

# JEFFERSON COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

## 1984 TO 2020

The Jefferson County Genealogical Society (JCGS) held its first organizational meeting on September 15, 1983 and was officially registered with the Secretary of State on January 30, 1984, making JCGS the



tenth genealogical society in Washington State. The original eighteen members met in the Jefferson County Library's A-frame building (current occupants J&M Salon and Tae Kwon Do) in Port Hadlock. In the mid-1980s, an agreement was made to share space in the Jefferson County Historical Society's McCurdy Research Library in Port Townsend, where our monthly meetings were held. In return for use of the library space, JCGS agreed to provide volunteers five days a week to help researchers.

As JCGS membership grew, more space was needed for monthly meetings, and the Tri-Area Community Center in Chimacum was chosen for its location, easy access into the building, and plenty of parking.

Not only did JCGS membership grow, so too did its library's research files. Starting with two file cabinets, one for Subjects and one for People, volunteers added the Press Index for Vital Records, Obituaries, Funeral Home and Cemetery records. And the library's collection of genealogical reference books grew with every passing year.

In 2003 the Jefferson County Historical Society (JCHS) purchased the Airport Baptist Church property on Airport Cutoff Road. The JCGS received an anonymous \$200,000 grant from the Seattle Foundation and contributed these funds to JCHS to pay off its mortgage on the property and negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement for the shared use of the 2,000 sq. ft. building.

The JCHS was also growing and squeezed for space at City Hall and needed a storage facility for its increasing collection of historical artifacts, and in 2008 contracted to build this facility on the property beside the Research Center. The cost to build the storage facility was \$3.5 million. The JCGS received another anonymous grant from the Seattle Foundation for \$350,000, which was given to the JCHS as seed money to launch its capital fund raising for the new building. In return for this and our earlier \$200,000 contribution, JCGS negotiated a fifteen-year lease with the JCHS with annual rent of \$1.00. Our volunteers contribute about 2,500 hours annually to the smooth running of the Research Center.

As JCGS grew over the years, it evolved to meet the fast-changing genealogy landscape and the interests of its members. Genealogy once considered the preferred pastime of shut-ins, spinsters and aging retirees trying to find family links related to nobility or the *Mayflower*, people started to solve family history puzzles using online databases and technologies to access these databases. Professional forensic genealogists moved into the forefront solving inheritance questions. Medical histories were more easily solved. Military records solved family mysteries. Family stories became as important as family trees.

Today JCGS has 200 members, nine board members, a strong financial condition thanks to thousands of hours of volunteer time, and an endowment of over \$160,000 thanks to four generous donations managed by the Seattle Foundation. We offer our members access to the Research Center five days a week with over 2,500 books, computers, printers, scanners, microfilm machines, four subscriptions to genealogy

Web sites, and trained volunteers for assistance. The Society meets monthly at the Tri-Area Community Center to hear professional speakers on a range of genealogical subjects. Monthly the Writers, New England, and DNA discussion groups meet at the Resource Center to talk about and exchange ideas in the group's area of interest. In past years there have been special-interest groups for Canada, the Wild West, and New Netherland. And throughout the year Resource Corner programs are given on subjects ranging from how to use genealogy software to find your Scottish ancestors. This is who we are.

What will we become? Genealogy is hot. Arguably, hobby experts believe genealogy ranks second only to gardening as American's favorite pastime. Television shows have helped bring genealogy into the mainstream. Today billions of genealogical records are searchable online, and it won't be too many years before most U.S. genealogical records and many of the world's records are completely digitized. Companies like Ancestry have millions of registered users and billions of records. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) has amassed one of the world's greatest genealogical archives, which researchers from around the world can use online or in person in Salt Lake City, at no cost. GeneaBloggers lists over 3,000 genealogy and family-history blog sites. DNA analysis is growing geometrically. Ten thousand Baby Boomers retire every day; some will relocate to Jefferson County and some will join JCGS. We will benefit from new members' ideas, volunteerism and financial support. We must be alert, however, to the membership's changing needs, and adapt our business model to rapidly changing technologies. There will be challenges, and bumps in the road along the way, but JCGS is thirty-six years strong and well positioned to meet the needs of our genealogical community.