

The WHAGS Journal



Volume 5, Issue 4 — February 2025



Editor's Note Ron Ware

Suddenly, it's January 2025 and a new year. My, how fast the holidays came and went! The calendar year 2024 has gone, and what a great year at WHAGS it was. I think 2025 will prove to be another year of excellent programming, special interest participation (SIG), and the fun in joining in committee work. On January 14th, the WHAGS Board completed the first meeting of the year, setting a path for activity for the remainder of the 2024-25 program year, and well into 2025-26.

The day before the Board meeting, the Program committee met to review programming for the remainder of this year, and to lay the foundation for program

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In the following article, WHAGS member, Leonard Spearman shares memories of mid twentieth century road trips through the south with his parents and siblings. Leonard as well as his father are interesting men. See his father's bio on page 6.

Traveling In The South at Christmas Time

By Leonard Spearman, Jr.

As a black child growing up in the south, I never experienced racism toward me or my family (to my knowledge). I think back on how well my parents shielded us from encountering any problems. There were five of us in our family.



Leonard Spearman

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Presidents Address Gail Colby

It is hard to believe we are in the second month of 2025. Time is flying by, and it will be May before we know it. May is the month that WHAGS holds the Board elections and installs newly elected members. May 2025 is also when I complete my two terms as president of the great organization. The Nominating Committee is currently working to find members interested in stepping up and bringing new blood and ideas to the organization. WHAGS needs YOU!

The proposed draft WHAGS Bylaws are available in the Members Only section of the

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Human Interest Stories

By Liz Philip

Our membership director, Liz Philip has written a series of human interest articles that I think the readers will appreciate. Liz is a life long Houstonian and grew up in the Spring Branch area. She recounts stories about her family in the 1960's. Heartwarming stories that I think all of us can relate too.

We'll begin with the story titled "Diary Queen and the Root Beer Float Test."

Dairy Queen and the Root Beer Float Test

By Liz Philip

One summer afternoon in the late 1960s, my Mom and I were at home alone in the family room watching TV. She turned to me and said that she wanted a root beer float. Well, the best root beer floats were at Dairy Queen.

There were three Dairy Queens in Spring Branch at the time. One on Bingle Road, just up the street from our house, on the south side of Long Point Road. Another on Wirt Road across the street from Fed-Mart. The last one was off Campbell Road, where it intersects Emnora, across the parking lot of the Rice Food Market. Which one should we go to? We decided to go to the one closest to the house, on Bingle Road. We jumped into the car and headed on over. We went to the drive-

thru and sat in the parking lot ready to enjoy our floats.

The Dairy Queen cup had a fill line near the top. This was curious because I did not recall seeing it before. I pointed that out to Mom and then we compared our floats. They were supposed to be the same, but they were not. Dairy Queen did not have scoop ice cream, it was soft serve. This means that it came out of the ice cream machine in a continuous stream. The soda jerk went to the machine and put the cup under the spout. Each swirl made me desire more. The ice cream swirled in the cup around the bottom and then came up inside and stopped. Then the root beer was poured in. It was served with a straw and a long spoon. My float had ice cream and root beer that stopped short of the fill line. Mom's ice cream came up to the fill line, but the root beer did not.

Oh well, I thought, not that big of a deal. I was enjoying the float and spending time alone with her. We were chatting and drinking our floats, there in the car. With windows down, a cool breeze drifting through the car, Mom turned to me and said, "I wonder if the other Dairy Queen's floats are the same as these? Let's see." A comparison test of root beer

floats? You bet, let's go!

Off we went to the Wirt Road location. The results from this Dairy Queen were about the same. My float was up to the fill line for the ice cream and a little over on the root beer. Mom's was the same. This Dairy Queen was a little more generous than the one closest to home. The final Dairy Queen contender for the Root Beer Float study was located near the Rice Food Market on Campbell Road at the intersection of Emnora Road. This DQ was out of the way, by itself. The grocery store was on the other side of the parking lot, not really within walking distance. The final comparison was on!

We had the last floats, and they looked fuller than the others. My float had ice cream up past the fill line and the root beer was at the line. Mom's float had both the ice cream over the line as well as root beer. These were the clear winners!

