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Records of Rights . . . and Rights to Records

by Curt B. Witcher

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Not too long ago, I read a press release about what sounds like a series of virtual exhibits by the National Archives and Records Administration entitled, "Records of Rights," with the current exhibit focusing on "The Records of Rights Vote." While certainly appreciating the ability to experience digital versions of marquee documents, and being reminded again of the importance and impact they have on our collective history, my mind quickly turned to a different theme—our rights to our records.

I would suggest that it is comparatively easy to acquire the requisite funding, engage in high quality scanning, and layer amazing amounts of metadata into the discovery systems associated with the precious few images the National Archives will be making available in its "Records of Rights" series. It is a much more challenging engagement altogether to digitize (scan and create metadata) the totality of World War I records - service and pension - or World War II, or the Korean War, or even "Indexes to Naturalization Petitions for United States District Courts, Connecticut, 1851-1992."

I also would suggest that a more worthwhile endeavor for the everyday person, the citizen archivist if you will, would be to confront the trend of restricting access to the records of every day individuals - millions upon tens of millions of them. Just this month(!), our rights to our records have been greatly impeded twice.

First, hidden in the heralded federal budget bill is a new embargo period for access to the most recent deaths in the Death Master File (DMF), known to many as the Social Security Death Index (SSDI). The articulated reason (which is almost never even close to correct) is to prevent criminals from fraudulently using others', particularly deceased individuals', Social Security numbers; the real reason is that numerous federal agencies, most notably the Internal Revenue Service, have chosen not to use the DMF as the fraud-prevention tool it can be. Properly used, the DMF would alert

officials when someone is attempting, for example, to use the Social Security number of a recently-deceased child to claim a tax refund. We should all make ourselves aware of the issues surrounding the DMF as well as other federal record issues by bookmarking and reading the national Records Preservation and Access Committee's blog at: [www.FGS.org/rpac/](http://www.FGS.org/rpac/). A great blog about the SSDI restrictions recently was written by the *Legal Genealogist*, and can be found at: [www.legalgenealogist.com/blog/2013/12/30/ssdi-access-now-limited/](http://www.legalgenealogist.com/blog/2013/12/30/ssdi-access-now-limited/).

Second, early in December, a number of headlines circulated online similar to this one: "U.S. Department of Defense's Public Domain Archive to be Privatized, Locked Up for Ten Years." As with any issue, there are many sides to the discussion, each with its own complicated set of circumstances, facts, and interpretations. Some are horrified at the prospect of public domain government data being behind a for-profit paywall for a decade. Others say it's understandable due to the quantity of data - 300,000 hours of video, 11,000 hours of film, 1.5 million hours of audio, and 700,000 images. The ones in favor of this grand public-private partnership are quick to point out that the National Archives "recommended" the solution. That might carry more meaning and emphasis if the National Archives was an advocate for the everyday citizen researcher; however, that is not the role of the National Archives, and further, it is not a role the National Archives has been anxious to take on during the past several administrations.

Many may say, "Alas, what can we do?" Records that should be public aren't; records that should be digitized and made freely accessible online for all aren't; and records that recently were public are being privatized so that the digitization work that our governments (local, state, and federal) typically would fund and execute can be accomplished by some other non-government entity.

Yes, it is a formidable challenge. And yes, if we focus primarily on the federal level, the hopelessness of oppressive "administrivia" and the endless bureaucracy will stifle any creative thoughts, any true collaborations, and any meaningful progress. But "our rights to our records" are too critical, too important, and too crucial to the successful engagement in our family history research not to pursue. There are very doable, very tangible tasks in which we can engage that will make a difference.

Engage at the local level - your local genealogical and historical societies, your local government officials, and your local office-holders. This is a fundamental that most completely miss. This lack of engagement at the local level completely inhibits our ability to have a voice, and severely diminishes any impact, at state and national levels. Long ago I lost track of how many times I have heard individuals say something akin to, "I don't vote in local elections" or "I don't vote in the primaries," only to be followed with some utterance about waiting for the more important state and federal elections. Hello!! Individuals on state and federal ballots typically come from the local arenas. By the time many of us across the country are confronted with federal ballots, our best efforts are relegated to choosing among candidates that we're not at all sure will in any way represent our best interests.

With rights come responsibilities, and it's our responsibility to ensure our records are not in the hands of disinterested parties. The impending 2014 election season provides us with a near-perfect opportunity \*at the local level\* to meet all the people we are going to elect, from the city and county council people to school board representatives, clerks, sheriffs, mayors, recorders, and

commissioners of all types. Inform them of your interest in record retention schedules, your concern about having access to records in the local courthouse, including the basement storage rooms and the attic annexes, and your desire to preserve the records that document our rich heritage. And then cast your vote!

