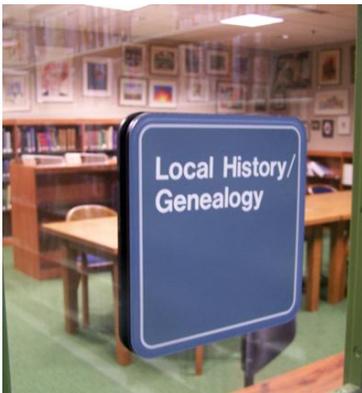


November, 2011

By Joe O'Rourke, Adult Services Manager and Mary Jane Santos, Director, Delaware County District Library



When the Delaware County Historical Society and the Delaware County Genealogical Society (DCGS) determined that they could no longer share a common space, members of the DCGS reached out to the Delaware County District Library (DCDL) suggesting a collaborative association between the two organizations. For years, librarians at DCDL have answered family history questions, researched obituaries, searched cemetery records, and scoured century-old local newspapers to help answer genealogical questions from all over the world. It seemed like a natural and logical partnership that would mutually benefit both organizations, combining Delaware County "experts" and in-depth resources from the DCGS with the facilities, hours, and known demand at DCDL.

A few details in a working agreement had to be sorted through to facilitate the relocation of the DCGS to DCDL's main library. The biggest hurdle was developing cataloging for the collection that was part of the wealth of resources DCGS was bringing with them. We wanted to make sure that the books, family histories and so forth were made accessible to the public; heretofore, their collection was not cataloged. We also needed to ensure that records created for DCGS in DCDL's catalog were easily retrievable if DCGS ever found it necessary to relocate from DCDL. It did not take long at all to come to common ground because both entities were anxious to make the agreement work.

The actual move-in by DCGS took several days, with truckloads of boxes of records making their way to the two different parts of the Library that were allocated for the Society. On the main floor, the shelves in the former Harness Racing Room became home to the Genealogical Society's books and indexes. The filing cabinets in this room contain mostly family histories arranged by surname. The Harness Racing Room is also where DCGS members keep their supplies as well as their computer equipment. These items have been cataloged and are visible in the Library's OPAC. They can be identified by spine labels that include DCGS as part of the call number. Staff at DCDL is working on cataloging the bulk of the Genealogical Society's materials, and additional items may be moved around as the project is completed.

On the mezzanine, dozens of filing cabinets and cardboard boxes contain Delaware County Probate Court records, Delaware County Pioneer records (the original "history" of Delaware County), and the internal records of DCGS. There are also bookcases on the mezzanine that hold excess books not in high demand.

DCGS materials have great historical value, and much of what they own is irreplaceable. For this reason, they need to control public access to most of their resources. The door to the Harness Racing Room remains locked when volunteers are not on duty. The key at the Information Desk may be signed out by volunteers who are authorized by DCGS. DCGS also designates which volunteers may access the materials upstairs.

Occasionally, patrons may ask to use DCGS materials when no volunteers are present. Library staff helps patrons retrieve specific items from the Harness Racing Room for use in the Local History Room, but extensive searching is best done when volunteers are available to assist. Materials from upstairs must be retrieved by a designated DCGS volunteer. Again, volunteers often arrange to meet with researchers when it is mutually convenient.

The Genealogical Society's volunteers are knowledgeable and happy to help people with their family history questions and research. Their regular hours are posted in the Local History Room, but patrons who cannot visit the Library during these times can call DCGS for an appointment. Volunteers are often willing to stop by the Library on short notice. Library staff who receives genealogical inquiries that are beyond our expertise frequently refer patrons to DCGS.

Although there is no exchange of funds between the two organizations, DCGS has generously and with no restrictions donated several hundred dollars to the Library. The Library wants the members of the Genealogical Society to feel at home in our facility, and we happily share book trucks, hand carts, the boardroom, the meeting room, photocopier bypass keys, Internet access, and telephones with them, for example.

The Delaware County Genealogical Society has been housed at the Library for almost two years, and feedback from DCGS members, DCDL staff, and the public has been nothing but positive. Because DCGS and DCDL now can offer help to researchers and Library customers 7 days (70 hours) per week, and because the historical and archival wealth of knowledge about Delaware County and environs is accessible for an equal amount of time, the public has embraced the partnership. Additionally, Library reference staff respectfully and gratefully refer difficult and complicated genealogical questions to the knowledgeable and eager DCGS volunteers, allowing everyone to concentrate on what they do best, but more importantly, providing a much more comprehensive service to the customer.

~ Many thanks to Adult Services Manager Joe O'Rourke for his input in this article. Joe is the Library's liaison between DCGS and DCDL, and as such, he works closely with them to ensure that this partnership works smoothly and effortlessly. *Mary Jane Santos*