

Genealogical Society publishes old records

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ITEM Family Editor

If you have an ancestor who was married in Walker County around the time of the Civil War and would like to know the exact date of the marriage, who performed the marriage and even where the ceremony took place, the Walker County Genealogical Society has just published a book that will help you.

A copy of the paper-bound book, "Marriage Records of Walker County, 1846-1880", which was printed by Sam Houston State University in February, was presented to the

Huntsville Public Library Wednesday morning by several members of the genealogical society. The book, which is the society's first publication will be added to the collection of over 600 books and microfilm the Walker County Genealogical Society currently maintains at the library.

The book's cover, which "suggests Walker County" because of the pine tree motif employed, was designed by Juanita Lynch according to genealogical society member Gwen Conner.

The book was financed through dues paid by the organization's members and from memorials made to the library. Proceeds from the sale of the 200 copies of the book will be used for Walker County Genealogical Society projects, according to member Mary E. Vick Rainey.

The book, which is divided into six time slots, details the marriages that took place in Walker County as abstracted (copied) from handwritten records the county has maintained over the years. Also included in the book are indexes of the grooms and brides that will aid researchers in pinpointing subjects.

While most of the material for the book was gathered in late 1977, the book's first three sections were compiled previously by Willie Powell Costilow, Estella Burns Stewart, Lucy Bruce Stewart and W.R. (Bill) McClintock.

Costilow and Stewart also assisted in compiling material for other sections of the book. Mary E. Vick Rainey, Johnnie Jo Sowell Dickenson, Vivian Adams Cowart, and Eva Mae Halbert Hackney copied records for the publication, too.

Rainey also typed the publication, wrote the book's forward and compiled the comprehensive bride's index.

Rainey said the genealogical society decided to publish the marriage records because such records are of great interest to genealogical researchers. The records are one of the necessary "proofs" required in tracing family lineage. The other vital proofs are birth and death records.

"In tracing lineage, you must have proof of your information. You have to have sources, just like you do in a research paper," Rainey said.

Rainey said the compilers of the book attempted to copy the handwritten and yellowed marriage records as they found them in the Walker County courthouse, changing the record only when the compiler made a change based on present-day spelling or personal knowledge of an error.

The book's forward states that marriages of Blacks are included in the courthouse records for November 1874 to December 1880, but those records were not copied for publication in the book.

Rainey said the records of black marriages were not included because, "When the Society began this project many years back that information wasn't included in their compilations. We just continued the format they had originally set.

"If we find there is interest in those records, someday maybe we can go back and abstract what's there," Rainey added.

Some of the entries in the marriage record provided more information than just names, dates and who performed the marriage ceremony, allowing the compilers a glimpse into

history. Some of the entries include the name of the person who gave consent for the marriage and some told whose residence the bride and groom were married in.

Mrs. T.E. Humphrey, who hosted the first meeting of the Walker County Genealogical Society in her home in 1965, pointed out the group was interested in genealogy long before the "Roots" phenomenon.

Humphrey said people have become more interested in genealogy and their family lines as a result of the phenomenon, but the people don't realize how much time and effort is involved in the process.

"People think you can go to the library and find out who all your ancestors are in a matter of minutes. I have been working on my family for 20 years and I'm not through yet," Humphrey said.

Mrs. Johnnie Dickinson said a person has to be a "detective, a historian and a good geographer" to trace family lines.

Humphrey said the membership of the Walker County Genealogical Society has grown in the last couple of years. The group currently has 33 members, who meet on the third Saturday of each month, except during July and August.

The purposes of the organization are to further the knowledge of genealogy; to exchange literature on genealogy; to aid others who are tracing their family lines and to exchange knowledge gained from experience in genealogical research, according to the forward of "Marriage Records of Walker County, 1846-1880".