



# Dane County Area Genealogical Society News

Feb 2017 - March 2017  
Volume 11 Issue 3

***President's Message*** from Bob Rettammel

Hello everyone

Soon Spring will be in our sights. During the last couple of months, I hope you found time to work on genealogy projects or talk with family members during the holidays about how to preserve your findings for future generations. Whatever you did during the holidays, I hope it was fun and brought you joy.

Recently two “new” board members were elected - Marilyn Merrill and Eleanor Brinsko. The current board is excited to have these two members of DCAGS join the board. When attending one of the programs please take the opportunity to say hello to Marilyn and Eleanor.

**Ask DCAGS**  
We are hoping to help members who are experiencing a problem or “dead end” in their research. At the next membership meeting, stop at the Name Tags table where you can provide us with a description of your problem, with your name and phone number/email address. Joyce Nigbor and helpers will respond with suggestions about how your situation might be approached. They will not do the genealogical work, but will offer ideas.

Regular DCAGS meetings are held on the 2nd Saturday of each month at 11:00 am at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints located at 4505 Regent, Madison, WI.  
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 The DCAGS Governing Board meets on the 2nd Saturday of each month at 9:00 am at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints located at 4505 Regent, Madison, WI. For more information, see: [www.dcags.wildapricot.org](http://www.dcags.wildapricot.org)

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***February and March Membership Meetings***

**February 11**

Saturday at 11am, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
 Speaker: Russell Horton  
 Reference & Outreach Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum

Our presenter will be speaking about “World War I Genealogy.” It is the 100th Anniversary of U.S. involvement in the Great War.

**March 11**

Saturday at 11am, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
 Speaker: Robert Allen, Treasurer and Board Member of Computer Assisted Genealogy Group of Northern Illinois (CAGGNI).

Our speaker will be talking about: “Secrets of findagrave.com.”

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***Book Review: The Zookeepers Wife*** by Diane Ackerman

The Zookeeper’s Wife contains many themes all taking place in Warsaw, Poland just prior to, during, and after WW II. The themes were the Warsaw zoo with its administrators, Jan and Antonia Zabinski; the War; the German occupation; the Russian occupation; the Bialowieza forest; and the local Jewish plight. These events were recorded in Antonia’s diary during this period.

(Continued on page 2)

## *January Meeting Highlights*

Our Saturday, January 14, program was done by Lee Grady, Senior Reference Archivist at the Wisconsin Historical Society. The title of his program was “Military Records and Other Genealogical Resources in the WHS Archives”.

Lee discussed genealogical sources in the Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society; and to mark the 100th anniversary of American participation in World War I (1917-1918), he also discussed reference materials and documents that provide the experiences of Wisconsin soldiers and citizens during this war. He also highlighted collections in the WHS Archives that cover military conflicts from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam.

Thank you, Lee, for a great presentation!

For those interested in the Wisconsin Historical Society Library & Archives, please visit: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:1142>

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### *(The Zookeepers Wife continued from page 1)*

Jan was the boss at the zoo, and his wife was the chief nurse for the animals. When the Germans invaded in 1939, they softened up the city first with bombing raids, and many of the animals died. Those that were left were taken to Germany and put in zoos.

As heartbroken as the curators were, they soon recovered enough to use the former animal cages, and even their own home to hide Jews - both friends and others who had been rounded up and put in a ghetto. Usually they stayed with the Zabinski's just for a few days until they were able to be sent through the Underground to safer quarters outside the city. Jan was an active member of the Underground, and during the

Russian occupation, he was captured and sent to Siberia. Fortunately, he survived.

During all the time that the city was occupied by the Germans, the Poles resisted in any way that they could. Their motto was “As little, as late, and as bad as possible”, and they set about sabotaging deliveries to Germans and diverting supplies to people in the cities, repeatedly claiming delivery of the same grain or livestock, overstating receipts, conveniently losing, destroying or hiding provisions. Forced laborers in the secret German rocket program at Peenemunde urinated on the electronics to corrode them, crippling the rockets.

Periodically, the book mentions Bialowieza the only primeval forest left in all of Europe. It straddled Belarus and Poland. This area was of particular interest to the Germans as they hoped to back-breed prehistoric horses (Przewalski) and cattle (aurochs) here.

The book paints a picture of Polish life primarily under the occupation of the Nazis, but some under the Russians. It is one of shortages, deprivation, fear, death, and many heroic acts. This a very readable book that talks about a time we should not forget.

