

Spotlight on GFO's Research Assistants

Marti Dell



As you may know, GFO has no paid staff. Everyone who works at the GFO is a volunteer, and volunteers are the heart and soul of the organization. In this issue of the *Bulletin*, we're recognizing one segment of our volunteer force: our research assistants (RAs). RAs keep the doors of our library open seven days a week, and we are very grateful to them. They open the library each morning, greet everyone who comes in, shelve books, assist with labeling books and work on other specific projects, but—most importantly—assist our patrons. They answer the telephone, respond to questions, suggest avenues of research, help people figure out how to use the computers or find books, and provide assistance with printing that online document you just found. RAs help keep the GFO open and running smoothly for all our patrons.

Because these wonderful volunteers are frequently genealogists in their own right and have their own interests, we're highlighting as many as we can. That way, if you need assistance and would like someone with more experience in a specific area, you can try to get into the library when that RA is working.

RAs are listed according to when they are most likely to be at the library, starting with our roving volunteers, then on to Monday and throughout the week. Note that

some RAs did not want to be mentioned and others didn't want their picture used; some wanted to list only their given name while others provided their full names. So if you know any RAs who aren't profiled here, don't worry, we didn't forget them. We are very appreciative for every single person who assists the GFO.



Judith Leppert: Judith has been doing genealogy for about ten years. She has been volunteering for at least six years at the GFO (maybe more) and is nice enough to fill in whenever she is available and we have a hole in the schedule. She has been told she gives a good tour of the library (she does!) and can help with Swedish and German records. Judith has also done some English genealogical research, and with an MA in medieval English literature, she is a good resource for help with some of the language in older records. If you are having trouble locating a book, ask Judith, as she's constantly shifting shelf contents to make room for new arrivals. By one estimate, she has moved every book in the GFO Library at least six times! She is often over-

heard saying, “Who needs a gym membership?” Judith wears many other GFO “hats.” You may have seen her serving as hostess at our Open House, managing the raffle table at our seminars, or read some of her “First Families of Multnomah County” articles in the *Bulletin*.



Carol Mikama: Carol has been volunteering at the GFO for about a year without a set schedule. We are so lucky to have people who are willing to fill in when and where needed. Carol has nine years of experience in special libraries and school libraries, and she has certification in educational media. She held an assistantship cataloging instructional materials

while earning a Master’s degree in special education. She also set up and managed a special education instructional materials library for Linn-Benton Education Service District in Albany, Oregon; managed a film and video library for a six-county region in southwest Washington; and was school librarian for one year in Portland Public Schools. Carol enjoys research, but admits that she wants to work on catching up in the computer arena because her training predates current technology.



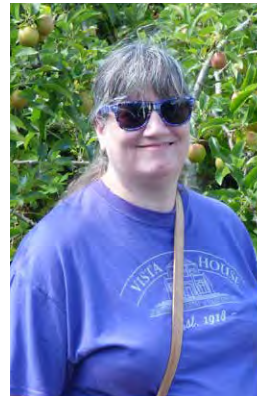
Cherill Vencil: Cherill has been an RA for approximately five years and is another of the wonderful people who fills in when she can. Cherill has a library degree with a concentration in archives. She interned at the New England Historic Genealogical Library, where she worked in the archives, and she has been doing genealogical research for 30 years. As might be

expected, she considers her strongest area of expertise to be New England colonial research. However, as a trained librarian, she can also conduct research in most databases, although she does not consider herself to be a “master” of any one. She really enjoys helping people get started with genealogy. She is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and one of her primary personal projects is documenting her more than 20 patriot ancestors!

Elizabeth Stepp: Liz has been volunteering for about four years and is in the GFO most weeks. She enjoys being an RA, especially making people who call on the

telephone or come into the library feel welcome. Liz tries to add value to their experience with the GFO by listening and asking questions. She tells us that the benefits of working as an RA include learning so much about research, helping people realize the importance of clarifying objectives, and finding different ways to approach a research challenge or question. Liz says she knows “more than the average GFO member about the history, geography, and people of the state of Hawaii.”

Barbara Jones: Barbara works on the first Monday of each month, which is GFO’s Free Monday. She has been an RA for about seven years, and she especially likes helping people break through their brick walls. She also enjoys introducing patrons to databases other than Ancestry.com. Barbara’s personal areas of interest include French Canada, New England, New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and the West Coast states.



Angie: Angie has been an RA since September 2016 and works on the first Monday morning of each month, welcoming patrons as they come in the door. Because she is relatively new to the GFO, she says she doesn’t feel she’s found where she fits in yet. However, Angie’s general library experience is of great service, as she worked as a clerk at the Mult-

nomah County Library for 37 years. Her passion is mending books and preserving them for future generations. She is a very detail-oriented person, so she loves putting labels on books and making each one look neat. She has experience with some of our online databases because she has worked with them doing her own research. She also knows a lot about the Multnomah County Library’s website and resources.



