



46¢ **FORUM**

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# Society documents Bay County's family tree

I got a real surprise last November when I looked in my email and saw the following message: "Florida State Genealogical Society presented the Bay County Genealogical Society an award tonight, called the Preservation Award. Pam Cooper, president of FSGS, said she went through many, many, Florida genealogy sites, and selected ours, as the best. She showed many Power Point slides of the different pages, indicating all the indexing and information available. Pam then asked BCGS members Suzanne Strickland and Janice Cronan to accept the award."

This award recognizes our website as the best of 67 county genealogical sites in Florida in terms of protecting, preserving, and indexing the county's historical records. That's pretty significant when you consider that

many Florida counties have 10 times the population of our county. It means we are doing our job correctly and better than any other genealogical society in the state.

I think it was selected primarily on the basis of the large number of indexes that we have on the site, including births, marriages, obituaries, cemeteries, funeral homes, voters, taxes, histories, First Families of Bay County, and more. There are more than 112,000 records on that site now, and it continues to grow each year.

Indexing and digitizing has been a pet project of ours for about seven or eight years. In conjunction with our efforts to expand the society and make it more appealing to our community, the web page has been a major factor. We have attempted to identify those areas which appeal most broadly to our membership

and which are also of interest to our board, who collect and compile much of the information. Perhaps to a greater degree than most other Florida societies, most of our members are not from here; they are from other states or counties. Therefore, it was initially a bit tricky to get our members interested in serving this community.

Not all of the databases have been compiled in just the past few years, however. Our cemetery index, portions of our marriage index, obituary indexes, and voters indexes have evolved over the years. Nancy Roberts is an example. In 1992, she spearheaded the collection of more than 22,000 names from 41 cemeteries in Bay County. She was assisted by many BCGS volunteers, including Natalie Thompson, Wallie Waltonen, Barbara Winge, and a

number of others.

Marriage records were collected by Judy Bennett, Dr. Clifford Loper, Walter Sherman, Wallie Waltonen, and Barbara Winge. More recently that index was completed by Sally Rinehart, Jo Hanson, Ruth Preston, Bobbie Tate, Judy Bennett, and Janice Cronan. It now contains all Bay County marriages for 1913 through 1955.

How about you? Was your ancestor settled in Bay County before April 24, 1913? If so, you could be the proud winner of the First Families of Bay County award. Remember, our 100th anniversary is next year. Contact us at [www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~flbcgs](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~flbcgs) for more information.

**WILLIAM J. ZEHNER**

President  
Bay County Genealogical Society  
Lynn Haven