*Joyce Hasselman Nigbor*

Publisher:  
WW Norton & Company, 2007

## *Special Interest Groups*

DCAGS is starting special interest groups that will focus on general genealogical topics and research. We think these special topics will help all members and be a way to reach various other genealogists in the surrounding area and outside groups with similar interest(s) in history or family history.

For this to be a success we need our existing members to help establish these Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

If you are able to embrace this challenge, it would require one of our members to lead an informal work-

shop devoted to a single topic. From this, a group would form to meet regularly with inclusion of both DCAGS members and non-members who are willing to do focused work on the genealogy topic that interests the group.

As President of DCAGS, I am calling for our membership to help create possible SIGs and to develop some guidelines on how SIGs should be created and maintained. These SIGs can also be of benefit to our community by sharing our knowledge and passion of family history. Eventually we

should have a SIG coordinator chairperson. This is another excellent opportunity for an established member or new member to become involved and help with this important outreach effort.

Here are some ideas for SIGs:

- **New to Genealogy**
- **Brick Wall Solutions**
- **British Genealogy**
- **German Genealogy**
- **Eastern European Genealogy**
- **Irish Genealogy**
- **Genetic Genealogy**

### **Sponsor a Guest**

DCAGS is offering an opportunity for members to sponsor a guest with a one year free membership. Here's how it would work:

1. Current members could sponsor a free one-time guest membership for a new guest and/or family with emailed newsletters and other electronic correspondence. No directories and no printed materials will be sent.
2. Thereafter, the guest may join as a regular member with full member benefits (newsletters, directory, emails, mailings and events).
3. The year for inclusion runs for the membership period-April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. Members who wish to sponsor a free guest member would send an email to the DCAGS email address, [widcags@gmail.com](mailto:widcags@gmail.com) with the following information:

- sponsor's name
- guest's address
- guest's name
- guest's phone number and guest's email address

This is an excellent opportunity to increase the visibility of DCAGS and promote membership. So, send us the name of a guest.

## *Nedecz: A Love Story* By Eleanor Brinsko

Being raised by two historians, genealogy and family history came naturally to me. I loved sitting at the family table at Christmastime listening to stories of things that my family and ancestors did that made them who they were. We would go through slides on many New Year's Eve nights telling the stories being depicted in the pictures. Our photographs and letters are preserved nicely, but still accessible for those who wanted to revisit the past. I wanted to learn who my family was and what they were made of. It turned out that I was fortunate enough to have the desire to sit and listen to the family who retold the stories every year.

As I got older, I discovered that a lot of my friends did not have that opportunity. Some were not close with their families or maybe they did not have the pictures to sift through. I did not - and still have a hard time - understand why their situation is as such. But the common theme through many of my friends' stories is that regardless of their situation, they wanted to

know. My now husband was one of those people.

On our first date, Nick told me about his grandfather who lived in Thiensville, Wisconsin. Clarence Brinsko had been a widower for about 15 years at that point, but he was still spry enough to drive himself around and live in the house that he built for his family of five. He was going to be turning 95 years old that September and although he lived a full life, there was still something missing: he did not know where his parents came from.

Nick said Clarence grew up in Iron Mountain, Michigan, a small mining town in the Upper Peninsula. His father immigrated from the Czech Republic, married Clarence's mother, had four boys, and was a dynamite man in the iron mines. His mother passed away when Clarence was three. His father, Thomas, remarried and had another son. Soon after, Thomas passed away from ulcers. Although Clarence was the youngest of the original Brinsko family, he worked hard to put his brothers through school.

He signed up to work for the CCC and then went off to serve in World War II as a comptometrist in France and England.

Nick was amazed about how Thomas passed away from something that is curable by today's medical knowledge, but what struck me is how can we help solve this family mystery? As Nick and I became serious, I asked him if he would like me to help him answer the family mystery: Where did Thomas come from? Nick said he was interested, but little did he know what a difference the two of us could make for the family and for ourselves.

We had three months to answer these questions, but we were going to do our best to give Clarence a present he would treasure. I began by doing basic searches through Ancestry Library Edition during my shifts at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Music Library. I was not able to come up with many leads that would bring me back to Europe. I found that Thomas arrived in Michigan during the 1890s, three federal census records, a marriage

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Nedecz: A Love Story continued from page 4)*

license, and a death certificate.

The marriage license record emphasized a lesson that I always mention in my lectures: you need to see the original document and to not rely on the transcription! Thomas married Caroline Strelick, a daughter of another iron miner in town, in 1907. Iron Mountain is a small mining town, but there were three Catholic churches that corresponded with the ethnicities of its citizens.



