



Vol. XL, No. 4

Darien, Fairfield County, CT

December, 2024

President's Message

This year we are tracking down missing relatives or "How did they get there?"

The first lecture, given by Sara Z. was about using the Leeds Method and Diahan Southards method for sorting your DNA matches into groups. If you would like to have a workshop on this topic please reach out to our [email](#).

Our second lecture, given by Jill Morelli was about the Orphan Trains out of NYC to Hamilton County, Iowa. She also has a book about it that tells the stories she has researched. *Journeys of the Forgotten: The Orphans of Hamilton County, Iowa*, available on Amazon. If you believe your family is connected to the orphan train trips to Hamilton County Iowa check out Jill's website, iowaorphans.wordpress.com.

Our third lecture will be in person at the Darien Library on 1 Feb 2025, given by Toni McKeen will be about Hart's Island.

March and April are also in person.

We are looking to add volunteers to our board. If you are interested in helping guide the topics, bring food for social hour, be a speaker about a topic you know well, write for our newsletter, or anything else please send us an email mgsvolunteer@gmail.com

I would like to publicly give a heartfelt thank you to our very active board member John Driscoll. He has been our steady rock covering membership, financials, newsletters and keep-

ing yours truly organized. He needs to step away for a little bit. He will be missed on the board but we are sure an active member in our audience. Thank you John!!

Sara

MGS News

By Peter Biggins

On October 5, MGS President Sara Zagrodzky made a presentation at the Darien Library on identifying cousins with autosomal DNA testing using the methods of Diane Leeds and Diahan Southard. She started by identifying the different kinds of DNA testing:

- autosomal DNA, commonly called Family Finder,
- mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which both goes back mother to mother to mother, etc., for both males and females.
- Y-DNA, which goes back father to father to father, etc. for males only.

Sara's focus was on autosomal DNA, which uses centimorgans (cM) to measure how closely two people with recent common ancestors are related.

She discussed the Leeds Method, designed by Dana Leeds, which helps those searching for biological parents and other close biological family members. The Leeds Method uses a spreadsheet. In the first column, she lists all of a

person's predicted 2nd and 3rd cousins, as identified by Ancestry.com. In the column 2 through 5, she uses different colors to identify the persons in column 1 who share a common ancestry with each other. The goal is to have 4 groups, one for each of four pairs of great grandparents.

Diahan Southard uses the term "Missing Ancestor" to identify the section of your tree where you have not identified a person by name. You use your DNA matches to identify that person. Diahan uses the term "Best Mystery Match" to describe the DNA matches that have trees that can help you confirm this in the section of your tree you are looking for.

On November 2nd, Jill Morelli made a Zoom presentation for MGS entitled "The Orphan Train Movement: Tales of Three Riders." The removal of orphans or "partial orphans" by the Children's Aid Society of New York City began in 1854 and continued until 1929. Over 250,000 children are thought to have been removed from the City with upstate New York by multiple agencies taking approximately 33,000 children and the Midwest taking a similar number. The program had its genesis in the Industrial Revolution which demanded child labor, had no laws to prevent it and had no social safety net for families. Children were abandoned by parents who could not afford to feed them or were too sick to care. Unwed mothers formed another group. Jill traced the lives of three orphan train riders in her own family in Iowa in different decades, exploring the characteristics of the orphans, their foster parents and their NYC birth parents. Jill discussed the records that are most likely to yield information and their challenges.

This led to a two-plus year investigation of 46 orphans who arrived in Webster City, Iowa in 1890. This in turn resulted in her book *Journeys of the Forgotten: The Orphans of Hamilton County, Iowa*. Jill Morelli is a writer, lecturer and researcher specializing in Midwest, and Scandinavian research and methodologies.

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MIDDLESEX GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY 2024 OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

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Middlesex Genealogical Society was established for the purpose of helping those interested in genealogy to pursue the investigation of their family heritage and to provide guidance in research to that end. The society publishes a quarterly newsletter (ISSN 1936-3494) and co-sponsors, with Darien Library, at least four meetings with a program and speaker during the year. Annual membership dues vary from \$25 for 1 yr. or \$45 for 2 yrs. per individual and \$30 for 1 yr. or \$55 for 2 yrs. per couple or family. Original notices of genealogical interest and queries are welcomed for publication in the newsletter.