Strong, active local genealogical and historical societies set the foundation for similar organizations at a state level that engage in preservation and access activities. And further, strong, active state genealogical societies contribute to preservation and access activities on the state level as well as open possibilities for national cooperative endeavors like the "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System" project of the 1990s and the "Preserve the Pensions" project of this decade. States that had, and have, strong state-level genealogical organizations drive these national projects toward successful completion.

Most New Year's days are welcomed with lists of things we resolve, or plan, to do in the New Year. If you're a list maker, why not make, and keep, a "2014 Our Rights to Our Records" checklist. I offer that such a checklist might include the following items, in addition to your own great ideas:

1. Meet and greet all the local officials for whom you will be casting a ballot in 2014. Find an opportunity to express to them how important documenting our collective heritage is, and that protecting access to records is a vital part of that.
2. Find out when your local public records commission, or similar governing body, meets and attend the meeting. It is extremely informative to hear what is being discussed. And the surprise on the faces of the assembled elected when they realize that everyday citizens are interested in this work will make your entire year!
3. Join the genealogical society in your local area. And no, that you have zero ancestors from the immediate area where you live is not an excuse for not joining. You're joining your local society to support its preservation and access measures in the area when you physically reside - finding an ancestor is simply an additional benefit.
4. Join the state genealogical society in your state of residence, and for the same reason that you are going to join your local society.
5. Contribute once a quarter this year to a major record preservation and access project. Even if it's just ten dollars - over the course of the year, forty dollars will have been contributed to the access project of your choice. I would suggest finding a state project and/or participating in the national project spearheaded by the Federation of Genealogical Societies, the "Preserve the Pensions" project. [www.PreserveThePensions.org](http://www.PreserveThePensions.org). Again, some who don't claim War of 1812 ancestors might say, "not my war, not my ancestor(s), not my concern." Hold on!! It's not just about the War of 1812. It's about preserving and making accessible 7.2 million pages of historically significant documents; it's about putting a significant record group in every classroom in America with an Internet connection; and it's about demonstrating to today's military that we will not forget. Collectively and cooperatively being able to accomplish something substantial by having many thousands contribute just a little is an extraordinarily powerful statement to make to elected officials and record custodians at all levels.

6. At least once a quarter, engage a young person in a family history-related pursuit. It can be hunting for a particular person in a cemetery, searching online records, creating a scrapbook page, working on a webpage, digitally saving a voice recording, describing family pins and military medals, attending a re-enactment, or cooking a legacy recipe. The possibilities are nearly endless as are the individuals who might be interested in engaging with you—family members, scouts of all ages, 4-H participants, boys and girls clubs members, and church as well as neighborhood groups. We can swell our ranks by nurturing interest in our history as well as our historical documents from a young age.

Our rights to our records - make it a part of your New Year.

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Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques  
by Cynthia Theusch

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Sooner or later, during the search for our ancestors and other family members, we will reach a brick wall, and we will struggle to find ways to break through it. Sometimes, the solution might be found by talking to other researchers. Or we might learn about new techniques and sources by attending genealogy society meetings or local, state or national genealogy programs or conferences. Other times, we might need to find ways on our own of looking at the problem and considering how to solve it. One of The Genealogy Center's most recent acquisitions is "Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques" by George G. Morgan and Drew Smith (929 M821ag). The authors provide several tips for reviewing the data we collect, and the steps needed to climb over, around or just go through that brick wall.

Their first recommendation is to re-examine all of the records you have for the person who is pivotal to your brick wall problem. Create a timeline of events, with locations, for his or her life, including information about the person's children, siblings, parents and father- and mother-in-law. Also don't forget to include social and historical events.

Recently a patron came to us in The Genealogy Center with a major problem in his census search on Lemuel Stanley in Surry County, North Carolina, in 1850. He found someone with this name in this place, but the man's age and his wife's were too inconsistent with the information the patron had to make it a comfortable match. Because of this roadblock, he started looking at the neighbors, also a recommended step mentioned in Chapter 3 of Morgan's and Smith's book. Our patron came to the Ask Desk to discuss this problem - Discussing your roadblocks is a technique the authors recommend in Chapter 4.

As the patron and the two librarians compared the two censuses - 1850 and 1860 - we discovered that a copying error had occurred. Two people's names had been skipped when the 1850 census was copied, so that the age and gender for everyone on the page on which Lemuel Stanley appeared were askew by two lines. When taking this into consideration, Lemuel's and his wife's ages were much more in line in 1850 to what they should have been, based on known information from the 1860 census. Brick wall problem solved.