By now, we had already had two floats and were getting very full. I have to say that it was a struggle to finish that third float. We sat in the parking lot, slurping on the last of the root beer and spooning up the melting ice cream. So full but not wanting to leave a single drop. We finished the floats and made our way home. It was a great afternoon, just my mom, root beer floats, and me.



A typical 1960's Dairy Queen.



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Editors Note

year 2025-26. In the coming months, we will explore potential topics such as research in State Archives, using the Periodical Source Index (PERSI), and other equally interesting presentations. Then we will launch a search for qualified experts in those topics. For me, serving on the Program Committee has been an enjoyable and fulfilling part of belonging to the West Houston Area Genealogical Society (WHAGS).

By the time you read this, we will have already had the January regular meeting where we enjoyed the presentation by Marian Burk Wood. Conducted in an all-virtual format via Zoom, it was unique. Conflict with room availability at the Steve Radack Community Center, our normal meeting location, left us with the need to find another venue or to conduct the meeting virtually. Changing venue locations can cause confusion, so the board made the choice of conducting

the meeting totally via Zoom. That decision posed a dilemma. How would we gather for our after-meeting lunch at Clay's restaurant? We solved the matter by creating a virtual lunch. Let's call it "lunch by Zoom," where members would bring their self-prepared meal to their computer and have lunch while socializing via Zoom. Those who attended shared conversation on a variety of topics.

Marian Burk Wood's presentation "Bring Family History Alive in Bite-Sized Projects," was well received, and proved to be informative. She offered tips that left me wondering, "why didn't I think of that."

We will return to our normal hybrid format in February, which combines an in-person and virtual platform. WHAGS will host Irish researcher, Debra M. Dudek, for a presentation around

"Researching Your Irish Ancestors Online." If you have Irish ancestry, this will be a program dear to your heart.

I leave you with a cry for help. All the WHAGS activities, the quality programs by expert genealogists, the special interest groups, and the field trips just don't happen. All programming and other activities are organized by members just like you. Only a few have stepped up to help. You will hear soon about the upcoming leadership elections, so please consider running for one of the positions or by participating in one of our SIG groups.

Ron

See Member Highlight

Eugene Denham

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Traveling in the South

My dad was from Tallahassee, Florida, the youngest of six children (3 girls & 3 boys). My Mom was from DeLand, Florida and grew up with her dad, Mom, and big brother, along with several aunts and cousins. I always wondered if everyone had an Aunt Bea, Aunt Irene or an Aunt Julia in their family, ha ha.

My parents met in Tallahassee at a mutual family wedding (Dad's big sister and Mom's first cousin) and it must have been love at first sight, because Mom decided to attend Florida A&M University (FAMU) where they dated. They got married in 1950 and a year later my sister Lynn was born, with me arriving a few years later. My sister and I were born in Tallahassee at the FAMU Hospital. My brother Charles was born at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor.

Traveling was always fun with the entire family in the car. Mom always had the front seat from where she passed out the food, so that we couldn't eat it before we got out of town. I remember we had fried chicken, boiled eggs, luncheon meat and bread for sandwiches. We never stopped for lunch, or a snack break and it didn't bother me, because that was the way it was back then. The harsh realities of

racism that plagued the south kept us moving on toward our destiny. Despite this, our family travels were filled with joy, camaraderie and exploration. I usually sat behind Dad, and he made me feel needed because I could read a map, and I helped to keep him on the correct roads.

We moved from Tallahassee to Baton Rouge, Louisiana and it was there that I have my fondest memories of traveling throughout the south, by car and train and occasionally by plane. We drove to quite a few cities and places in the country, To New York City, to Estes Park, Colorado, to Beloit, Wisconsin and to Miami, Florida to name just a few. Those rides kept us as a close-knit family, then and now. Not once do I recall a stop where we weren't accepted, and maybe Dad knew about the "Green Book" and avoided those places where we weren't appreciated. The "Green Book" was used by Black Americans as a travel guide that identified places that we were welcomed.

