

# Loretto Heritage Center's 1st Family History Day draws crowd

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For many of the people who spoke at last Saturday's Family History Day at the Loretto Heritage Center, history was more than just a story to be told, it was one that needs to be rediscovered.

Attracting over 50 history-minded members of the Washington, Nelson, and Marion County communities by mid-day, many members of the community seemed interested in learning how to do some digging of their own.

"Most of what we have is very Loretto-centric, but then it goes wider than that because there are so many interlocking ties with local families and with the students as well, who would have come from here in this area," said Loretto Heritage Center Director Susanna Pyatt. "We wanted to highlight those resources and then when we talk to other people in the area, there's so much other local history, resources, local genealogy, and family history in particular. Today, we were able to pull everyone together into one space for a day and share that with a broader audience."

Focusing both on the practical side of genealogy research as well as personal stories of people who have spent much of their lives uncovering local history both near and far, the gathered audience heard from several different speakers over the day, including local historians as well as representatives of the Bardstown African American Heritage Museum and The Reckoning Project, which dives into the history of slavery in America.

"I think it's really interesting to see older generations be able to tell their stories," said Marion County High School junior Gracy Mattingly, who attended that event as part of the school's young historians



PHOTOS BY DAVID NERI / The Lebanon Enterprise  
Participants in Saturday's Family History Day at the Loretto Heritage Center break up to discuss their own genealogy efforts and histories. The event drew individuals from Marion, Washington and Nelson counties.

club. "It's interesting to be a part of that Marion County history."

Following a "crash course" on genealogical research to start things off, during the event, the audience heard the stories of members of the community, including local historians Gerald Thompson and Susan Lewis, who spoke both on their journeys in genealogy as well as a bit of what they have learned about research along the way.

For his part, Thompson stated that he got interested in genealogy as a means of connecting to his family's past as he and his wife prepared for their first child, but each time he walked to the Washington County courthouse to look through their records, he found more and more threads to untangle. Nearly 50 years later, by his admission, he still hasn't quite finished with everything.

"Miss Walker, who used to take care of the records in the Washington County loose records room, used to say genealogy is the most sidetracking business and I found that it is," said Thompson. "You meet so many people you read and learn so much."

Speaking on her efforts to reconcile oral history with written records, Lewis highlighted how meticulous one has to be to weed out false dates

and reconcile inconsistent documents. Talking to the audience about a number of her family's stories, from the tale of her grandfather: Frederick William Joy, who decided to give himself a proper name after being told by a teacher that "Baby" was a bit too odd. While it sounded like the kind of tall tale that crops up in many permutations of a family's story, the tale, and a willingness to dig, found the family's 1900 census entry, including Baby Joy, age 3.

"You have connections everywhere and the longer you look, the more you'll find them," said Lewis. "Oral history you've heard about this morning, you need to go to all the older people in your family and take your tablet and talk to them and write down their stories".

According to Loretto Heritage Center Archivist Reba Weatherford, the initial idea for Family History Day was a series of events to attract visitors to the Heritage Center's genealogy exhibit, which chronicles the history of the Sisters of Loretto connected to the Kentucky Holy Land, especially Marion County, and their educational impacts across the world, which will be in place until December.

"We were trying to figure out how to get people to come into the museum



Marion County juniors Gracy Mattingly and Emily Mattingly talk with members of the community who attended Saturday's event. Both students are part of the Marion County Young Historians Club.

and look at our genealogy exhibit," said Weatherford. "I've always been interested in trying to get people interested in genealogy so I thought: 'Why don't we do a series of genealogy programs that will get people here to look at our exhibit?' Then we decided we should just do it all in one day. We weren't sure how many people would come and we were surprised to see as many people as we saw today."

While the archives are primarily focused on the sisters themselves, Weatherford noted that the order's impact on the Kentucky Holy Land, particularly in the realm of education, means that those stories cross in many interesting ways with the history of local communities.

"It's important to just remind people that we're here," said Weatherford. "I don't think that a lot of people even know that this space exists and I don't think that they know that we're open to researchers. If you're interested in genealogy if you're interested in family history or you just want to know more about this area this is a good resource for people to come schedule an appointment and look through our materials."

local and family histories important, the director stated that that kind of personalized, living, and messy history can provide a good sense of perspective.

"It helps tell you where you came from, in a lot of ways," said Pyatt. "Family history is a part of who individuals are, so being able to know and uncover more of that history is just really interesting. In a lot of cases, you know more about your family, but genealogy also just helps you understand where you and your family came from."

Those interested in scheduling an appointment or visit can contact the Loretto Heritage Center at lorarchives@lorettocommunity.org or by phone at 270 431-0096. More information can also be found on the organization's website <https://www.loretto-community.org/>

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