

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Episode 6: "A How-to Guide to Genealogy"

Guest: Bill Eddleman

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. The end of the year is upon us, and it is once again time to load up the car and head out to various parties and events to mark the season. And yet, between watching sports on TV, passing the plate for one more helping of your favorite dish, and awkwardly trying to avoid uncomfortable small talk, don't let the time pass without utilizing this moment with loved ones to finally record the information on the family tree that you promised yourself you would do years ago. Now, I know you are thinking, "But where do I begin?" Well, turn off the TV, find a comfy spot to sit, maybe grab one more piece of pie, and join us for a "how-to" guide to genealogy. Today, we are speaking with Bill Eddleman. He earned a PhD in Biology from Oklahoma State University, and spent over two decades at Southeast Missouri State University as a professor and provost before retiring in 2016. He is the Associate Director of the State Historical Society of Missouri's Cape Girardeau Research Center, and presently serves as the President of the Missouri State Genealogical Association. Thanks for being here with us, Bill.

BILL EDDLEMAN: Well, thank you for having me.

SEAN ROST: Since you are currently the president of the Missouri State Genealogical Association, could you tell us a little bit about that organization.

BILL EDDLEMAN: We call it MOSGA. The Missouri State Genealogical Association. Its mission statement is to enhance the knowledge of its members, and the public, and the study of family history. Also, genealogical records and principles of sound genealogical research. So, some of the things we do—we have kind of a speakers' bureau and researchers' list that's on our website. We host an annual conference where we try to get, usually, a nation-wide, nationally-known speaker to supplement local speakers on localized topics. We publish a newsletter four times a year and a journal sent to members. We also have something called the First Families Project. The First Families Project—there's several different levels, depending on when you can

document an ancestor in Missouri. You have to submit materials on that ancestor. We evaluate the materials to make sure that its sound genealogical research. If it passes muster, you get a certificate documenting that. So, the different levels of that are if you can document someone who was here before statehood—tenth of August 1821. Then, if you can document someone who was here before the Civil War, which is called the Pioneer Certificates. And then, the Civil War Service Certificates, you have to document Civil War service by your ancestor. We also try to actively solicit authors donating their works so that we can review them in our journal, and then we also have them send a copy to the library out at the Midwest Genealogy Center, the Mid-Continent Public Library in Kansas City—it's actually Independence. We also recognize good genealogy and good volunteering with an awards program. We have an Award of Merit for people who do genealogy and volunteer in genealogical societies. We also have a Certificate of Appreciation to people who are not genealogists but help. People like librarians, for example. And the president also gives out an award usually to one of the board members or someone else who has performed substantial service to the group. People may join MOSGA as an individual or they may join as a society. So, we have a lot of the little local genealogical societies around the state that are members. And one of the things that I think a lot of the board members [and] that I personally think would be a good idea over the next couple of years while I'm president is to serve as more of a resource, an umbrella organization, for the local genealogical societies. Genealogical societies are struggling right now because a lot of people think, "Well, it's all online." It's not. To get the good stuff, you sometimes have to go offline. So that's in a nutshell something about MOSGA.

SEAN ROST: What got you first interested in genealogy?

BILL EDDLEMAN: Well, I can remember talking with my aunt and my maternal grandmother a lot about the family when I was a kid. On my dad's side of the family, I had an uncle who was interested and did some work in the 1970s and then put together a little book in 1981. He sent me all his files when he finally had to break up housekeeping and go into a nursing home. And so, that really got me started.

SEAN ROST: Why do you think that genealogy is so important?

BILL EDDLEMAN: Well, we could look at that from a couple different perspectives. One is the medical perspective. If you want to get ahead of certain genetic diseases, if you know they run in your family, that's a good thing. Most people I know aren't interested in it for that. Mainly, I'm interested in it, and a lot of other people are interested in it, just to know how our individual history fit in with the history of the country. Since I've done detailed genealogical research, I've found Revolutionary War ancestors. I've found people who were early pioneers in certain areas of the country. I have one ancestor that rode escort for Kit Carson for a brief time during the Mexican War. Multiple Civil War ancestors. It's not that I think that my ancestors couldn't get along with anyone, but most of them would have fought in a war just because of the timing. Right now, we're heading in to the Missouri bicentennial and it's interesting to see how a lot of my ancestors fit into that picture too. What they were doing and where they were 200 years ago. So, I've always been interested in history and it makes history more interesting when it's people that I descended from.

