

Berkshire Family History Association - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

With so many activities on hold during the Covid 19 pandemic, this seems like a good time to take a look at where BFHA began, where it is now, and what our future might look like.

In the spring of 1975, The Berkshire County Genealogical Society held an organizational meeting, electing Ronald A. Stratton as its first president. The 35 people in attendance all joined the society, and members were required to submit a family pedigree going at least back to their grandparents. By November, membership was 120 strong. In 1977, a Northern Berkshire subgroup was created, known as the Fort Massachusetts Genealogists.

In 1979, at its fourth annual meeting, officers were elected and an expanded board of directors was created representing all areas of Berkshire County. In early 1980, the Berkshire Genealogical Society was renamed *The Berkshire Family History Association*. It was to be an educational and social organization to foster the study of family history among both beginners and experienced genealogists.

Following Stratton in the president's role were Mary H. DeGiorgis, Denis J. Lesieur, Joseph G. Guertin, Don Lute's, Jr. and me. All the past presidents contributed their enormous talents and knowledge to the organization, but as the longest running president (32 years) Don Lutes, Jr. may have had the greatest impact. Upon his passing in 2018, there was much work to be done to work through Don's unique systems. His home was the repository of BFHA's files, materials, and equipment and the site of a huge annual tag sale, the proceeds of which were donated to the local history department of the Berkshire Athenaeum. Don also produced indexes that were offered for sale, he published the quarterly, *Berkshire Genealogist* and beginning in 1983 he organized an annual seminar held each September for many years. He was a "one man band."

Which brings us to today. Today we are based at the Local History and Genealogy Department of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield's public library. The library was extremely supportive as we moved out of Don's. We were given a generous amount of shelf space in the local history department, we were permitted to use their computers to do BFHA record keeping and other business, and we received the valuable support of the library's staff. The closure of the library due to Covid 19 has changed the way we're able to operate. We are doing our best trying to figure out how to best serve our members.

The two hours of free research to which members are entitled each year is on hold until the library re-opens. There we have access to unique indexes, historical records, vital records, valuable collections, church and cemetery records, and many other resources for research. If you live in the Berkshires or a nearby state, please watch for information about the library's

plans for re-opening. <https://www.pittsfieldlibrary.org/> When that happens, stop in and look at the extensive resources, ask questions, and maybe find a valuable bit of information on your family.

The brand new BFHA website should be improving very shortly. Please use the site <www.berkshirefamilyhistory.org> to contact us, share stories, purchase memberships, and offer suggestions.

And about our tomorrows. With all the disruptions to our current lives, BFHA will come through it all stronger. Our website will become awesome, our social media presence will increase, our members will continue to support us, new and exciting programs will be offered again, the library will reopen, more people will step up to help with technology (Facebook, website), and we will continue to "foster the study of family history among both beginners and experienced genealogists."

Sincerely,

Jan Rogge, President BFHA