

LOCAL

# Stark families find genealogy in focus at Stark Library

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Special to The Canton Repository

In much the same manner as the observation that "all politics are local," it perhaps could be said that "all genealogy is history."

Genealogy research results in family history. And family history often transcends geographical and chronological boundaries. Family history intertwines with community, national and world history as individuals interact with each other and experience the events of their time.

"I think genealogy and family history belong together," said Stephanie Houck, genealogy and special collections manager at Stark Library. "You can't have one without the other."

There is a subtle difference by definition. Technically, genealogy could be considered the accumulation of names and dates and other information vital to identifying the existence of individuals.

"Family history is the stories," Houck explained. "And the stories tell you how your individual family members fit into larger historical events. For example, we're just coming off a pandemic. The stories answer the question, 'How did your family navigate that.'"

Houck said she often encourages people to study their families' stories by referring to the "who, what, when, where and why" that are needed in literary writing and journalism in order to tell the whole story.

"Genealogy tells you the 'who, what, when and where' about your family," she said. "The stories in your family history tell you the 'why.'"



## How Houck got started

Houck explains her own intense interest in family history through a video posted on the genealogy page of the website for Stark Library.

"I got started in genealogy actually when I was a kid. My mom was interested in it, and I spend a lot of time with my grandparents, so I heard a lot of the old family stories," she said in the video. "And, of course, as I became a teenager my mom was going to all these libraries and all these archives."

As a teenager, she wondered "why do I have to go to these places?" She didn't care.

"But, then, as I got older and I heard more stories and more things I actually went to school and studied genealogy."

She learned about "all these people who came before me and all the cool things that they did."

"History has always been a big thing (to me). I've always enjoyed the stories," she said in a recent interview. "I think it's because of the stories that you learn you have a personal connection to history."

And that interest continued to grow, she recalled.

"And now I get to help others with their journeys as a genealogist."



## Help offered for family searches

Besides Houck, the genealogy department in the main library of Stark Library at 715 Market Ave. N has a staff of researchers eager to help patrons with their journey through their ancestral past.

"They all have different specialties, but they all have a passion for genealogy and family history," said Houck. "I think that rounds out our ability to help patrons who come in."

Assistance offered "depends on where they are in their journey," Houck noted.

That journey through family history begins, of course, with determining names and dates of family members who came before them. Death dates and marriage dates, for example, are discovered by patrons who may only during their search have learned of the names of those ancestors.

Additional facts can be determined through what Houck calls a "robust collection" of archives available at the library.

"We've compiled histories for all 88 counties in Ohio," notes Houck. "And we have the original estate documents for Stark County, so you can find out what your family members had when they died."

Past issues of The Canton Repository are archived at the library on microfilm for in-depth research of ancestors. Patrons can find out facts as well as fill out profiles of individuals and see for themselves "what was happening at the time their great-great-grandfather was born."

Online access is offered to such genealogy sites as Family Search, Ancestry.com Library Edition, My Heritage, Fold3 (military records) and African American Heritage or Black Life in America.

Those online sources can be used only in the library but other help is offered through specialized online library sites or in-person programs.

"We can get you going in the right direction," said Houck, "whether you have ancestors here or other places."





## **Genealogy evolves to family history**

One 24-hour access offerings patrons can take advantage of through their computers at home is Stark Memory, an online resource that explores digitized local photos and stories, as well as offering international collections of images.

"It's our digital platform," said Houck. "It's a place we can put articles, pictures, and oral histories online."

The genealogy staff also provides programs encouraging journaling, which in turn hands down information to future generations.

"There comes a point where we tell patrons, 'You need to talk to your family,'" said Houck. "We have a program called 'Journaling My Story.' We go out in the community and talk about how to get started."

Organizers of the program toss a ball to a participant, ask a question – such as "Did you have a pet?" – and the person answers with a story about that question before tossing the ball to another person.

"We encourage them to write about that story because someday someone may want to know about it since it's a story of their family."

## **What genealogy can teach us**

Interest in doing genealogy work and building family histories is "holding steady," if not increasing slightly in the last couple of years, said Houck, who noted that the genealogy staff has helped nearly 3,000 patrons with their research so far this year.

Houck said that patrons can call the genealogy department at 330-458-2765 or fill out an online form at the library website to schedule an appointment to meet with a staff member about getting started in a family search or about dealing with problems they might encounter in their research.

Discovering family history can extend well beyond even distant relatives, Houck said. Family histories taken together develops a larger history.

"Genealogy gives people a deeper understanding of where they live, of where they came from," said Houck. "It builds a bigger sense of community. It's a very social thing. You have to talk to people and that's what makes history personal."

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