Two copies of "Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques" by Morgan and Smith are available for

check-out from the Main collection at the Allen County Public Library and have a slightly different call number from The Genealogy Center copy, 929.1082 M82a. In addition to "Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques," Family Chronicle's books titled "500 Brickwall Solutions to Genealogy Problems" (929 F1984a) and "More Brickwall Solutions to Genealogy Problems" (929 F1984b) might provide inspiration for solving problems. They contain stories and solutions submitted by Family Chronicle readers to their own brick wall situations.

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Thomas W. Jones's "Mastering Genealogical Proof"  
by Dawne Slater-Putt, CG(sm)\*

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Anyone who sticks with genealogy for more than the short-term soon discovers that there is a time before vital records were being kept, and before the names of all family members were recorded on the federal census. At that point, identifying parents becomes more difficult. Many times we lack a piece of direct evidence that says specifically that "John" was the father of "James." When we must expand our research beyond the usual sources, analyze evidence carefully and build a body of evidence to answer a question, we are putting the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) into practice. Thomas W. Jones's book "Mastering Genealogical Proof" (929 J71m) is a guidebook to the GPS.

Chapter 1 of the volume explains the GPS. Chapter 2 details the concepts that are fundamental to practicing it:

- Forming the research question
- Understanding "source" as the word is used in this context
- Considering types of sources and the difference between original and derivative sources
- Understanding nuances of information (the content found within a source), e.g., the importance of considering the informant, as well as the type of information - primary, secondary and/or indeterminable
- Using information as evidence - is it direct, indirect or negative?

The book devotes a chapter to each of the five elements of the Genealogical Proof Standard: Thorough research, source citations, analysis and correlation, resolving conflicts and assembling evidence, and preparing the written conclusion.

Chapter 8, "Using the GPS," lists eleven questions. Author Jones says that "Yes" answers to all of these questions indicate that the researcher's conclusion meets the Genealogical Proof Standard. A "No" answer to even one of these questions means that more research work or analysis needs to be done. These questions begin with "Does the writer state a clear research question - what is it?" and end with "Does the writer state the conclusion clearly?" and "Does the author convincingly show or explain why the conclusion is correct?" Between these are questions about whether the citations reflect a reasonably thorough search, whether the sources used are likely reliable, whether the author has justified the use of any sources that are not as likely to be reliable, whether analysis of the evidence is shown in citations and the text, whether conflicting evidence is resolved, and more. These questions can be used to test one's own work, or to test another researcher's work, such as a published family history book or an online family tree.

Each chapter in "Mastering Genealogical Proof" includes written exercises. The author's answers are

at the back of the book. The volume also includes a glossary and a "Reading and Source List," in addition to two examples of articles that demonstrate the use of the GPS.

A Google+ discussion page about "Mastering Genealogical Proof" is at <https://plus.google.com/communities/109187935060995685018>, and ongoing study groups have been forming since the book was released earlier this year.

\*"CG" & "Certified Genealogist" are service marks of the Board for Certification of Genealogists®, and are used by authorized associates following periodic, peer-reviewed competency evaluations. Certificate No. 386 awarded 4 July 1996; expires 4 July 2016.

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Technology Tip of the Month--A Look at Microsoft PowerPoint, Version 2010  
by Kay Spears

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So ... you're ready to get in front of an audience and wow them with your knowledge, but you're still using a slide projector or overhead projector because you are a little intimidated by PowerPoint. Well, if you are able to conquer your fear of an audience, you can put on a show using PowerPoint!

Before we begin to explore the mechanics of the slide show, here are some things to keep in mind: You are going to tell a story with a beginning, middle and ending. Your slide show presentation is there to help you illustrate whatever it is you are talking about. Its purpose is to *enhance* your talk, not *be* your talk. I find it helpful if I have written a script of sorts of what I'm going to cover, then organize my slide show around that script. I also try to limit the text I'm showing on each slide. I do this because members of the audience are reading the slide as I speak - if they jump ahead, they might be twiddling their thumbs waiting for me to catch up. They also might be reading what's coming next instead of listening! So, use text wisely in a slide show.

Now, on to some basic mechanics. As we all know, Microsoft likes to help us, so PowerPoint comes loaded with some templates for those of us who don't want to create our own slides. I suggest you begin with those until you feel comfortable creating your own. Go to File>New>Sample Templates, click on the template you want, and then click Create. When you do this you should see the Microsoft ribbon at the top, and to the left is the Slide and Outline Pane, which displays a thumbnail of all the slides. The large workspace below the menu will show the first slide or the slide you have clicked on in the pane. At the bottom is the Add Notes Pane. These are your work areas; you may have them all open or you may close any that you want - how you choose to work is up to you. For now, leave all of them open.