*Thomas Brinsko and boys  
(Clarence is youngest on left)*

Iron Mountain was a town that was made up of Czechs, Italians, and a small mashup of Finns, Norwegians, and Germans. The transcription that Brinskos had from the church said that Thomas and Caroline were married

at the Italian Catholic church, which was kind of odd to me. Ancestry was able to provide the scan of the original book and he was actually married at the Czech catholic church in town. The transcription error was made due to the record being two pages long and the transcriber jumped to the following record when they crossed to the next page!

We still needed more information since the items I found so far were American-based. Wisconsin naturalization records are housed in the Area Research Centers (except Milwaukee, which are at the Milwaukee County Historical Society) and I checked to see if Michigan had a similar format. I went to the Dickinson County website and they do not have the naturalization records, BUT they did have an index to the petitions and the naturalization records. There were Brinskos on that page! This gave me the citation to request the papers through the state, but it also told me that Thomas likely had brothers who came over too.

I will never forget the day that Nick received the package in the mail from Michigan. It was an early September day and the air was crisp. He went to the mailbox and there it was. He stood in his family's driveway and opened the package. This was the biggest gold mine I could have ever imagined! It not only listed his physical description, but it gave the exact town that he was from, the boat he came on, and the date he arrived. The rest of the day, we went and scoured the internet for information. We went on FamilySearch and looked through ship manifests to find Thomas. Those particular manifests were not indexed, so Nick went page by page to find his name.

The name of the town was hard to read, but we tried different spellings to see what would turn up online. We discovered that the town was Nedecz in the Czech Republic. So, we went to the census records and combed through page by page. Nick discovered another ancestor: Thomas' father, Michal!

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*(Nedecz: A Love Story continued from page 5)*

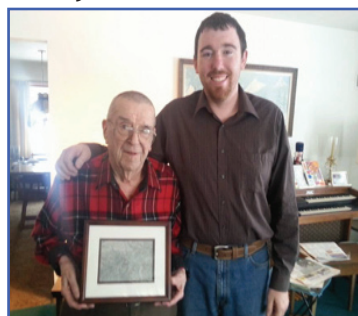
With all this information and some remaining questions, we went to Iron Mountain for the weekend to search through the genealogy section in the public library. I taught Nick how to use the microfilm reader so he could find obituaries of his ancestors and I went digging through the books. I came back and Nick was just amazed that Thomas' obituary made the front page of this town's newspaper. Who was this man and how did he get on the front page?

As we were leaving Iron Mountain, Nick thought it would be a fun idea to send his grandpa a birthday card from Iron Mountain so there can be a date and time stamp on the envelope. Nick hoped his grandpa would notice and to give him a little surprise before the big one came.

On September 30, 2013, Clarence Brinsko turned 95. Nick went to Thiensville after work to give his grandpa a present that he would remember forever. As Nick told me, Clarence opened the door and Nick asked about the birthday card. Clarence said "I noticed that, I figured something

big was coming." Nick gave him the folder with all the documents that we found. Clarence was absolutely floored and so happy that he now knew where his father was from and who he was, even though he was the last of the Brinsko boys and could not share with his brothers.

Clarence shared it with all five of his children and his many grandchildren. He wanted to let everybody know who they were, where they came from, and that Nick Brinsko and "his librarian girlfriend" helped him find out. A few months later, we got a map of Nedecz from the American Geographical Society Library at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and had it framed for him. Nedecz, Czech Republic is Niedzica, Poland in today's modern world.



*Nick Brinsko (right) and Clarence with map of Nedecz*

The map became a fixture on his television

stand along with other important family pictures to help serve as a testament of who they were and how far they came.

Clarence made such an impact on our lives, through his spark, his wit, and his amazing retention of history. He was the only one Nick told he was going to propose to me. Clarence passed away in November 2015 at 96, months before our wedding. In his honor, our wedding had a family history theme, nodding to all of those who made us who we are and how we got here. Nick was even fortunate enough to have Clarence's wedding ring as his own.

Because of Clarence, I was inspired to create my business, Carlon Genealogical Services, LLC. Nick and I enjoy helping people discover who they are and how they got here. We are far from done researching the Brinsko history, but because of Clarence's lifelong mystery and the small village of Nedecz, this is who Nick and I are.

