

MORRIS AREA GENEALOGY SOCIETY
General Meeting - March 13, 2001

The meeting was called to order by MAGS President Carol McCloud.

Treasurer Janet Meissner reported a balance of \$1,886.91.

Trustee Regina Springer gave a preliminary report from the Nominating Committee. Most current MAGS officers have agreed to serve another term. The nominations will be presented to the membership at the April meeting at which time they will be voted on.

Several announcements were made including that the LDS Family History Center in Ledgewood is now open, that Ancestry.com now claims to reach over one billion records (which does not mean they will have the one record you need), and that MAGS now has a group email at MorrisAreaGenSoc@yahoogroups.com.

Leroy May introduced his guest Elizabeth Siecke. She is a reference librarian at the Bernard's Township Library in Basking Ridge and is the coordinator for that library's Family History Interest Group (FHIG). She was at the MAGS meeting to learn about our programs and to seek potential speakers for FHIG meetings.

Carol continues to collect member email addresses in order to improve communication with members. Consideration is being given to putting the membership list online.

Carol then introduced Denis Sullivan and his wife Joan who presented the evening's program titled *The Tilley Smith Murder Trial*.

He began by describing how events, even photographs, may be portrayed differently by various observers, e.g. the case of Elian Gonzalez, and how difficult it is to determine which version is the truth. In fact there may be multiple "truths". He noted that putting a spin on news was not a new behavior by the media as would be illustrated by the New York newspapers' treatment of the murder of Tilley Smith.

Denis's story really began when he grew up near the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn which he liked to explore. After moving to Hackettstown, NJ he explored local cemeteries and came upon an impressive monument to a Matilda Smith. The inscription read that "She Died In Defense Of Her Honor."

What was the story behind this monument? Denis was hooked and began a search that uncovered the story of an 1886 murder, a media driven case and a trial that convicted an apparently innocent man James Titus. Titus was sentenced to death and was within days of hanging but then amazingly was offered a plea bargain which saved his life but imposed a life sentence. Seventeen years later he was paroled and faded into obscurity.

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Denis Sullivan has pursued the story of the Tilley Smith Murder with great tenacity and resolve. He overcame such problems as official statements that there was no trial court record and went on to find it among the appeal court records.

In fact, he found so much information that he has written a book titled *In Defense of Her Honor*, copies of which were available after the meeting.

The meeting adjourned after the program.

Leroy M. May
Recording Secretary