Take this time to go through the template you have chosen. There are a variety of features available to you and you can change any of them that you wish. There are text boxes, images, shapes, clip art. All of them can be maneuvered. Going through one of these templates is a good way to learn how to manage a PowerPoint show.

When you are finished creating your show, run it by either clicking on F5 or clicking on the icon that looks like a little television on the bottom bar. Or you can click on the Slide Show tab, then click on From Beginning.

Next: Create your own PowerPoint show.

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Quick-Tip of the Month for Preservation--Create a Timeline of Your Life  
by Dawne Slater-Putt, CG(sm)\*

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In these "Preservation Tip of the Month" columns, we often talk about preserving not only your paper documents and photographs, but preserving your personal memories for future generations. Here is another idea in that category that is a fairly easy way to jump-start this project of getting facts about your own life recorded.

Begin with a sheet of paper and write down each year that you have been alive, one to a line, like this:

1962

1963

1964

Next to the year you were born, write, "I was born" and your date of birth. If you are or have been married, write that date in next to the appropriate year. Record your children's and grandchildren's birth dates next to the years that they were born. Write down the death dates of any loved ones. Next, write these kinds of events next to the years where they apply:

- Siblings' births
- Started school, left school or graduated
- Entered the military
- Got your first job, started subsequent jobs, retired
- Moved from one locality to another
- Won an award
- Attended a memorable event (concert, sporting event, etc.)

Your first goal might be just to write down as many events as come to mind. Another time, go back and add details: Where were you born - the city and state, and was it at a hospital or at home? Are there any circumstances you have been told about your birth? For example, the day of my birth still holds the record for the hottest August 20th on record in Fort Wayne. You can begin to expand on many of these events, taking them one at a time. No doubt there are many things you can write about your school years, the jobs you have held, and how you felt when your children were born.

If you begin with a sheet of paper, as I suggested, you will soon run out of room! Consider using your paper as a guide and writing your memories on index cards or in a computer word processing program. Tackle them one at a time and soon you will have a bank of memories that will be cherished for future generations.

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WinterTech in the New Year

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January's WinterTech class is "Net Treats" on Wednesday, 8 January 2014 at 2:30 p.m. in Meeting Room C. Delia Bourne will share which free genealogical databases and websites are treats for the family historian. WinterTech programs take place at 2:30 p.m. the second Wednesday of each month, November through February, to coincide with the Allen County Genealogical Society of Indiana's monthly meetings held at 6:30 p.m.

The last WinterTech class for this season will be "Apps & Programs for Genealogy" on Wednesday, 12 February 2014. For more information see the brochure at [http://www.genealogycenter.org/Libraries/2013\\_Brochures/WinterTech.sflb.ashx](http://www.genealogycenter.org/Libraries/2013_Brochures/WinterTech.sflb.ashx) . Call 260-421-1225 or email [Genealogy@ACPL.Info](mailto:Genealogy@ACPL.Info) to register for any of these free classes.

Remember, too, that this year for WinterTech we have added "Basics of Adobe Elements Workshop," a four-part series on Monday evenings in February, 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the Computer Classroom. This hands-on class has limited seating, so register early.

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Out and About

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Curt Witcher

January 11, 2014 - Joint Program with Oakland County Genealogical Society & the Detroit Society for Genealogical Research, Christ Church Cranbrook, 470 Church Street, Bloomfield Hills, MI, 2-3:30 p.m. Presentation: "Migration Routes to Michigan and the Midwest."

January 24, 2014 - Genealogy Librarians Pre-conference, ALA Midwinter Meeting, Conference Room, Philadelphia Free Library, 1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia, PA, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Presentation: "Making the Financial Case for Genealogical Librarianship."

February 7, 2014 - RootsTech Conference, Salt Palace, Room 251D, Salt Lake City, UT, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Presentation: "PERSI 3.0: The Next Generation of the Periodical Source Index."

February 7, 2014 - RootsTech Conference, Salt Palace, Room 251D, Salt Lake City, UT, 2:30-3:30 p.m. Presentation: "Remembering Those Who Have Passed: Why Obituaries Are So Key" (and a community linking project to make obituary data more accessible).

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Area Calendar of Events

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Allen County Genealogical Society

8 January 2014--ACPL Meeting Room, 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 6:30 p.m. Gathering time, followed by business meeting and presentation, "Using Find-A-Grave in Your Genealogical Research," presented by a panel of ACGSI members.