SEAN ROST: Now, for someone who is new genealogy, what are some things they can think about to get started with?

BILL EDDLEMAN: The first thing you do is put together your own story. Look around the house. Where are the documents that relate to you? Your birth certificate. Your marriage certificate. Your children's birth certificates. All those things that can document your story. And then start looking to see if you have any of that for your parents and grandparents. One of the key rules of genealogy is always start in the present and work your way backward. People that think they have an illustrious ancestor and try to work forward are usually going to bias their results, but also, they may be on the wrong track. An example is people—occasionally you'll get somebody that says, "I'm descended from George Washington." Which is a miracle because he didn't have any children of his own. You find that a lot, too. Just because your last name matches up with some illustrious ancestor potentially doesn't mean they're really your ancestor. So, get started locally, and then branch out. Don't run fifteen generations at a time. Go step-by-step one generation at a time. Gather the documentation so it's better genealogy.

SEAN ROST: Now, if someone were to go to a local library, historical society, or even one of the [State] Historical Society's branches here throughout Missouri, how should they prepare really before they even step through the door at that institution to do genealogical research?

BILL EDDLEMAN: Put together everything you've got on the ancestor you are going to focus on. When I go to a library, I tend to only focus on small groups of ancestors or maybe just one ancestor, particularly if it's a local situation and you only had one ancestor there. Put together everything you've got on them. Identify where the gaps are. What do you not know about them? Focus on those resources. Otherwise, you're going to walk in the door of a library or an archives and say, "Wow, where do I start?" Now that there are a lot of online finding aids and catalogs, look through those. Try to find what you think you're going to use in advance. That will save you a lot of time.

SEAN ROST: Now, there's several holidays coming up here at the end of the year, how can people use this time with their family—a time that's notorious—kind of in-fighting and politics and religion and things like that—how can they use this time to learn more about their family history?

BILL EDDLEMAN: I'd say if you're going to sit down with relatives, gather the stories. That's what makes it real. That's what makes it interesting. Have some way of recording older relatives. A cell phone will do that if you've got a memo recorder. I know I sat down before my father passed away—he had dictated his autobiography on cassette tapes and then we transcribed those—my sister did. I kind of worked them into a book. But, when he did that, I saw gaps. So, I sat down with him, with a digital recorder, already had my questions focused, and talked with him about that. And I'm glad I did because six months later he passed away. So, would have missed that otherwise.

SEAN ROST: For the more seasoned genealogist—someone whose perhaps been doing this for a couple of years—what are some tips that they can do to build on [to] their family collections?

BILL EDDLEMAN: What typically happens with genealogists after they've been in this a few years is they've gathered a lot of information. They may not have synthesized that information and organized that information. So, the main tip I could offer people at that stage is get organization going if you haven't already. It's hard to identify gaps and the sort of information you need to research if you haven't done that. I know my uncle struggled with that. I, of course, have his notes and all of his information. A lot of times I was finding three and four copies of the same pages out of a book that he had copied over several years because he hadn't done that. He hadn't known what he'd done before. So, many people use charts to do that. There are certain types of records that you always use. If you haven't hit some of those record sets, that's where to focus. I know a couple of examples. One is land records. I use land records a lot. Many people are scared of land records because it requires a little bit of knowledge of how land descriptions work. They will steer around that. Learn about the records and use the records. So, that's the next step from a beginning genealogist is really to learn more about the records and then what they mean.

SEAN ROST: Before we return to our conversation, let's take a step back in time with Bob Priddy to an event from this week in history in a "Missouri Minute."