Middlesex Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 9
Darien, Fairfield County, CT 06820
Website: mgsdarienct.org

Upcoming MGS Presentation

Presentation will be held at the Darien Library in the Louise Parker Berry Community Room

Saturday, February 1, 2025, 1:00 pm

Informal "Meet & Greet" Come and talk to your fellow members about your work, brick walls, successes, etc.

Saturday, February 1, 2025, 2:00 pm

Hart Island: The Island of Lost Souls, presented by Toni McKeen



Potter's Field is where New York City's poor and unclaimed dead are buried. Most people have never heard of Hart Island, or barely have any knowledge of this island. It doesn't even appear on many maps, in spite of the fact that it is the largest tax-funded cemetery in the world. Are your relatives included there?

Hart Island is still an active cemetery, where burials still take place each year. Toni will include its long and sad history and discuss where you can find the burial records and what years are available. Over 1 million bodies are buried here.

The island is of interest to genealogists looking for an unclaimed relative.

She will naturally discuss research databases as well as the fascinating history of the island.

For the last 21 years, while not doing continuing research on her own family, Toni has been teaching several levels of genealogy, 5 classes weekly. Toni is on a mission to expose as many people as possible to the fun, excitement, and importance of tracing their own genealogy. She believes documenting your family history is important for yourself and for future generations. Over the years she has taught over 4000 hours

of genealogy courses at Founders Hall in Ridgefield, Redding, CT as well as Bronxville, Tuckahoe, and Mamaroneck, NY.

Toni has also been a popular lecturer at various genealogy societies in the New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Boston, and Long Island areas.

She earned her BS and MS Degree in Biology. Her training from her research background helped her to establish organized systems and charts for recording family information for herself and her students...a problem for most researchers.

Toni has traveled to Italy visiting the towns of her ancestors in search of additional original documents of her relatives.

Go West Young Man

By Peter Biggins

Genealogy is more than a family tree. After the family tree comes the stories. Stories can be written about each family in your family tree. Family tree software is now helping you to create these stories.



Some stories are written by our ancestors and handed down

through the generations. Other stories can be put together from snippets that are entered in family bibles or handed down word-of-mouth. Others are detected from census information and other sources. And, more recently, there can be stories written from Y-chromosome DNA handed down male-to-male-to-male.

I now have 31 family history stories and 40 stories about travel, work, places, and Y-DNA associated with these families. One of my stories has to do with travel out west. It is about a Bavarian ancestor going to the Gold Rush of 1849.

Gold Mine at Mathenias Creek

My great great grandfather John Schmitt was born in 1820, in Kassel, in the far northwest corner of the Kingdom of Bavaria. John Schmitt immigrated to Tiffin, Ohio, in 1838.

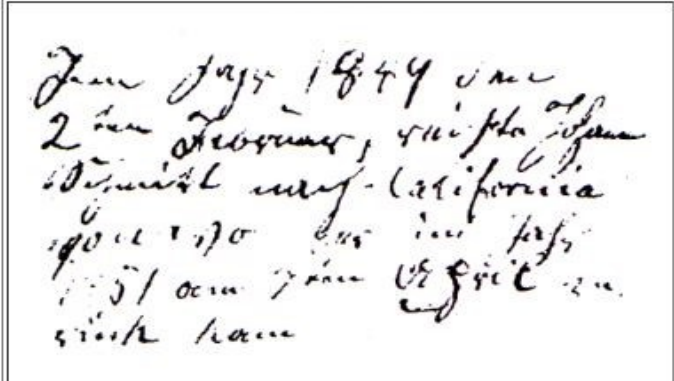
John Schmitt married Mary Augusta Schickell in 1847. She had emigrated from the same town as John. Mary's father was a music teacher in Tiffin. Their first child was born in February 1849. But John was not in Tiffin for the birth. The 1850 U.S. Census shows John's wife and child living in Tiffin. There is no John Smith listed.

One day I was looking at a page for special events in the Bible of John Schmitt, that my cousin Richard Drueke had given me. I had a year of German in high school, but I could not read the page. It was written in German script. But the word "California" popped out. Then I saw what looked like a date in 1849. Online I found Gerhard and Betty Becker who deciphered the German script. It looked like John was a "49er." **See below.**

at an elevation of 1,000 feet. We do not know where John lived and worked on Mathenias Creek. Cosumnes Creek eventually flows into San Pablo Bay, San Francisco Bay, and the Pacific Ocean.

