

New York State Council of Genealogical Organizations (NYSCOGO)

By Marian S. Henry

The New York State Council of Genealogical Organizations (NYSCOGO) is an umbrella organization for genealogical groups in New York State that may be of some assistance to genealogists doing research in the state. NYSCOGO provides a statewide voice for genealogical interests, a means of communication among researchers, education via workshops and seminars, and helpful publications. NYSCOGO was founded in 1991 to accomplish the following stated goals¹:

- To promote interest in genealogy
- To increase communication among researchers and genealogists
- To provide a forum for local and statewide discussion of the care, use, preservation, and accessibility of records related to genealogy
- To utilize various educational means to further knowledge regarding genealogy

The council wishes to improve accessibility of state records related to genealogy. In furtherance of this aim, a NYSCOGO representative sits on the advisory board of the State Archives and Records Administration (SARA). Unlike the situation in the various New England states, vital records in New York State are not readily available. Until recently, the index to the state's vital records was only available to the public at two locations — the New York State Archives in Albany and the National Archives Northeast Region in New York City. Due in part to the advocacy of this board, a copy of the index to the state's vital records has recently been added to the public library in Rochester as well.² This is a concrete example of how a small organization can help make a big difference. As this index becomes available at more sites, researchers will be able to confirm quickly that an event has been recorded. Sometimes that is all that is needed and months of waiting can be eliminated.

The council has a publications committee chaired by Ruth Metzler. This committee aims to produce publications that link researchers with sources. They try not to compete with or rework existing guides, but instead choose an area in which the guide is missing. The data collection and writing are done entirely by NYSCOGO members. In 1996, NYSCOGO published its *Guide to Naturalization Records of New York State*. This forty-four-page finding aid contains a listing of sites within the state that hold naturalization records. Listings are arranged by county, beginning with the year 1790, and a description of the holdings of each site is included. The publication is available through member organizations as well as from NYSCOGO itself. One may obtain a copy by sending a check for \$10, plus \$3 for shipping and handling, to NYSCOGO, at the address listed below.

A guide to Native American records is currently in preparation. Similar to the previous publication, it will describe available sources of Native American data of use to genealogists. It will cover all sixty-two counties including New York City. Work on this publication contains the added twist that tribal reservations usually have their own historians. Sensitive to this, NYSCOGO is considering limiting their guide to sources outside of the reservation and providing contact information for reservation officials for further details.

The council's quarterly member newsletter, *The Lifeline*, contains information about upcoming events and local society programs, and includes a calendar of events submitted by member organizations. The calendar also includes notices of meetings and conferences for larger organizations, such as the Federation of Genealogical Societies and the National Genealogical Society. In addition, *The Lifeline* publishes other items of news from member organizations such as: the debut of the Niagara County Genealogical Society website; a project by the Jefferson County Genealogical Society to inventory holdings of libraries, museums, etc. in their county; a project by the Western New York Genealogical Society to copy nineteenth-century records in their eight-county region; and the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the Northeastern New York Genealogical Society.

The Lifeline also publishes original articles of general interest to genealogists. The winter issue of 2000-1 (Vol. 8, No.

32) contains an article by newsletter editor Joyce H. Cook titled “State Archives’ New Website an Award-Winner!” In this article we learn that the New York State Archives’ website <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/> had received an Ancestry Family History Favorite Award from *Ancestry.com* . Details about the content of the website and instruction on how to navigate through it are clearly discussed. The summer 2001 issue (Vol. 9, No. 2) leads with an article by June Partridge Zintz, the council’s treasurer, titled “New Equipment in the FHL in Salt Lake City.” In this article members are informed, among other changes, of a new capability at the Family History Library – the ability to enhance microfilmed images and transfer the image onto one’s own CD-ROM for use at home.

NYSCOGO has been building a speakers’ bureau of individuals willing to give presentations in their area of expertise. The list of speakers and topics is a resource available to member organizations for use in planning their individual meetings. NYSCOGO holds two meetings each year, one in the spring and another in the fall. These daylong meetings are open to the public. The location and topics vary but the site is usually at or close to an archive or library. Members can combine a personal research trip with the meeting. Occasionally the meetings are held in conjunction with other Society meetings. The spring meeting in May 2001 was held in conjunction with a meeting of the New York chapter of Palatines to America held in Middleburgh, about thirty-five miles southwest of Albany. The research sites for this meeting were the Schoharie County Historical Society and the Middleburgh Library. The fall meeting in October 2001 was part of a two-day conference in Syracuse, marking the fortieth anniversary of the Central New York Genealogical Society. This larger event included exhibits and vendors, individual consultations with Diane Snyder Ptak (of Lineages Unlimited, a family history research business), and several presentations, including one by John Austin (FAGS, past editor of the *Register*).

The 2002 fall meeting was held September 28 at the Oneida County Historical Society in Utica, N.Y. In addition to committee and business meetings, the featured speaker was Frank Tomaino, author of *History: Just for the Fun of It*, and co-author of *Mom and Pop Grocery Stores of Oneida County* . His talk was titled “Early Oneida County History, Especially Some of Its Most Famous Sons & Daughters.”

NYSCOGO members include genealogical societies, historical societies, archives, family lineage groups, and libraries, as well as interested individuals. Ten years after it was founded NYSCOGO membership was evenly split between individual members and organizational members – over thirty of each. Organizations designate two members to act as delegates to attend meetings and to transmit NYSCOGO information to their societies. Dues are \$10 for individuals and \$25 for organizations. NYSCOGO can be reached at PO Box 2593, Syracuse, NY, 13220-2593.

1. Presented verbatim from the membership brochure.

2. This site was the subject of a [previous article](#) in this series. The public library in Syracuse also recently obtained a copy of the VR index.