Most of our destinations were due to Dad's conferences and we came along for a great vacation. Driving from Baton Rouge to Florida was a regular trip, especially around Christmas time, which held a special significance for our family, as we embarked on our annual trip to Tallahassee and DeLand, Florida to

celebrate the festive season with loved ones. These trips took place before the Interstate system was complete, so we traveled U.S. 90, which took us through many cities and towns in the south such as New Iberia, Franklin, Morgan City and Houma, LA. In Mississippi we crossed the old Pearl River Bridge all the way to the Biloxi Bay Bridge. We always witnessed the beauty of the picturesque gulf coast, but Dad never stopped, which I understood when I got older. I admired the magnificent antebellum homes across from the gulf. I remember how a lot of the gulf coast beauty was destroyed by Hurricanes Camille (69) and Katrina (2005). The journeys that we made were a testament to the resilience and adaptability of our family unit.

We then entered Alabama from Mississippi headed to the Mobile Bay "Causeway," a small stretch of land before we entered the State of Florida, our home away from home. A long drive awaited us through the panhandle where the pine trees were plentiful and tall. It was this stretch where most of us fell asleep and were awakened on our approach to Tallahassee. It was there we would have to change our Timex watches as we were now in another time zone.

As usual we spent a few

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Traveling in the South

days in Tallahassee with Dad's folks, grabbing a piece of that good ole butter pound cake Grandmother made with 12 sticks of butter, yum yum. But, as most husbands and Dads know, we were off to Mom's parents to spend Christmas. So, back in the car driving southeast with no interstate, to DeLand, where we spent the rest of the holidays. DeLand will always be remembered as my fondest memories growing up at Christmas time.

Granddad had orange and grapefruit trees in the backyard and every morning he would go outside and pick a few oranges off the trees and squeeze them for us to drink. It rivaled the pound cake. We enjoyed the fresh juice with a hardy breakfast to eat. The warmth of Grandma's wood-burning stove, the taste of fresh orange juice from Granddad's trees, and the joy of attending church as a family all contributed to the magical atmosphere of the holidays. Our Sunday dinner was baked chicken where Charles and I fought over the wishbone.

When Christmas Eve finally arrived, we were sent upstairs, along with our two cousins from New York City to go to sleep and wait on Santa Claus. Imagine five children upstairs talking

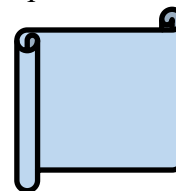
and playing until our parents gave us one last ultimatum, "Go to sleep or Santa will pass us by", so off to sleep we went.

We woke up excited to open Santa's gifts, but if we came down too early, we were sent back upstairs and back to bed. That was next to impossible, but as a parent I now realized that grown-ups stayed up practically all night and were just getting their sleep. We finally awoke and went downstairs to open our gifts from Santa. The unwrapping of presents, the laughter and smiles as kids, and the joy of shared traditions added to the magic of the holiday season. Those toys we received back in the day were the best toys Santa could bring. I remember the Pikes Peak racing car set, a cowboy gun and holster set with pop caps, an electric football set, the GI Joe's walkie talkie set and of course clothes. It was great growing up with a brother to have someone to play with. Lynn received dolls, clothes and shoes (ugh), but she was very happy and satisfied.

When it was time to head back home, I really can't remember the long ride home, maybe it was the wonderful thought of another great Christmas with family and lots of toys. Traveling in the south at Christmas time for me was not just about reaching a destination, it was about connecting with family, building memories, and savoring the simple pleasures of life. I will

always remember the beautiful Gulf Coast as we drove by it again. Maybe, one day I'll get to experience the joy of swimming in the gulf, but for now spending Christmas time with family is the greatest joy God could give us.

Leonard Spearman



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Presidents notes

website. Please review them as we will vote on them in a Business Meeting before our February program. The major change in the Bylaws is the Board election process and schedule. All Board positions (President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors) will be up for election in May of odd years, including this year. The term of office for all positions will be two years. Incumbents who are not term-limited in May are eligible to stand for re-election. Two term-limited positions will be open, President and Secretary. Every WHAGS member is eligible to stand for any position.