John Smith is a common name. It is not certain that the John Smith on Mathenias Creek was our John Smith. Our John Smith would have been 29 or 30 instead of 28, but census ages are not always reliable. There were other John Smiths of a similar age born in Germany. But, next to John on Mathenias Creek were two miners named Cordes: John and William. Because of future relationships between the Smith and Cordes families, their presence next to John in the census lends credence to the John of Mathenias Creek being our John.

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered at

Family Bible	German	English
 <p>Jan Jahr 1849 am 2ten Februar, reiste Johann Schmitt nach California von wo er im Jahr 1851 am 7ten April zu rück kam</p>	<p>Im Jahre 1849 den 2ten Februar, reiste Johann Schmitt nach California von wo er im Jahr 1851 am 7ten April zu rück kam</p>	<p>In the year 1849 on February 2nd Johann Schmitt traveled to California from where he in the year 1851 on April 7th returned</p>

Then I found John in the October 1850 Census for Mathenias Creek, working as a miner.

"Eureka!"

He was living on Mathenias Creek in El Dorado County, California. He was on the 11th of 16 pages for "on Mathenias Creek" in the 1850 census. Each page has 42 persons. That's a total of 672 people. Of these, 627, or 93%, were miners.

Mathenias Creek is now called Martinez Creek. It is seven miles long and 13 miles south southeast of Sutter's Mill. The mouth is behind 1550 Pleasant Valley Road, east southeast of Diamond Springs at an elevation of 2,000 feet. It flows into the North Fork of Cosumnes Creek

Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. Word of the Gold Rush spread slowly at first. In March 1848, San Francisco newspaper publisher and merchant Samuel Brannan, after he had hurriedly set up a store to sell gold prospecting supplies, strode through the streets of San Francisco, holding aloft a vial of gold, shouting "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!" On August 19, 1848, the New York Herald was the first major newspaper on the East Coast to report that there was a gold rush in California. On December 5, 1848, the State of the Union message of President James Knox Polk urged Americans to explore and exploit California's

new-found mineral wealth. Suddenly a mania for gold swept the United States.

The United States acquired California and other southwest territories from Mexico on February 2, 1848, in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which followed the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, also known as the War of North American Invasion.

My John Smith left for California on February 2, 1849, the first anniversary of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. California did not become a State until September 9, 1850. The distance from Tiffin is about 2,500 miles through Chicago, Illinois, Council Bluffs, Iowa, the Rocky Mountains, and the Sierra Nevada.

According to Wikipedia, approximately 90,000 people went to California in 1849, about half by land and half by sea. Of

these, perhaps 50,000 to 60,000 were Americans. The California Trail was an emigrant trail of about 1,600 miles across the western half of the North American continent from Missouri River towns to California. After it was established, the first half of the California Trail followed the same corridor of networked river valley trails as the Oregon Trail and the Mormon Trail, namely the valleys of the Platte, North Platte, and

Sweetwater rivers to Wyoming. The main route of the California Trail branched from the Oregon Trail west of Fort Hall, as immigrants went on forward going southwestward into present-day Nevada, then down along the Humboldt River to the Sierra Nevada. The journey was often slow and arduous, fraught with risks from dysentery, infectious diseases, dehydration, malnutrition, cholera, highwaymen, Indian attacks, injury, and harsh weather, with as many as one in ten travelers dying along the way, usually as a result of disease.

John and Mary's first child, Mary Appolonia Schmitt, was born in Tiffin on August 10, 1849, six months after her father left for California. On April 7, 1851, John Smith returned to Tiffin, Ohio, from California. His gold mining days were over. He was away for over two years. There is no indication that he made a fortune there.

Less than a year after John returned to Ohio, the Schmitts moved from Tiffin to Grand Rapids, Michigan, close to where the Cordes family lived in Alpine, Michigan. John and Mary's second child, Crescenz Joseph Schmitt, was born in 1852. He was my great grandfather. John and Mary's third child, Rosa Wilhelmina Schmitt, was born in Grand Rapids in 1854. In the 1856 and 1859 business directories and the

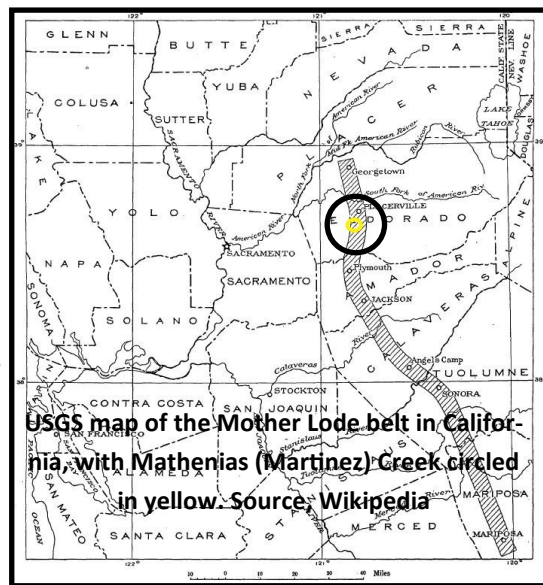
1860 census, John Smith was listed as a saloon keeper.