## *To German Records – The Felix Connection by Bob Rettammel*

I started my journey into German church and civil records by doing on-line searches with Ancestry and FamilySearch but also seeking out researchers and librarians who could suggest correct steps to take when searching records of your relatives abroad. Prior to seeking advice from experts, I also found a birth record of my grandfather's younger brother Edward Herman that lists the mother's name as Louise Felix, nationality German, and place of birth Platenrode, Neustadt, Prussia (now Poland). This primary document was a valuable find for a couple of reasons:

- It showed that the surname was Felix;
- Provided the place of origin-birth for one of my great-grandparents.

This was a new finding with exciting opportunities to do more research on the surname but also the place of origin in the former state of Prussia in Germany.

Finding books and articles on German genealogy sources was also a key to building my knowledge of the place of origin for one side of my family before coming to America in the

mid-19th Century.

It is important to recognize that prior to any search for family in Europe, to research all records in the U.S. first, along with source and documentation of findings. As I showed proof of relationship between current and past relatives in America, I sought help from a genealogy researcher in the country of origin for my great-grandmother Louise Felix. I provided my story, with sources and documentation to a German researcher.

After several weeks, I learned that there were records available for a family called Felix that matched my great-grandmother Louise and the location area that I had discovered in an Illinois 1880 birth record. I learned through German church records who my great-grandmother's own mom was and the maiden name (her mother's maiden name or my great-great-grandmother), siblings of Louise, who her father was (my great-great grandfather) and finally the death record of Louise's mother and remarriage of her father. Also, that my great-

grandfather had a younger half-brother from his father's second marriage. How do you read German church records for baptism, marriage, and death records? First a general overview of these types of records in Germany and then actual findings of my own family in Germany.

### **German Source Records: Birth, Marriage & Death**

Records of German birth/baptism, marriage, and death were historically collected and maintained by churches or in some cases by organizations in the region that a family member lived. Before the 1870s, the churches, not civil authorities, meticulously kept track of their members' births/baptisms, marriages, and deaths. In 1876, five years after German unification, a law was passed legally requiring civil registry offices to keep records - the church then kept records only for their own interests and no longer for civil reasons. More on the structure changes in Germany can be found at FamilySearch wiki, see link below -

[https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany\\_Civil\\_Registration](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Civil_Registration)

*(Continued on page 8)*

(To German Records continued from page 7)

Since Germany was not unified as a country until 1871 and then during the period of 1961-1989 was separated as West Germany and East Germany records were not maintained in a central location for most years that genealogists investigate. Church records serve as important vital records substitutes and are helpful in finding relatives born prior to an established central repository for vital records in Germany today.

Here is a list of the “most frequently” given information in the respective entries in church records:

- Baptisms (Taufregister): Name of child, dates of birth and baptism, parents’ names, mother’s maiden name, legitimacy of the child, occupation of parents, town of residence, pastor’s name, midwife’s name, godparents’ names, etc. The baptismal register may also list the corresponding family book number.
- Marriages (Eheregister): Name of person married, their occupation, age, parents’ names, and occupation, whether the parents are still living, town of residence, spouse’s name, occupation and age, spouse’s parents’ names, occupation and whether they are still living, dates of marriage banns, date of marriage, witnesses’ names, ages, and occupation, etc.
- Deaths (Totenregister): Name, occupation, residence, age, cause of death, date of death, date of burial, surviving relatives, etc.

### Contents of the church books - My Ancestors the Felix Family

There is no standard format for church books. In some church books you can find tables, in other flow text, depending on what the pastor/priest has written down. Below are the German church findings of my relatives and the English translations for the columns of entry.

Partial page - Baptism - indicates residence as Mariehof, Date of Birth: 23 Jan 1845 at 4 am, Date of Baptism: 26 Jan 1845, Female, Name: Louise Juliane, Name of Father: Eduard Felix, Name of Mother: Renate nee Resfar, and Godparents in last column.

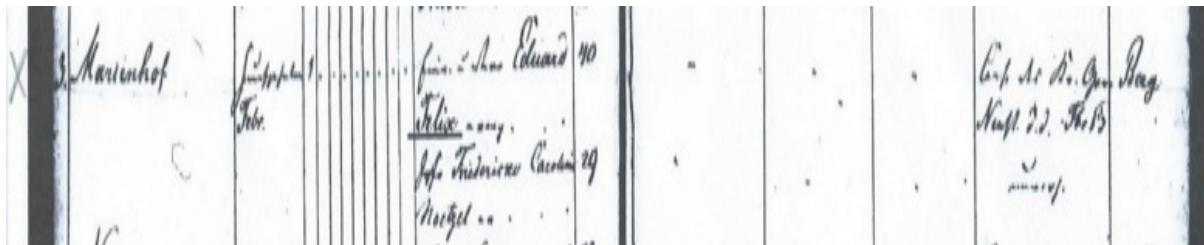
No.	Wohnort	Vater	Mutter	Kindes Name	Geburtsdatum	Taufdatum	Taufort	Godparents
2	Mariehof	Eduard Felix	Renate Resfar	Louise Juliane	23 Jan 1845 at 4 am	26 Jan 1845	Mariehof	Conrad Fuchs, Catharina, ...

