

Tracing **PASTS**

Newspapers connect you to family history

By **MARY STAMPS BENNETT**
Bay County Genealogical Society

Before I can start this article, I have to confess that I am a news junkie.

Some of my most fond memories of childhood are of my father, Monroe (Buddy) F. Stamps Jr., reading to me from the newspaper. He was killing

two birds with one stone as they say, because he really wanted to read the newspaper and I really wanted to have his undivided attention. Thus, an enjoyment of reading all newspapers was born. Even though I was a child, he also read me the obituaries. My father is a history buff, and found them full of history and not really morbid. Thus, to this day, I can't complete any newspaper without reading through the obituaries.

Obituaries, birth announcements, engagement and wedding announcements, and simple human-interest stories are full of family information. They cannot be overlooked as good sources for documenting family history. I might

never have known who my great-great-grandparents were had I not had the obituary for my great-grandmother. During my research for them, I found two different families with the same names. Both families lived in the state of Georgia, and some of their children had the same names. Thank goodness, my aunt had given precise information in the obituary about her parents and grandparents. When I read obituaries today, I mourn the fact that some have such little information in them because of the high cost of printing.

The fact that I am a member of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution is the result of a distant relative's insight to report in the local

newspaper, about the news of a Stamps family reunion in 1909. In that article, it was revealed how several of the Stamps relatives were related and gave me additional documentation to back up my primary sources that got me approved in the DAR.

I am very blessed to have relatives from my family and my husband's that kept up with family articles that were published in the local newspapers. I can sit and read about our relatives for hours, because of the insight of those that stashed and kept clippings of family safe.

Panama City is so blessed to have Marlene Womack researching the local history and publishing it in The News Herald. Her column, "Out of the Past,"

is a treasure for those also interested in family history.

I know more about my husband's Bennett family of Bay County because of her articles. She is not alone with her research and writing of local history. Many community newspapers have similar columns that can help document family history. Luckily, my father wrote a similar column for his hometown paper.

Newspapers all over the world are being digitalized and stored on the Internet. There are various search engines, to find digitalized newspapers for free. But, my favorite one to use is a paid-for site, which is www.newspaperarchive.com. I first used this site at the Bay County Library.