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute" about a Missouri school teacher from Steelville who at age nineteen married a coarse miner old enough to be her father, but when he died, they were wealthy. He was a U.S. Senator, and she was on her way to becoming one of the most unusual women in national history. Phoebe Apperson Hearst, born December 3, 1842, would live to give \$21 million dollars to educational and philanthropic causes, establish schools, and help found what is now the PTA. Her son would live to be ninety, but would never, some say, be more than a spoiled, rich little boy. George Hearst took Phoebe to San Francisco to live their lives of wealth, much of it drawn from the ownership of the Anaconda Copper Company. Son William Randolph Hearst was kicked out of Harvard and went into newspapering. When his children went on to visit grandma, they had a two-story playhouse so big they could ride their bicycles in it and an upstairs with thirteen rooms. She was one of the founders of the National Congress of Mothers which later became the National Parent-Teacher Association. She was a leading suffragist who died in 1919 before she could vote. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

SEAN ROST: Now, kind of thinking about digital materials, and really the digital age with computers, how has genealogy, in your opinion, changed over time in this digital age?

BILL EDDLEMAN: You're capable now of making discoveries really many times faster than you would have been in the past. I started out—there were no digital records when I started, which was twenty-five, thirty years ago. It would be sometimes years before I'd make a new discovery because I'd have to get time to get to the right library or the right repository to research the records. Now, I can just get online and I've made multi-generational discoveries without leaving the sofa. Some examples of the big ones. Well, Ancestry has made available a lot of digitized original records. I use those mostly. Most people when they get an Ancestry subscription go to the trees that have been posted on there. A little tip on that. Probably over half of those have major errors. Probably eighty percent of them have major errors. If you just copy

and paste or link to one of those trees, you're inheriting all those errors and just compounding them. Use those things like Ancestry as a route to original records. The other major repository is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints microfilm collection. They've been all over the world microfilming records. A lot of the U.S. records were microfilmed starting in the 1930s. They are moving to digital format for those microfilms. It's free—with caveats. You have to start an account, which is a free account and log-in. But also, when the agreement was made to microfilm the records, certain entities had stipulations on that. One example I can think of is Virginia records are not available from your sofa. You have to go to a family history library, then you can access on the computers there. There are lots of other digital records out there. Lot of other things very much like Ancestry and it's just revolutionized genealogy. I do some paid research for people. Usually, I will say right up front I mostly research Cape Girardeau County because I'm most familiar with those records. My typical "MO" when I do that is I go through what I've got at home and then can access through Ancestry, FamilySearch, and other outlets. And then the very last thing I do is go out and look at original records that aren't microfilmed or digitized at the county archive center. So, it's great. We can do a lot with digital records. But, they don't replace a lot of original records. I was at the Missouri Historical Society [in Saint Louis] looking at tax lists for Cape Girardeau County that don't exist anywhere else. They're not digitized. I had to go there to look at the originals. So, great digital records are wonderful. But, you still have to look at originals oftentimes.

SEAN ROST: Now, over your time not only doing genealogy, but also working for the State Historical Society at the Cape Girardeau Center, what are some favorite stories or memories you have about individual's genealogical research?

BILL EDDLEMAN: Well, one that comes to mind is we were contacted by a descendant of a man who was murdered in Mississippi County—had a lot of questions about what happened, are there newspaper accounts, and so forth. Pretty quickly I was able to find the story behind that. And, as usual, when you find the story behind an event like that, it ends up being interesting. It turned out he was apparently seeing another man's wife, and then the man waited until he arrived at the house, came in, and shot him. And apparently [he] got off. I found information later the murderer never went to prison. He was on the next census. Apparently, they decided that was justifiable homicide. But, I found a lot of other background information about the person's ancestor as well. He worked for a cotton gin so he traveled around many places in the Missouri Bootheel and other states. The other one that comes to mind that's very interesting is the ancestor who supposedly died at age 122. It is on the man's tombstone. It is in his obituary. It is on his death certificate. Finally managed to find the man in the census. He was not in the place that the patron had said he was. He was in an adjacent county. His age was marching along—federal censuses are every ten years—and it was seemingly advancing every ten years until 1900. Then, his age started accelerating rapidly. As near as I could figure, he was age eighty-six when he died. So, again, family stories are wonderful because they flesh out the people. But, a lot of times, don't buy all of it. It may not be true. It may be about another family. It may be because grandma got the story wrong because somebody told it to her wrong, or maybe grandma just got it crossed with another story. So, always check them out.