A few years ago, the Chaparral Genealogical Society dissolved itself as no one would step up and be the President of the organization. I recently

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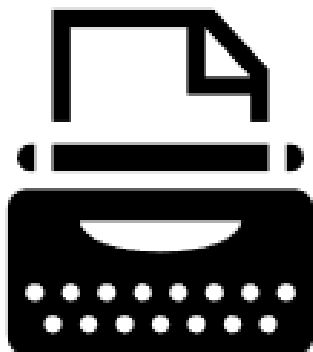
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Presidents Notes

Zoomed into an Iowa County genealogy society that was in the same situation (no president) and they were talking about closing their proverbial doors for the same reason. We don't want to close our proverbial doors and dissolve WHAGS. Unfortunately, that is a possibility.

These jobs are not hard and do not require a lot of time. The duties of the President and Vice President do not include staffing the technical jobs of coordinating the programs, so you don't need to be a Zoom guru. Over the last four years, the WHAGS Leadership Team has streamlined and simplified the duties of the office holders and committee chairs.

It takes all of us to make and keep WHAGS a functioning organization that provides the benefits we all enjoy. Please consider running for a Board position or chairing a committee; if not you, then who?



Following is the biography of Leonard Spearman, Sr., the father of the author of the feature article, beginning on page 1. Leonard's father was such a fascinating man that I felt compelled to add his biography as an addendum to his son's article.

Leonard Spearman, Sr.
Biography

Leonard Spearman was an educator during the first two decades of his career, working at various colleges and universities. Spearman was a psychology professor at his alma mater Florida A&M. He held the same position at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He taught at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, and at Coppin State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Spearman also served as a visiting professor at Queens College in New York. In addition, he was a Martin Luther King Lecturer at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

From 1970 to 1979, Spearman worked at the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the division that is now the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. His highest position with the department was as Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary within the office of Postsecondary Education. As

Associate Deputy, Spearman oversaw the Federal Government's Trio Programs which provided assistance to lower income people who wanted to attend college. During his nine-year tenure he expanded the programs to assist more college and university students.

From 1980 to 1986, Spearman served as President at Texas Southern University. In 2003, because of Spearman's years of academic service to Texas Southern, the university dedicated the Leonard Spearman Technology Building to the former ambassador.

On February 5, 1988, President George H.W. Bush nominated Spearman as U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda. Following U.S. Senate confirmation, Spearman presented his credentials on April 27, 1988. He served at the U.S. Embassy in Kigali until November 10, 1990.

On October 22, 1990, weeks before he finished his term as ambassador to Rwanda, President Bush selected Spearman to become U.S. Ambassador to Lesotho. Presenting his credentials on January 24, 1991 in Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, Spearman led the U.S. Embassy there until April 25, 1993.



One of our long time members, Linda Hudson, suggested that we begin a Tips page for the newsletter. Well, here it is. I hope these suggestions help you down your genealogy path.

War Records

by Linda Hudson

At Thanksgiving, we met our kids and grandkids in Columbus for a meal. It was a good time to get away, as we were having work done on the house. While there, my son spoke of a story his dad told him about my dad's service in WWII. He said that Dad had been in the South Pacific and was given a furlough to come home and be with my mom, as she was sick and not expected to live. My dad was on Palawan Island, and my son told the story of how most of his troop and others were killed. My son assumed I knew this story. I told him I had never heard it. Later, I asked my older brother about it and he had never known this. I recall my son's dad and my dad would often get into lengthy conversations that I didn't pay attention to because I was too busy watching two toddlers.

I told my son I had not heard this story, not any part of it. I do have a copy of my dad's discharge papers, but they don't

contain the information a service record has. Service records contain such things as training received and where, what duties, they had, various movements from base to base, etc. I'll digress for a moment. Mom would never fly in an airplane after hearing the details of Dad's flight experiences and how a plane would drop several feet and you better be belted in. Or his trips crossing the Pacific in boats and how the puke would roll with the ship. Apparently, a lot of young men had trouble getting their "sea legs." I think Dad was trying to find humor in a really tough time. Anyway, I had pictures of Dad in New Guinea and the Philippines. So, growing up that was all I needed to know.

I knew dad had come home briefly because Mom was very sick. I knew enough of the story that made me want to learn more. I hoped that Dad's records had not been destroyed in the fire in St. Louis. I went online and filled out the online form requesting records. The site is

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans>.