John Smith died in Grand Rapids in 1861. He was buried in St. Andrew's Cemetery. He was 40 years old. He left his wife Mary and three young children, including my great grandfather Crescenz, age 9.

John Smith was not the only young man in my family to go west. In 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad was completed and passed through Auburn, California, 30 miles

northwest of Mathenias Creek. My great grandfather John Foy, born in County Mayo, Ireland, worked on the railroad between Nebraska and Utah and was present at the Golden Spike ceremony in Utah, at age 21.

John Smith's son, my great grandfather Crescenz, was an early vaudeville musician. In 1878, at age 26, he was playing with a group of "15 Talented Artists" on a California tour. The tour included Grass Valley, a mining town 55 miles north of Mathenias Creek.



THE CATHOLIC TEST – WHEN NEW HAMPSHIRE OUTLAWED CATHOLICS

From *The New Hampshire State Constitution*, By Susan E. Marshall.

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<http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/>

New Hampshire's Constitution, adopted in 1784, had some of the it stated unequivocally that to hold elected state office a man had to be "of the protestant religion."

Similarly, it authorized the government to raise money for the support of "protestant teachers."

Though not part of the state's first, interim constitution of 1776, this language was inserted into the 1784 revisions. Over time these provisions — known as the Catholic Test — developed into a thorny issue.

To be fair, New Hampshire was hardly alone in banning Catholics from public office. New Jersey's 1776 Constitution declared that only men "professing a belief in the faith of any Protestant sect" could hold office.

Other states were more tolerant of different beliefs. Massachusetts, for instance, required office holders to declare their allegiance to a Christian faith. But many states had some religious tests in their constitutions.

Reform Efforts

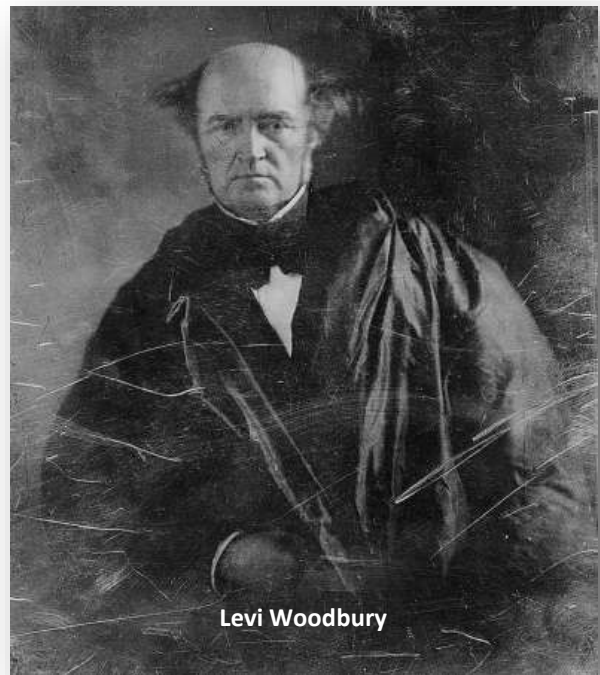
Three subsequent New Hampshire state constitutional conventions considered the issue . Each proposed removing the language referring to protestants from the constitution. But each time — 1792, 1851 and 1852 — voters failed to pass changes, which required two-thirds support to win.

In the constitutional convention of 1850, Rep. Enoch Cass of Holderness led a spirited debate of the Catholic Test in a speech to the convention:

"Was it safe to elect a man governor who was

sworn to the Pope of Rome and believed that all protestants were heretics and should be persecuted unto death? Was it ever known that Catholics gained the power over any people, and got the government into their own hands, that they did not persecute, even unto death, all that were opposed to them? . . . Were not nunneries and Catholic schools springing up all around us? And were they not teaching the children that we are all heretics?"

