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Della Reagan Fischer 1058E
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Between Two Rivers



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TUCKED AWAY ON A BOOKSHELF

by Mrs. Ellen J. Ballas *ETHS Genealogical Researcher*

Tucked away on shelves in one of our library rooms is quite a collection of books compiled by a very special lady. She made copies available to libraries, historical societies, lineage organizations and private individuals all across the nation, over a number of years. Her name was Della Reagan Fischer (Mrs. Frank C.) who became well known for her work far & wide, by providing the means for those men and women who longed to research their families way before it became as popular as it is today. Della was born on June 13, 1904 in East Huntingdon Township, Westmoreland county, PA. She resided on Summit Street in White Oak Borough when she died on November 19, 1980 at the age of 76 years.

The Elizabeth Twp. Historical Society has been the official repository for her original stencils, other work and all the

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personal materials involved, and holds the rights for any reproduction or sale of same through a sequence of events not herein mentioned. I believe it is only proper that we give some background about the person who made it possible for our shelves to contain such a fine volume of research materials of which we've become guardian.

Della's interest in genealogical research began with her own family research. This included being a descendant of eight Revolutionary War pioneers. Membership was held in the Queen Alliquippa Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, in which she once held the office of Chapter Regent and Registrar. She was later contacted to help with the organization of the David McKee Chapter, of the Pennsylvania State Society of the National Society Daughters of the American Colonists and became a Charter Member and Chapter Registrar. She held the latter position, except for the 3 year term she served as the Regent of the Chapter, until her demise. She also was a member of the PA Huguenot Society. Thus began her avid interest in finding hard to get records and have them available for easy research. She was named an honorary life member of the Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society because of her pioneering research and publication of genealogical records.



dirty stone needed cleaned or turned over if it had fallen down and didn't weigh too much.

Her personal efforts include census work for the 1810 census of Fayette and Westmoreland counties and the 1850 for Westmoreland county. The 1850 census for Fayette county was copied from the microfilm by Jean White Cox & compiled by Della as a joint venture. The 1850 census for Washington county was actually copied from the microfilm by Matthew C. Henderson. Mr. Henderson was so grateful to her for providing him with so much information to help in his own genealogy that he wanted to do something to help in return. I watched him spend many days in The Carnegie in Oakland, Pittsburgh meticulously hand copying the micro-filmed data while I was in there working on genealogy research. We would stop long enough to have a quick lunch break together now and then. He turned all over to her for publication and asked that no credit be given to him. It was his personal contribution. Della also compiled the 1880 census for Westmoreland county.

Della abstracted births and deaths from a number of Westmoreland county newspapers, including a German newspaper, to publish in an *easy to read* alphabetical listing. Many days were spent in the Westmoreland County Courthouse in order to abstract early wills and administration of estates. These cover Will Books 1 and 2.

It was she who re-compiled an easy to use index for *Ellis History of Fayette County*. She also compiled quite a variety of cemetery inscriptions which she'd gathered over a number of years for Fayette County. Although she did not compile much for Allegheny County there are a few very local cemetery and church records for those bordering Westmoreland county. She also put together a History of Philip Reagan, an early ancestor of hers who was involved in the Whiskey Insurrection and she is responsible for the marking of his grave and the placement of a Daughters of the American Colonists historical marker placed across the road from the church and cemetery where both Philip Reagan and Della now lay in rest.

Della and Frank had no children but the legacy she left in her compiled records for those she came in contact with and those she will never know have long outlived her and will for many, many years to come. We are proud to be the repository for her legacy and hope many of you will find it useful in the future. To sum it up I'll use the words I've heard many times in the last 30 odd years - *Bless You Della Fischer!*

She would contact early churches that interested her and ask to copy all their early records for birth, baptism, confirmation, marriage, death, burial, and communicants. Once in a while she was able to take the books to photocopy so she could work from them at home but this was a costly procedure. Hours and hours were spent to copy the material on to stencils and run off copies for distribution. Most of her work was done for Westmoreland county and in the Lutheran and Reformed Faiths, but there are a few others included such as the Methodist and Presbyterian Faiths.. In 1976 I obtained photocopies of some church records of Somerset county and Della re-compiled those for easy use also. In addition she also did some other Somerset church records. Many a day and night she would have her apron on while she ran off the stencils. I can still see her ink smudged face when she'd answer the door for me to come in and go over some of the new things she had and thought I'd like to take a look at without delay.

A trip to a cemetery entailed obtaining copied records in their offices on rare occasions but mostly records were gleaned by trudging from stone to stone to take off the difficult to read transcriptions. Many times the stones were in weeds, hills had to be climbed and other difficulties were encountered. Her husband, Frank, was the official driver & companion during these jaunts. Sometimes, if there was a small stream or lake nearby Frank would get to spend a little time fishing on those excursions and they would stop to enjoy a home packed picnic lunch. Frank also came in handy to have around when a