SEAN ROST: Now, as the associate director of the Cape Girardeau Research Center, could you tell us a little bit about that facility, where it's located at, and some of the collections that you have in-house there?

BILL EDDLEMAN: The Cape Girardeau Research Center is in Pacific Hall which is on the south end of the Southeast Missouri State University campus. We're on the first floor. It started, I believe, in 2013. I'm the second director down there. We have approximately twenty to twenty-five collections, but, I'll put a caveat on that, we have one huge collection. The Oliver Law Firm Collection. The Olivers were in Cape Girardeau County from about 1820 on and became lawyers shortly after the Civil War. The law firm collection covers about 1880 to 1960. Started in 2013 processing it, we're still processing it. We should finish within the next year to year-in-a-half. It is particularly rich in local history, in legal history, because the Olivers, one of the Olivers was head of the Missouri Bar at one time. Also, Rotary history locally, Boy Scout history, and many, many other topics that relate to the region. So, what we've processed so far is in the finding aid on the State Historical Society of Missouri website. Some of the other collections we have. We try to collect within our region which is the southeastern corner of the state from Saint Genevieve County south and then west out to Carter, Wayne, and then up to Saint Francois County. So, most of our collections are from that area. I'd say it's pretty heavy on Cape Girardeau because we can get the word out more easily in Cape Girardeau County. We try to get it out in the other counties, but it's always a challenge. So, a lot of people think, "Well, I can donate my genealogy to the State Historical Society." We are only interested in certain parts of your genealogical collection. If it's what's called secondary information—copies of library books, copies of your notes, your genealogical trees and so forth, we're not really so interested in it. We're more interested in whatever original records are in there or photographs. So, we will take genealogical collections, but they may be heavily selected by the time we're done processing them.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for being on the podcast, Bill.

BILL EDDLEMAN: Well, thank you, Sean. It was a pleasure to do it.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events:

Benton's Perilous Visions is an exhibit of Thomas Hart Benton artwork from World War II that showcases the artists' interpretation of the anxiety, horror, grief, and resolve that permeated American society during the war years. This exhibit will be on display in the Main Gallery of the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center until Spring 2019.

Did you know that Missouri native Marlin Perkins lived a truly wild life? In addition to serving as the director of Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo and later the Saint Louis Zoo, Perkins also hosted two popular television programs—*Zoo Parade* and *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*. On December 6th, the Historical Society's Saint Louis Research Center will host an opening

reception for a new exhibit curated by graduate assistant Miles Jenks entitled *Marlin Perkins: Wild Life*. With over 40 photographs, hand-written documents, and a few surprises pulled from the Saint Louis Research Center's Marlin Perkins Papers, this exhibition explores some of the most legendary, dangerous, funny, and touching moments of Perkins's life and highlights his contributions to wildlife conservation at the zoo, on television, and in the wild.

On February 4th, join the State Historical Society of Missouri's Joan Stack and Faith Ordonio in Room 114A of the University of Missouri's Ellis Library for a curators' presentation of *Exodus: Images of Black Migration in Missouri and Beyond, 1866–1940*. This exhibition explores how thousands of African Americans came to and through Missouri while seeking greater political, economic, and social opportunity. Images from the Historical Society's collections offer insights into the movement of African Americans from their first great exodus out of the South after the Civil War to relocations sparked by violence, repression, natural disasters, and the turmoil of the Great Depression. Viewed together, the artwork, including fine art prints by George Caleb Bingham and Thomas Hart Benton, creates an overall picture of American life in an era of dramatic change. This event is sponsored by the University of Missouri Libraries and the MU Black History Month Committee.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.