

## NEWS

# Genealogy boost: Woman's gift to help Stark County libraries share historical photos

**Robert Wang** The Repository

Published 5:57 a.m. ET Sept. 22, 2021

CANTON – Mary Tomic loved history.

Her gift to the Stark County District Library will help others get access to historical photos and other genealogy research materials via an online database.

Tomic, 89, died on March 17. In her will, the Canton resident left \$42,000 to the Stark County District Library without any conditions for how the library should spend the money. She was one of the volunteers, known as Friends of the Library.

Stephanie Cargill, a library spokeswoman, said the library has estimated the cost of the database — including hardware, software, scanning and uploading historical information about the digitized materials — at \$100,000.

The library said the database will be known as Stark Memory. And it will launch sometime early next year. It will debut with a database software platform provided by the nonprofit library cooperative OCLC or Online Computer Library Center.

"This platform allows libraries to share documents, images, video and audio files, and add meta data, making genealogical and historical researchers to easily search for and access this information," according to a library statement.

**Related::** New North Branch library reopens after 5 months of renovations

**Related::** Stark Library scares up 'Goosebumps' author R.L. Stine for virtual talk

## **Stark Memory's digitized collection**

Stephanie Houck, the district library's genealogy and special services manager, said that Stark Memory would initially have the genealogy department's collection of roughly 160 to 200 historic photos digitized and uploaded.

Houck, one of the library's three genealogists that work at the district library's downtown Canton location, said that collection includes photographs of the Stark County Courthouse and other buildings in downtown Canton from decades ago.

She estimated that library staff has digitized about 43 photographs, about a quarter of the collection. Houck said the old photos are scanned at high resolution and include a tremendous amount of metadata about the background of the photograph.

Houck said her department is also working on digitizing oral histories recorded on cassette tapes in the 1960s. These consisted of a local librarian interviewing Stark County residents about life in the county in prior decades.

She said she was not ready to talk yet about other elements of her department's collection that would be uploaded to Stark Memory.

The statement said the library's genealogy department "has an extensive collection of historical documents and materials, including census information, birth and death records, tax records, deeds and abstracts, journals, military records, and ... also includes recorded oral local histories."

## **Mary Tomic's love for research**

According to the statement and her nephew Joe Gerzina, Tomic was the child of immigrants from Croatia who settled in Canton. She graduated from Timken High and worked for more than 30 years for the federal government and the U.S. Embassy and the Department of the Navy in Germany.

She later was a volunteer for about 15 years at the National Archives before moving back to Canton in 2007 and volunteering for the library and as a victim advocate for the Stark County Prosecutor's office, Gerzina said.

Her nephew said during her years in Canton, she often helped the library put on regular book sales.

"She was a very much an advocate of reading and she was an avid reader herself," said Gerzina, a Canton resident, who added his aunt during her years in Europe researched her own Croatian family history. "She had a very passionate interest in history."

Mary Ellen Icaza, the library's CEO said in the statement, "Given her history, the Library wanted to honor Mary's gift by using the funds to create a service that would allow her legacy to live on. Stark Memory is a perfect fit."

Gerzina said, "She wanted this (\$42,000) to go to support this organization and I think because of her love of history and her love of research that this is kind of cool."

Reach Robert at (330) 580-8327 or [robert.wang@cantonrep.com](mailto:robert.wang@cantonrep.com). Twitter: @rwanGREP.