

**NAGS Early Days**  
**by Phil Barnes, Historian**

I have been asked about the beginnings of our Society. I have referred to my files, to my fading memories, and especially to the fine history of our early days written by Betty Murphy.

Betty tells of interested persons meeting in various homes as early as 1978, sharing knowledge & problems. About that time I began a series of no-fee genealogy classes at Prescott Country Club for interested groups, a forerunner to the 14-lesson course I taught for Yavapai College from 1982 to 1989, a course called Genealogy for Beginners.

Betty notes, "The very first genuine meeting was in response to an attempt by the Genealogical Society of Arizona (GSA), Director, William Stebbing, to organize a branch of his organization in the Prescott-Chino Valley area. A small group met in the conference room at Prescott City Library on 17 January 1981, and technically, we became a branch of the Genealogical Society of Arizona for about one year under the name of Yavapai County Genealogical Society. Dues were \$12 (retained by GSA), Donna Wood was Director, and members were to receive a quarterly newsletter."

The Xerox copy of my application for membership in the Prescott Chapter, GSA , is dated 20 Jan 1981, and contains no mention of the Yavapai County Genealogical Society.

I spoke to the Prescott Chapter in Mar 1981 on Pennsylvania Research, and in Oct 1981 on Quaker Records.

Betty continues, "The first decisive date of our Society was 21 August 1982, when minutes were taken and our association with the Stebbings group was debated. It was decided to continue on our own, however feebly, with our own officers, dues and projects. Only one quarterly had been received in the previous year from the GSA and we felt rejected and forgotten. We had received no material, monies, or input from them...The name Yavapai County Gen. Soc. was retained...There were 13 members by August 1982, and dues were \$4.00".

The list of members, the original 13, follows:

LaVena Wilson, president Alice Quinn  
Imogene Hodges Phil Barnes  
Donna Wood Jeri Pat Dawson  
Muriel Van Camp Margaret McCain  
Dora Whiteside Elaine Maag  
Wanza Grissom Abbie Ritzinger  
Blanche Lines

"Although the minutes of August 1982 gave the impression that Yavapai County Genealogical Society planned to break away from William Stebbing's Genealogical Society of Arizona, the September 1982 minutes deny this. In fact, whether to remain with GSA, or go it alone was argued back and forth for many months and everyone was becoming thoroughly tired of it...By February 1983, a need for by-laws and goals for the club was realized. The name had been changed to Prescott Genealogical Society, and there was yet another discussion on whether to discontinue entirely being an appendage of the GSA."

It is appropriate to say more about the GSA here. The concept of its founder and director, Bill Stebbing, was that GSA was to be a statewide umbrella organization with chapters at localities throughout the state, and that individual members of each chapter would pay dues to GSA.

I first met Bill Stebbing at his 1981 GSA seminar which featured Alex Haley of "Roots" fame as a speaker. Bill and I became friends and eventually I served as a speaker at several of his GSA seminars, including a memorable 3-day affair staged aboard the Queen Mary in 1985. My article "A Quaker Lineage Trail" was published in the Journal of the Genealogical Society of Arizona, Vol 2 No 1 (Jan-Feb 1982).

In Mar 1982, the Tucson genealogical group, calling itself the Arizona State Genealogical Society, issued a call for a meeting prior to the opening of its scheduled seminar in Tucson on 19 Mar 1982, to discuss the possibility of establishing a real statewide organization. Tucson offered to give up its society's name to a newly established state organization. Individuals from several locations attended. I remember Bill Stebbing and I attended, and Sun City, Payson, Sierra Vista, perhaps others, were represented. The meeting was cordial, and led to another meeting on 28 Apr 1982 in Casa Grande. My memory says that it became apparent at Casa Grande that Bill Stebbing insisted that he already had a statewide organization, and all that was necessary was for all local societies to become chapters. Since GSA was obviously a proprietary setup, existing groups were unwilling to subordinate their societies to Bill Stebbing and his strong Mormon influence.

The attempt to establish a state society finally led to the 1988 creation of the Arizona Genealogical Advisory Board (AzGAB), which was conceived as a statewide coordinating body. It still exists in that form today.

Several more months were required before the separation of the Prescott Genealogical Society from the GSA was recognized as an established fact, although no formal action by either party affirmed this status.

From our beginning we experienced a steady growth of membership. From the initial 13 noted in 1982, Betty's account noted 34 members in Sep 1984, 71 members in May 1987, & 125 members in Sep 1990. Memberships continued to fluctuate up & down, in part due to the continued refusal by the board to mail dues renewal notices to members.

We have enjoyed the leadership of a number of our members as President of our society. These are listed below:

1981 Donna Wood 1991 William Cheek  
1982 LaVena Wilson 1992 William Cheek  
1983 Imogene Hodges 1993 Robert Wixon  
1984 Muriel Van Camp 1994 Carla Dixon-Wolcoff  
1985 Muriel Van Camp 1995 Carla Dixon-Wolcoff  
1986 Nancy Smith 1996 John Hanny  
(resigned Sep 1) 1997 John Hanny  
1986 Sep, Peggy Magee, 1998 Barbara Googe  
to early 1987 1999 Barbara Googe  
1987 Betty Murphy to June 2000 Barbara Googe  
1987 Gerald Kimmet 2001 Robert Houser

1988 Gerald Kimmet 2002 Robert Houser  
1989 Gerald Kimmet 2003 Travis Holtzclaw  
1990 Gene Chesson

Our quarterly newsletter began publication in Jan 1987, and appeared quarterly through Vol 8 No 2 (Apr 1994). Publication was suspended until Vol 9 No 1 (Jul 1995) was published. Vol 9 No 2 (Oct 1995) was followed by Vol 10 No 1 (Jan 1996). The Bulletin has appeared quarterly since then.

We have held our monthly membership meeting in several locations throughout the years. Our first few meetings were held in the staff room of the Prescott Public Library, an area which was later opened to general public use. Our Oct 1981 meeting was held in the upstairs board room of Yavapai Savings Bank. After May 1983 the steep steps led to abandonment of that place in favor of meeting in several members' homes. Membership growth required meeting in a larger place, and by Apr 1984 arrangements were made to use the 3rd floor in the Prescott Public Library. When our welcome there expired after June 1999, for a year we paid a fee to meet monthly in the Prescott Adult Center. Finally, by July 2000 we were welcomed to our current meeting place in the LDS Church in Prescott.

One of the missions of our society is to assist in genealogical education. To this end we have arranged for speakers on genealogical topics for our monthly membership meetings. By my count I have appeared as a speaker some 15 times, from May 1981 to Nov 2003. We are especially proud of the annual seminars our society has presented, involving speakers of national renown. These have been:

1986 Edna & John Bentz  
1987 Everton Workshop-Louise Everton  
1988 Eli O'Carroll, Peggy Magee, David McElroy  
1989 Anita Cheek Milner & Nancy Kelley  
1990 Dr V Ben Bloxham  
1991 Gary Boyd Roberts  
1992 Fred W Klose & Frank J Glover  
1993 Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck  
1994 Bradley W Steuart  
1995 Henry "Hank" Z Jones  
May 1996 James L Hansen  
Nov 1996 Ron Bremer  
1997 Kathleen W Hinckley  
1998 Sharon DeBartolo Carmack  
1999 Kory Meyerink  
2000 Mary McCampbell Bell  
2001 Sandra H Luebking  
2002 Roger Joslyn  
2003 Jana Sloan Broglin