I filled it out and explained that I believe my Dad was absent from Palawan when troops were badly treated and killed or died from the abuse. I waited for a reply, and hoped would learn more. Sadly, the archives

eventually sent a letter saying his records were destroyed in the fire in 1973. They did have his final pay voucher which provides a little more information than his discharge papers. But a glimmer of hope was included. And I'll quote this because it's another place to seek information.

"Army historical records which contain unit histories may be on file at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, ATTN: Patron Services Division 950 Soldiers Drive, Carlisle, PA 17013-5021, and the New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY 10018. Although unit histories do not normally include information about specific personnel, they will show the unit's activities and participation during the war. We suggest contacting these addresses, with the specific unit designation, for possible information pertaining to the veteran's unit activities."

My Dad was attached to the 1619th Ordnance Service Maintenance Company. He was support for many Army Companies and Air Force. He received medals for Campaigns in the Pacific and the Liberation of the Philippines among others. He has kept a book on the Thirteenth Air Force in the Philippines. I will wait to see what I get from the above resources, but I've always felt that book was significant. I wish I had asked.



Member Highlight Eugene Denham



As a kid, Eugene (also known as Gene) Denham developed an interest in genealogy by spending time with his paternal grandmother. She often talked about her grandparents and was proud of the fact that she had two grandfathers who had served in the Civil War. Knowing that he had ancestors who DID something and played a part in history gave Gene a sense of belonging and connection with his family roots since he moved around a lot throughout his childhood. Ever since then, he has wanted to know more!

Along his genealogy journey, Gene was excited to run across postcard-sized advertisements for his great-great grandfather's paint store. His most memorable genealogical find is a family history written for and read at a 1901 family reunion. It tells a scary story of immigration and helps him understand the struggles that his ancestors encountered in the past.

Gene learned about WHAGS and joined in the fall of 2023 after he met member Tom Matchett at the Cy-Fair Writers' Group. His interests beyond genealogy and writing include playing Dungeons & Dragons and collecting coins.

While attending Lamar University in Beaumont (Texas), Gene met his wife Corliss. They subsequently moved to Houston in 1990. He credits the Clayton Library as a great resource for fueling his research enthusiasm as an adult.

Gene kept strong family ties with the military, serving as an artillery officer in the National Guard. The most meaningful honor he ever received was commanding a Color Guard as part of the Lamar University ROTC while former President Gerald Ford was there for a speech.

Gene's favorite band is The Beatles. He discovered them in college and appreciates Paul McCartney the most.

His ideal vacation is a mix of fun, food, and history. Trying the local food is a must anywhere he goes.

If Gene was granted three wishes, he would understand multiple languages, be able to sing (like Freddie Mercury!), and have perfect health. The most extravagant thing he would do if he won the lottery would be to travel.

When you have an opportunity, ask Gene about some of the colorful characters in his family tree like his great-grandmother Myrtie that sparked that genealogy interest so many years ago.



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Helping to Find Your Roots

Monthly meetings are hybrid: in person at Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Road, and via Zoom

WHAGS February Program

Researching Your Irish Ancestors Online

Presenter: Debra M. Dudek



Discover online tools and resources to unpuzzle your Irish heritage. This presentation will introduce you to a variety of online sites, new search strategies, and what steps to take to further your research objectives online and abroad.

Don't miss this opportunity to learn tips to help you search and browse for success!

Debra M. Dudek is Head of Adult and Teen Services at the Fountaindale Public Library District in Bolingbrook, IL. She holds a post-graduate certificate in Genealogical, Palaeographic & Heraldic Studies from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. Ms. Dudek is the Book Review Editor of the Illinois State Genealogical Society, a Chapter Librarian of the Chicago Chapter NSDAR, and the author of the *World War I Research Guide: Tracing American Military and Non-Combatant Ancestors* – Includes a Guide to Canadian Military Research.

Saturday, February 15, 2025

Meet & greet at 10:00 am

Program begins at 10:30 am

If you'd like to join the meeting virtually, visit our website at www.whags.org for the Zoom registration link. Those attending in person will meet at the Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Road, Houston, TX 77084. Visitors are always welcome!