ACGSI Genealogy Technology Group



15 January 2014--ACPL Meeting Room, 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 7 p.m. Open forum discussion.

Fort Wayne/Allen County, IN History Center

5 January 2014--History Center, Shields Room, 302 East Berry, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 2 p.m. Blake Sebring will present "Fort Wayne Sports History."

Historic Fort Wayne

25 January 2014--1201 Spy Run Avenue, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. "Nouvelle Annee: A French Garrison 1754."

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Driving Directions to the Library

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Wondering how to get to the library? Our location is 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the block bordered on the south by Washington Boulevard, the west by Ewing Street, the north by Wayne Street, and the east by the Library Plaza, formerly Webster Street. We would enjoy having you visit the Genealogy Center.

To get directions from your exact location to 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, visit this link at MapQuest:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?formtype=address&addtohistory=&address=900%20Webster%20St&city=Fort%20Wayne&state=IN&zipcode=46802%2d3602&country=US&geodiff=1>

>From the South

Exit Interstate 69 at exit 102. Drive east on Jefferson Boulevard into downtown. Turn left on Ewing Street. The Library is one block north, at Ewing Street and Washington Boulevard.

Using US 27:

US 27 turns into Lafayette Street. Drive north into downtown. Turn left at Washington Boulevard and go five blocks. The Library will be on the right.

>From the North

Exit Interstate 69 at exit 112. Drive south on Coldwater Road, which merges into Clinton Street. Continue south on Clinton to Washington Boulevard. Turn right on Washington and go three blocks. The Library will be on the right.

>From the West

Using US 30:

Drive into town on US 30. US 30 turns into Goshen Ave. which dead-ends at West State Blvd. Make an angled left turn onto West State Blvd. Turn right on Wells Street. Go south on Wells to Wayne Street. Turn left on Wayne Street. The Library will be in the second block on the right.

Using US 24:

After crossing under Interstate 69, follow the same directions as from the South.

>From the East

Follow US 30/then 930 into and through New Haven, under an overpass into downtown Fort Wayne. You will be on Washington Blvd. when you get into downtown. Library Plaza will be on the right.

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#### Parking at the Library

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At the Library, underground parking can be accessed from Wayne Street. Other library parking lots are at Washington and Webster, and Wayne and Webster. Hourly parking is \$1 per hour with a \$7 maximum. ACPL library card holders may use their cards to validate the parking ticket at the west end of the Great Hall of the Library. Out of county residents may purchase a subscription card with proof of identification and residence. The current fee for an Individual Subscription Card is \$70.

Public lots are located at the corner of Ewing and Wayne Streets (\$1 each for the first two half-hours, \$1 per hour after, with a \$4 per day maximum) and the corner of Jefferson Boulevard and Harrison Street (\$3 per day).

Street (metered) parking on Ewing and Wayne Streets. On the street you plug the meters 8am - 5pm, weekdays only. It is free to park on the street after 5pm and on the weekends.

Visitor center/Grand Wayne Center garage at Washington and Clinton Streets. This is the Hilton Hotel parking lot that also serves as a day parking garage. For hourly parking, 7am - 11 pm, charges are .50 for the first 45 minutes, then \$1.00 per hour. There is a flat \$2.00 fee between 5pm and 11pm.

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#### Genealogy Center Queries

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The Genealogy Center hopes you find this newsletter interesting. Thank you for subscribing. We cannot, however, answer personal research emails written to the e-zine address. The department houses a Research Center that makes photocopies and conducts research for a fee.

If you have a general question about our collection, or are interested in the Research Center, please telephone the library and speak to a librarian who will be glad to answer your general questions or send you a research center form. Our telephone number is 260-421-1225. If you'd like to email a general information question about the department, please email: [Genealogy@ACPL.Info](mailto:Genealogy@ACPL.Info).

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#### Publishing Note:

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This electronic newsletter is published by the Allen County Public Library's Genealogy Center, and is intended to enlighten readers about genealogical research methods as well as inform them about the vast resources of the Allen County Public Library. We welcome the wide distribution of this newsletter and encourage readers to forward it to their friends and societies. All precautions have been made to avoid errors. However, the publisher does not assume any liability to any party for

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If you do not want to receive this e-zine, please follow the link at the very bottom of the issue of *Genealogy Gems* you just received or send an email to [kspears@acpl.lib.in.us](mailto:kspears@acpl.lib.in.us) with "unsubscribe e-zine" in the subject line.

Dawne Slater-Putt, *CG* & Curt Witcher, co-editors