April Ober: April’s usual shift at the library is on Monday mornings, and she has volunteered in that capacity for about three and a half years. April commented, “I like to solve puzzles—jigsaw, Sudoku, and word puzzles. Genealogy puzzles are more intriguing to me as they involve people and stories. My curiosity is challenged to find answers. I retired from *The Ore-*

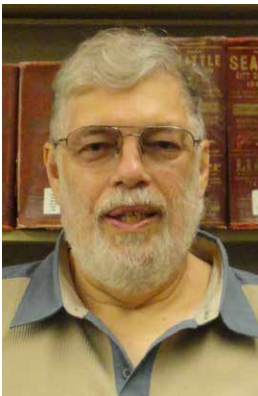
gonian newsroom where I went to mini-classes on

research, and I am pretty good using Google to get answers and at thinking outside the box.” Friendliness and humor are two of her family traits—great assets for welcoming everyone to the GFO.



Kristin Parks: Kristin’s normal shift is Monday mornings, and she also has been an RA for about three and a half years. Kristin has a good working knowledge of the Genealogical Proof Standard—the bases that need to be covered before research can be considered “reasonably exhaustive.” She is very good at helping patrons plan their research strategies, analyzing

the types of records that their ancestors should have generated based upon their unique life events, including when and where they lived. She then enjoys showing people how to go about finding those records both online and in person.



Harold E. Hinds, Jr.: Since he moved to Portland about three years ago and started volunteering with us, Harold can be found at the library on Monday afternoons. He has about 20 years of experience volunteering for other genealogical organizations. Harold shared these thoughts about his greatest strengths, “I have been doing historical research, including

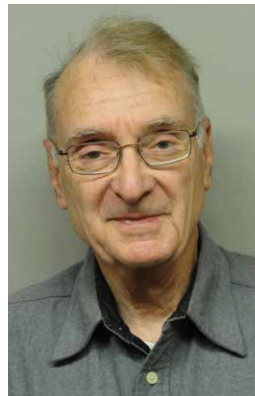
extensive work with archival records, for over 50 years, and more specifically with genealogical records for 20 plus years. I’ve done extensive research in upstate New York, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, the Pacific Northwest, Wisconsin, and French Canada for the 26 genealogical volumes I’ve published. My primary areas of genealogical expertise, which include on-site archival research, are the following: New York, Vermont, Minnesota, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Idaho, South Dakota, Alaska, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, Oregon, Washington, the Republic of Ireland, England, and French Canada. I’ve also, generally as part of my preparation for teaching an annual course at the University of Minnesota-Morris on family history and genealogy, done advanced course work in the following: land records, military records, National Archives records, New England, U.S. Mid-West, U.S. Mid-Atlantic, Canada, Scotland, England, Colonial U.S., Migration,

Western U.S., and advanced problem solving.” Although he is not a computer tech, he is also very familiar with Internet research generally, including Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.



Rhonda Stone: Rhonda has been volunteering as an RA for the GFO for about five years. If you ever need someone to greet you with a great big smile, come to the GFO during her regular shift on Tuesday mornings from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Rhonda is a member of the Portland Chapter of the DAR, the National Society Colonial Dames XVII Century, and the

General Society of Mayflower Descendants. Rhonda uses Legacy Family Tree software to organize her family history research and would be happy to answer questions about this tool.



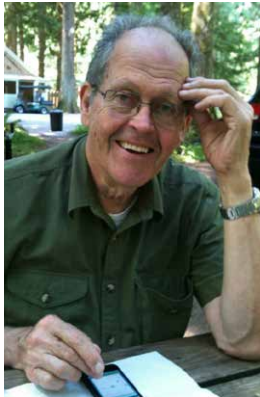
Ridgeway “Dick” Foley: Dick has been a member of the GFO since 1985, volunteering as an RA for the past five years. You can usually find him in the library on the first and third Tuesday mornings of each month. Dick is a fourth-generation Oregonian and is very knowledgeable about local resources. He primarily uses Ancestry.com and census records,

and says he’s learning more skills all the time. He has provided different kinds of assistance to the GFO in the past, including legal services and participating on various committees.



Sharyl Swope: Sharyl has been an RA for almost three years, and you can usually find her at the library on Tuesday afternoons. Her personal research is focused on North Carolina and Missouri as well as Scotland, Germany, and Italy, with some exposure to Scandinavia. She has a lot of experience searching the U.S. Census. Sharyl uses Legacy Family Tree genealogy

software and is most familiar with Ancestry.com, although she can also get people started on FamilySearch, Cyndi’s List, Newspapers.com, and various other sites.



