowboy. The west and cowboys were pictured so glamorously in the news.

He left home, went to Texas and became a cowboy. Real life was not as glamorous. The ranch was big. The Cowboys quarters in the center of it with only a company store to take care of the men's needs. His pay was held back, the store prices so high that each week he was deeper in debt.

He finally smuggled a letter out to my father and mother asking for money so he could escape. They sent him a check for \$100 and then waited to hear from him. He finally arrived at our home about 2 o'clock one morning.

He had to hide in the daytime, only at night until he escaped from the ranch. He saw the man out, searching for him. Hid in silence, we were so glad he was back.

Now the jewelry business did not seem so confining. He opened his own store, married, had a son.

He was shot and killed by a robber who held him up. His son is a physician in California.

(My brother) Max - Pittsburgh

We all had to study music - then theory and harmony. Max wrote some music for the piano. - it was just beautiful and Max played it wherever he went. It was his trademark.

Maxie, my husband passed away. One night when I could not sleep, I turned on the radio at 3 o'clock in the morning. Over the airwaves came Max's Music note for note. I lay there dumbfounded. So someone had taken my brother's music for their own!

And first, I thought I would find out who did it, but as I listened, I realize that I had no way to identify the score or prove that it was Max's.

My brother had passed away in an accident years ago. His music has lived on after him. He had created a thing of beauty that could be enjoyed 65 years after he had passed away!

Arnold Malkoff - papa's brother

Arnold Malkoff had been manager of the jewelry department of Maas Brothers on the West Coast of Florida. He retired.

Karen Malkoff, Joe Malkoff's daughter, applied for a summer job with Moss Brothers in Fort Lauderdale in the jewelry department. she gave her name, was asked if she was related to Arnold Malkoff. She said "yes". She got the job, was put in the fine jewelry department. They knew she was honest. ***The End***

A child is born...

By Valerie Westbrook Bennett



Andrew (Slim) and Lillian Westbrook - June 1964

Recently, on what would have been my father's 99th birthday, I revisited a document he had shared with me long ago. At the time of his birth, my grandparents were living in Augusta, GA. and her mother was in Fernandina, FL.

The cover letter read:

On my 63rd birthday I found this letter written by my father (Andrew Barney Westbrook) on June 4, 1926, to my maternal grandmother (Lillian Smith Burney) and my aunt (Ida Smith) concerning my birth.

William Hardy Westbrook

June 4, 1989

Friday afternoon

Dear Mother & Auntie,

Everything must come to an end some time and that long looked for event has evented.

Yours truly is certainly a brand new and sure enough Papa. This fellow came this morning at 11:15 and in my simple way will try to tell you about him as I know you are anxious to hear. He seems to be complete and have everything that a good boy should have.

He is at the present time of a brunette complexion. Weighs 7 pounds and 11 ounces. I have given up crap shooting but after such a happy omen will certainly have to take it up again. His eyes are the bluest things I have ever seen and what little hair he can call his own is brown. Auntie: his ears are O.K. and will be if he doesn't stretch them too much listening to the girls out at the hospital talking about him he stands a fair chance of being normal in that respect.

The nurses out there all say that he is exactly like me, but I don't see that he has any of his Daddy's good looks. In fact, he doesn't look like anybody I know; he has a long head which they say will shape up soon. But he looks powerfully funny to me.

And you ought to see the hand and foot on that fellow, just about half as big as Leslie (note: baby's uncle). He ought to be a big fellow when he grows up as he will have to be husky or else attach a pair of wings on his feet in order to navigate. He looks bright and intelligent and here's hoping that he will act thusly. Of course, he is a little startled and confused by recent events.

Lillian and I have thought it over very carefully and after giving everything grave and serious consideration have decided to keep him, for awhile anyway. If we decide later if we won't keep him we will give our friends first chance to take him.

The Doctor, nurses and Lillian all told me we had two girls and I got sick, sicker and worse. When they finally (after about 30 minutes) told me differently it was the same as casting a life-line to a drowning man as I was about ready to pass out. I would certainly on placed the blame for all that on Lillian. A man's wife had twin girls out here about six months ago, in the country, and he hasn't been seen or heard of since. I bet if they looked in the river they would find him there with a big rock around his neck. Could you imagine me pushing a double-deck baby-carriage down the street and lasting long at it? It will be peculiar enough to push a roadster.

If this boy should grow up to be another George Washington or Babe Ruth he could never repay Lillian for what she had to stand. She suffered fifteen hours with not a let up and I will be truthful to say that I have never been so scared and sick in all my life. She didn't even want me around for the last four hours. However she is thru now and had little trouble at the last. She is feeling as bright and perk as you please and is happy as she can be. I think she was hoping for a girl tho. I am beginning to feel better and better myself but it will take a long, long time for us to forget about the last few days.

Hope you will consider this little boy and not hold anything against him because he wasn't a girl. I think he showed good-common sense myself. Your letter and one from Jennie just came and I am going to take them out in a few minutes to the hospital.

With love, Slim



William (Billy) Westbrook - 1944

The family of 3 returned to Florida soon after his birth and “Billy” spent his life in Jacksonville.

Attending Landon High School, he played football. This is where he earned the nickname “Beaver”. Graduating in 1944 he joined the US Navy and served 2 years aboard the aircraft carrier Bon Homme Richard which saw action in the Pacific.

In 1950, he married Amanda Mae Clegg, and I arrived in 1952. (I like to say “I’m number 1” similar to sports fans celebrating their team’s success). My brother Jeffrey arrived in 1954 & sister Karen in 1956.

Billy worked for the US Post Office for over 30 years. He did a stint in the “dead letter” department. If a piece of mail had an incomplete or illegible address, he would review and try to determine correct one. There were 2 occasions that I received letters only because they came up for review on his shift. I always thought that was amazing with a city the size of Jacksonville and my dad being the one on duty.

When my sister was older and making home health care visits around town, on multiple occasions, the patient would see her nametag & say “I use to know a Westbrook... Beaver!” After about the fourth time this happened, she called me to say “I am beginning to believe Daddy got around”. I had to explain that back in that day there were only 3 high schools in town—Landon, Jackson & Lee. It was not that strange that students from other schools knew his name.

Billy passed away on August 20, 1992 and is buried in Arlington Memorial Cemetery in Jacksonville. At the visitation, some of his ol’ Landon buddies were there. My sister eagerly told them she knew the story behind his nickname Beaver. “It was because he was such a studious student”. The friends roared! “No, it was because he had a long, flat tail!”

In addition to his 3 children, he was survived by 3 granddaughters and sister Elizabeth Neese.