

SOMERSET VITAL RECORDS 2nd Ed. & W.P.A. CEMETERY READINGS - April 2006.

After two years of work, I have completed two more of my Vital Records projects for Somerset Co., PA.

In early 2004 I announced completion of a database on CD-ROM entitled, "Somerset County Pennsylvania Families: Early Vital Records." It contained 20,790 birth records, 7950 marriage records, and 15,300 death records. The data sources were (1) the 44 years of publication of "Laurel Messenger," the journal of the Historical & Genealogical Soc. of Somerset Co.; (2) my readings of the Cramer-King cemetery in New Centerville; (3) Cemetery readings from Harry Speer Rush's book, "Rush & Skinner Families of Lower Turkeyfoot Twp.;" (4) Cemetery readings from the Union Cemetery in Meyersdale Borough; and (5) Data from Dorothy Yoder Coffman's book, "Sanner Baptismal Records." I sent copies to libraries and made a few copies for individuals.

I have now completed what I will call the Second Edition of that Database. To the above sources I have added readings of most of the 500+ cemeteries in Somerset county. Most of the data was extracted from the Internet on-line listings of cemeteries. Most of that Internet data was from the compilation of the 1930s WPA readings as recompiled by Della R. Fischer in 1977. Data from cemeteries missing on the Internet were extracted from original WPA data sheets by myself. Also added was Marriages from Stoystown Reformed Church, and the Birth, Marriage & Death data from the three years of LM published since the First Edition. Any cemeteries missing from this compilation were either missed by the WPA readers [at least 18 small ones], or were started after the WPA compilation [Somerset Memorial Gardens, for example].

The source databases now are at 22,797 births, 8731 marriages, and 50,264 deaths. The deaths database also contains calculated birth years, where ever possible. The original source files are also included in a separate directory, for reference purposes. The Births File is 490 pages, the Marriage File is 195 pages, and the Deaths File is 1150 pages. Each is sorted in multiple ways.

In future I hope to add more birth and marriage data from church records and data from Biographical and Obituary sources to make a Third Edition. That is likely to take another two years work.

The SECOND of my completed projects is a complete recompilation of the W.P.A. cemetery readings from the original worksheets. This was a joint project between myself and the Meyersdale Library who kindly loaned me a copy of the entire set of datasheets. There are 2782 pages in the WPA compilation archived in the Biesecker Public Library in Somerset. As noted above, Della Fischer recompiled the WPA Readings in 1977. However, there are major flaws in her compilation which this new database will remedy. One is that there was no over-all index. A person must look at all 500 cemeteries individually. Another is that many graves are omitted in her compilation. Also, only a few copies were made, and the print quality was poor.

The new compilation has all 39,423 WPA grave records in a single file. It is about 900 pages in size, and is sorted in multiple ways. A notes field gives data on wife/of, husband/of/ son/of, daughter/of, etc., and military service. Bookmarks are used to enable the user to jump to any desired location in the files. Graphic Images of the 2782 original worksheet pages are included for reference. The earliest death is 1779, and the earliest birth is 1700. Most of the readings were

done in the 1920s to 1940. However there are about 1000 deaths recorded between 1940 & 1990. Although the Deaths database on the Early Vital Records CD-ROM contains many of the same death data as the W.P.A. Compilation, they are not equivalent because of some missing graves in the Internet sources, and the notes field does not exist in the Deaths Database. Unlike the Vital Records Database, which will have additional data in future, the W.P.A. CD is final.

As in the past I will donate copies of the CD-ROMs to libraries and will be happy to make copies for individuals for the same copy fee as before. Please contact me for more details.

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