Richard Eckman: Richard has been an RA since 2014 and works on Tuesday afternoons. Richard shared, “My employment prior to retiring was as a full-time supervisor for an army reserve hospital. It has helped me as an RA because I know where to go to access military records, and I understand what I am looking at when a question is asked about a particular document. It has also helped me understand many of the records that are encountered when dealing with genealogy. I like helping people who come into the GFO with little or no information, and they are simply curious about their own individual family history. Most times I have been successful in finding something for them. I find the census to be a very good starting document to help people connect to past generations. I can make most of the technology work, even if it’s being a problem. I don’t quit until several unsuccessful attempts using different approaches.” Richard went on to say that success when helping others with research is having someone say, “I didn’t know that about my grandfather!”



Jane McGarvin: Jane has been an RA since 2013 and usually works on Wednesday mornings. She enjoys working with newbies, trying to suggest ways to solve problems and where to look for answers. Jane is a member of the DAR, and always tries to provide service with a smile. Although she admits to not knowing everything about the library, she enjoys providing tours, and she certainly knows a lot about it. She is also good with Ancestry.com and FamilySearch. She uses Family Tree Maker for her personal research. Jane adds, “Sometimes I do best solving problems by the seat of my pants, asking questions, and ferreting out where to look.”

Tracy L. Buckner: Tracy has been volunteering as an RA for about three years. She works on Wednesday evenings, when the library stays open until 8 p.m. Tracy can help those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing get started on their family histories or with any genealogy help they may need. She is very proficient with the flatbed scanner and she uses Photoshop, FindaGrave, Ancestry.com,

Newspapers.com, Fold3, FamilySearch, and Family Tree Maker for Mac.



Barbara Forster: Barbara has been involved with the GFO just a few months and volunteers most Wednesday afternoons. We’re glad to have her on board! Barbara teaches a “Beginners Class” at the Happy Valley Library for the genealogy club there, and she loves helping newbies get started on their family history search. She also enjoys inspiring people to write their stories. Hers are called “Storybooks,” and you can find a few of them at her website www.atkinsfamily.club. Barbara justifiably prides herself on always providing a smile to patrons and making them feel welcome. She has experience researching in Missouri, Virginia, Connecticut, and many other states. She drove across the United States for six weeks in 2015, stopping in all the places she wanted to conduct research. She says she is good at troubleshooting and finding the answers to puzzles.



Jackie Phillips: Jackie is at the GFO on Thursday mornings and has been an RA for about three and a half years. She has been doing genealogical research for more than 20 years. Her particular interests are Maine, Utah, and Upper Canada between 1818 and 1840. A lot of her work involves Mormon history, as both sides of her and her husband’s families are LDS. She also has several family members who are members of Daughters of Utah pioneers—and although she qualifies, she is not a member of that group. Jackie has ancestors who were in the United States by 1645, who were accused as witches, and who fought in the Revolutionary War. On her Canadian side, she has ancestors who arrived in 1818, some of whom later moved to the United States. She loves working at the GFO and helping patrons achieve their own family history successes. As she says, sometimes the smallest find can be the most satisfying.

Bonnie Randolph: Bonnie (or Bonie) is usually at the GFO on Thursday mornings. She has been a research assistant since about 2010. She enjoys helping people who come

in as well as working on the manuscript collection when she doesn't have patrons to assist. Her own research has focused on Oregon and on the Prussian area of Europe. She says that because she is very visually oriented, she might write down what you tell her so she can picture recommendations for next steps.



Gerry Lenzen: Gerry's regular shift is each Thursday from 1 to 5 p.m. He also works on fifth Sundays when they occur. Gerry has been volunteering with the GFO in multiple capacities since the 1980s. He and his wife, Connie Lenzen, have been researching genealogy together for more than 50 years. Gerry is very knowledgeable about most things in the library and is our local expert on Donation Land Claims.



Joann Taylor: Joann's regular schedule is on Thursday afternoons from 1 to 5 p.m., and she is one of our newest volunteers. Joann says, "I am a relatively new member of the GFO RA staff; however, I have been doing genealogy seriously for 12 years. I have a lot of experience with Irish research, including immigration to the United States, Irish records, and tracing roots back to Ireland. My Irish kin settled in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York, so I have a lot of experience with records from those states. In my own work, as well as for other families, I have encountered a bunch of interesting genealogical puzzles over the years (ask me!). My husband's family has much deeper roots in New England, Canada, and Great Britain, so I have experience with those locations, too. I really enjoy applying research techniques to help people discover their pasts, whether they are new to genealogy or have been at it a while. I have experience with the online research tools we have at the GFO, especially Ancestry.com, American Ancestors, and FamilySearch, as well as many others. For my own family research, I have been a long time user of Family Tree Maker but am in the process of evaluating a new program. I am a chemist/color scientist by profession as well as a member of New England Historic Genealogical Society, Association of Professional Genealogists, and National Genealogical Society, and I obtained a Certifi-

cate in Genealogical Research from Boston University in 2013." We are glad to add Joann's expertise to our remarkable pool of talent.