(Continued on page 9)



(To German Records continued from page 8)

Partial page - Marriage- indicates residence as Mariefhof, Date of Marriage: 15 Feb 1853, Name of Couple: Eduard Felix, widower and Friedericke Caroline Noetzel, single (virgin), both Lutherans, Age of Groom: 40, Age of Bride 29, Last Column: says permission of the parish Neustadt in Feb 1853, she was unmarried.



Partial page - Death - Place of Death: Mariefhof, Date of Death: 02 Dec 1852 at 4 pm, Date of Burial: 05 Dec 1852, Age: 32, Name: Mrs. Renate Felix nee Resfahr, leaves behind her husband and 3 minor children, Husband: Eduard Felix, Illness/Cause of Death: Chol-

				Gestorbene 1852.						
No.	Lebensort	Wohntag	geb. d. Tag	Alter	Name	Wohntag	Wohntag	Wohntag	Wohntag	Wohntag
90	Soppitzgrün	Leipzigerstr. 16/17	12	12	Albert Meier	Soppitzgrün	Leipzigerstr. 16/17	Leipzigerstr. 16/17	Leipzigerstr. 16/17	Leipzigerstr. 16/17
91	Behltschau	Leipzigerstr. 17	11	11	Caroline Janowitz	Behltschau	Leipzigerstr. 17	Leipzigerstr. 17	Leipzigerstr. 17	Leipzigerstr. 17
92	Mariefhof	Jan. 12/1853	12	32	Renate Felix nee Resfahr	Mariefhof	Leipzigerstr. 17	Leipzigerstr. 17	Leipzigerstr. 17	Leipzigerstr. 17

#### Article Sources

- <https://www.archion.de/en/family-research/kirchenbuecher/>  
Web portal for German Protestant Records, available in both English and German
- <http://www.ancestry.de/kirchenbuch>  
Church Books Online at Ancestry.com in Germany
- <http://www.beyond-history.com/>  
German Genealogy firm that I have linked with for my own history
- Author's own research  
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Dane County Area Genealogical Society  
P.O. Box 5652  
Madison, WI 53705-0652



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[brettammel@gmail.com](mailto:brettammel@gmail.com)

Vice President: Vacant

Secretary: Joyce Nigbor  
[Billyjoycenigbor@aol.com](mailto:Billyjoycenigbor@aol.com)

Treasurer: Jerry Lange  
[gelange@wisc.edu](mailto:gelange@wisc.edu)

Past President: Rollie Littlewood  
[rkittle@wisc.edu](mailto:rkittle@wisc.edu)

### **Directors**

Barb Abbott  
[bdabbott12@tds.net](mailto:bdabbott12@tds.net)

Jim Booth  
[jaboath03@gmail.com](mailto:jaboath03@gmail.com)

Eleanor Brinsko  
[eleanor@carlongenealogy.com](mailto:eleanor@carlongenealogy.com)

FGS Delegate: Jim Benes  
[jimbenes@iname.com](mailto:jimbenes@iname.com)

Jerry Lange  
[gelange@wisc.edu](mailto:gelange@wisc.edu)

Marilyn Merrill  
[lynmerrillwi@gmail.com](mailto:lynmerrillwi@gmail.com)

Joyce Nigbor  
[Billyjoycenigbor@aol.com](mailto:Billyjoycenigbor@aol.com)

Bob Rettammel  
[brettammel@gmail.com](mailto:brettammel@gmail.com)

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### **Standing Committee Chairs**

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[jaboath03@gmail.com](mailto:jaboath03@gmail.com)

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[brettammel@gmail.com](mailto:brettammel@gmail.com)

Historian: Barb Abbott  
[bdabbott12@tds.net](mailto:bdabbott12@tds.net)

Web Master: Rollie Littlewood  
[rkittle@wisc.edu](mailto:rkittle@wisc.edu)

Newsletter: Liz Freitick  
[efreitick@gmail.com](mailto:efreitick@gmail.com)