[Levi Woodbury](#), U.S. Supreme Court justice and presidential candidate, led the push to revise the Constitution. As it stood, he said, it "offered the husk of religious freedom, but withheld the kernel." The 1850 constitutional convention approved amending the constitution to remove the Catholic Test, but voters did not.



Levi Woodbury

Franklin Pierce Controversy

The Catholic Test developed into an important issue in the 1852 [election of Franklin Pierce](#) to the presidency. Pierce was a weak candidate from the start. It had taken 49 ballots at the Democratic national convention to choose Pierce. He was a dark horse candidate who only appeared after the convention deadlocked, with a majority deathly opposed to James Buchanan, the most powerful of the nominees.

Almost immediately, critics accused Pierce of anti-Catholic bias. He had been chair of the 1850 constitutional convention. His supporters produced and published a “speech” Pierce had given in support of removing the Catholic Test from the constitution. His opponents, meanwhile, scoured the record and found no such speech. The speech had been fabricated, they concluded, to con Catholic voters. However, they could also find no record of Pierce supporting the Catholic Test. He had stood silent on the issue, they charged.

As was typical of Pierce, he did his best to straddle the issue of religious freedom, seeking to avoid conflict. His stance on religious freedom did not prevent him from winning the presidency, but did create a blot on his character. After one term in office, voters replaced him with fellow Democrat Buchanan.



Franklin Pierce

Catholic Test Repealed

New Hampshire received plenty of ridicule for its religious test in the years following the Pierce presidency. Political leaders across the country would entreat the state to abandon [the anti-Catholic relic](#).

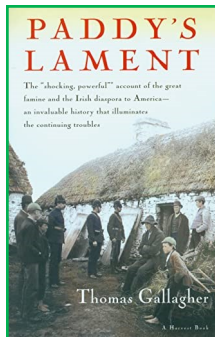
Finally, a new constitutional convention came together and recommended removing the Catholic Test. In 1877, enough voters agreed to strip it out of the law.

Member Recommended Book

Paddy's Lament, Ireland 1846-1847: Prelude to Hatred

By Thomas Gallagher

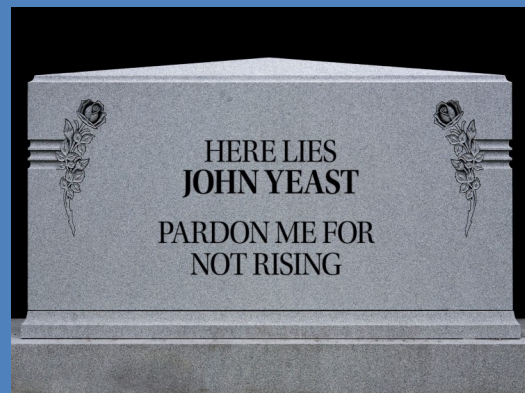
A highly engaging, yet heartbreaking account of the Irish's plight due to the Great Famine. Gallagher explains why and how the famine happened, but also details the agonizing human experience of life in Ireland and aboard devastatingly crowded ships in search of a better life in the U.S.



Ireland in the mid-1800s was primarily a population of peasants, forced to live on a single, moderately nutritious crop: potatoes. Suddenly, in 1846, an unknown and uncontrollable disease turned the potato crop to inedible slime, and all Ireland was threatened.

Brilliantly presented and powerfully written, Paddy's Lament is a gut-wrenching look at Ireland's rural peasantry past and how The Great Famine shaped the Irish-American community particularly in New York City. It also explains some of the deep rooted tensions within Northern Ireland. Paddy's Lament is a must-read for anyone wanting to better understand the Irish community and identity.

LEAVE THEM SMILING



REMINDER

2025 DUES ARE DUE ON JANUARY 1ST

OUR PRESENTATIONS ARE SUPPORTED BY DUES AND
ADDITIONAL DONATIONS ARE NEEDED AND WELCOME

You can download the membership application from our website

www.mgsdarienct.org/application.pdf

Renewing members do not need to complete an application unless their information has changed. Payment can be mailed to PO Box 9, Darien CT 06820 (make checks out to Middlesex Genealogical Society Inc.) Or you can use PayPal Click [HERE](#)

Membership fees are as follows:

Individual \$25 per year (\$45 for two years)

Family \$30 per year (\$55 for two years)

Youth complimentary for first year

If you wish to receive a paper copy of the quarterly newsletter, please add \$10 per year to cover the cost of printing and postage and a note stating your wish to receive a paper copy.

2025
FEBRUARY, 1
NEXT MEETING

Middlesex Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 9
Darien, CT 06820