Nanci Remington: Nanci has volunteered at the GFO for about eight years. Her usual shift at the GFO is on Fridays. In her own words: "I really enjoy working with patrons—both beginners and those who are struggling with a brick wall. My greatest strength is doing Internet research on Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, and other sites, such as those offering newspapers or local resources. I have done a lot of research in Ohio, Michigan, New York, and Germany. I use Legacy Family Tree software and can help others with it." Nanci also assists in other ways throughout the library—as many of our volunteers do—including orchestrating GFO seminars, ongoing organization of the manuscript collection, and providing a wealth of articles to *The Bulletin*.



Joan Galles: Joan has been volunteering at the GFO for about five years, and you can usually find her in the library on Fridays. Joan was a history major and taught in the Portland Public Schools. She is knowledgeable about Finland and some Finnish databases, and is also familiar with Italian genealogy and databases. She is fond of geography, is good with general genealogy, and loves to indulge the curiosity that rises when presented with a query by a patron.



Doris: Doris usually (but not always) works on Saturdays. She is not sure how long she has been volunteering for the GFO, but we are certain it's been more than five years. When asked her areas of experience, she replied that she has researched in Wales and is familiar with the records there, and she is somewhat familiar with English records. She also does five minute tours of the library. Our president, Laurel Smith, also noted that Doris is the lead on our flat maps cata-

logging effort with Cathy Lauer; when asked her about map expertise, Doris replied, “Well, I can read them. I have a fair idea of what we have in the collection.”



Cathy Lauer: Cathy is one of our star RAs. Her normal days are Saturdays, Sundays, and Monday afternoons. She is a star in part because of how long she has been an RA at the GFO (38 years) and because she also is our volunteer coordinator. She makes out the RA schedule every month and finds new RAs and other volunteers when we need them. I am in

complete awe of her ability to get things done. As for her skills as an RA, she has general knowledge of how to research family history, specializing in preparing application papers for lineage societies. She is a member of the Mayflower, Colonial Dames, and Daughters of the American Revolution societies. She also enjoys working on other people’s family research. Cathy uses Legacy software to record her own research, but also has limited knowledge of Family Tree Maker. Cathy says that most of her time at the library is spent with cataloging and scanning book covers or working on other organizational projects. For instance, she has also organized our entire collection of microfiche and all the microfilm land records.

Debbie: Debbie assists at the GFO on the first Sunday of every month (and sometimes on the first Monday), and has done so for more than 10 years. Debbie enjoys assisting genealogy newbies and providing tips for finding birth parents.



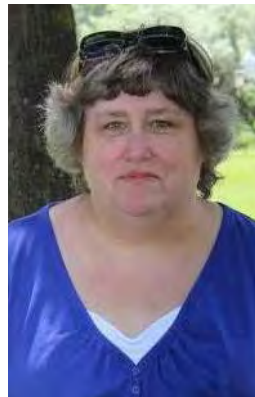
Jeannette Hopkins: Jeanette’s usual shift is on the first Sunday of every month. She has been volunteering for the GFO for about 14 years in a variety of roles. With regard to helping patrons as an RA, she says, “I have advanced computer skills to assist you in your research in the various databases to which the GFO subscribes. I have researched my German and

Canadian ancestors, so I have experience in those areas as well as land records, probate, and military records.”



LauraDenise White: LauraDenise works most Sundays. She has been volunteering for about three years now. We were thrilled when LauraDenise volunteered, as she has a degree in Archives and Information Management. She is always willing to share computer skills and to teach tips for patrons to more easily save, manipulate, and ensure long term preserva-

tion of the digital copies of their research work. She also works on the GFO’s website, and she assists with our manuscript collection. Oh, she is also the current secretary for the GFO’s board of directors—another volunteer who wears many hats.



Shelley Hoffman: Shelley has been volunteering as an RA for about 15 years, and you can usually find her on the third Sunday of each month. She enjoys helping others with their research and seeing their eyes light up when they discover something they hadn’t previously found. She also enjoys learning the new databases, although it can be hard to keep up

with all the new ones coming out. Shelley is originally from Montana, so she gets excited when she hears of anyone who may be searching for family in that state. She has used Family Tree Maker for years.



I hope you’ve enjoyed this introduction to our RAs. Please give them a thank you for their service the next time you’re at the GFO.