



# Indian River Genealogical Society

Est. 1983

## Excellence in Education Award to Diane Macgowan



Genealogy Librarian Michelle Wagner, Diane Macgowan,  
IRGS President Colleen Butler

Diane Macgowan has been an active and dedicated member of IRGS since she and her husband joined in 1998.

Over the years, she has led the Swedish GIG, volunteered in the genealogy library, chaired the Education Committee, and generously shared her expertise as an educator by teaching Beginner Genealogy classes for many years.

Although Diane is now retiring, she plans to remain involved with IRGS.

In gratitude for her outstanding dedication and service, we are honored to present her with the Excellence in Education Award.

### In this newsletter:

Who Are the Melungeons? Part 2 -	2-3
GIG News	4
Up the Stairs at the Library	5
Local History	6-7
Photos/Submission	7
Upcoming Events	8
Message from the President	9
Membership renewal time	10
One Last Thing	11

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## *Who Are the Melungeons? - Part 2*

**Part 1 appeared in our Spring 2025 Newsletter by Paula Holmes**

In the Spring issue of the IRGS newsletter, the question “Who are the Melungeons?” was answered. To recap, they were originally thought to be a separate race of people living primarily in the area where Kentucky and Tennessee meet, mostly isolated and self-sufficient in a hilly and mountainous land. They were an endogamous population that suffered from bigotry by the outside world, primarily because they were “different” in appearance and in speech. Many of the Melungeons did leave their Appalachian homes and moved west in the late 1700s-early 1800s to establish farms, and north in the early 1900s to find jobs, especially to Detroit to work in the infant auto industry and to the Pittsburgh area to work in steel mills. With the advent of DNA testing and research into the Melungeon population in the 1990s, it was discovered that the Melungeons are not a separate race, but tri-racial — European, native American and African. Some also have Jewish Sephardic DNA included in the mix. The Melungeons are descendants of some of the earliest arrivals to America. I have Melungeon ancestors on my maternal side, and have been able to identify the source for one of what I believe to be three Melungeon lines. This is the story of that line, which is the same ancestral line as Johnny Depp, one of my Melungeon cousins.

Before moving to Vero Beach, I lived in Lexington, Kentucky, where I worked two or three days a week in a gallery. One day a young man came into the gallery and asked if I would help him choose a gift for his fiancé, which I was happy to do. He handed me his credit card and when I looked at it I said, “You are a Grinstead? Where are you from?” He said that he had just moved to Lexington so they could get married, but that he was from Bowling Green, Kentucky. I threw my arms around him and said, “Wade Grinstead, you are my cousin!” This was quite astonishing to both of us -- I am more than 40 years older than Wade and Caucasian. Wade is African-American. He was confused. I asked him if he knew his family history, and his reply was a big NO, that the only thing he knew was that Johnny Depp was his cousin. “YES, Johnny Depp is your cousin! And my cousin too! Come sit down and I will tell you a good and true story that I think you will love.”

Around 1630, a child named Elizabeth Keye was born to wealthy Virginia plantation owner Thomas Keye and one of his slaves, thought to be named Martha, who was one of the first slaves to be brought to America from Africa. At that time, mixed race children took on a modified version of the father’s legal status. Elizabeth was not exactly free nor was she a slave, but an indentured person who would be free when she turned 15. Thomas had Elizabeth baptized in the American branch of the Church of England and in the event of his death, established a legal guardianship for her with Henry Higginson, a member of the Virginia Council of State and Elizabeth’s godfather. When Elizabeth was six, her father planned a return trip to England and bound her over to Higginson with two stipulations: (1) that Elizabeth would be legally free at 15, and (2) if Higginson returned to England that he would take Elizabeth with him. Thomas Keye died in Virginia before he could make his voyage to England, and then Higginson died. Elizabeth passed into the custody of Col. John Mottrom, a Northumberland County, Virginia, justice of the peace. Mottrom did not honor the law of freeing Elizabeth when she turned 15. He died in 1655, Elizabeth was 25 years old, and had been bound for 10 years longer than she should have been.

Continued on next page

In 1650, Col. Mottrom paid the passage to Virginia for a young lawyer, William Grinstead, who arrived from East Grinstead, Sussex, England. This meant that Grinstead was indentured for six years to Mottrom in order to “pay back” the cost of transport. Grinstead and Elizabeth Key, both of whom lived and worked at Mottrom’s plantation (Coan Hall), fell in love, had two children, but could not marry because they were still bound. Elizabeth decided, with William’s help, to sue for her freedom. Her defense in the suit was based on the fact that she had been baptized a Christian and that her status of freedom was inherited from her father. Elizabeth’s lawsuit was successful. When William’s indenture was completed in 1656, they married. This was not the end of the story.

It was not uncommon for white plantation owners to father illegitimate children with their female slaves. As a result of Elizabeth Key’s lawsuit, the Virginia House of Burgesses passed a law in December 1662 that changed the legal status of children to the status of the mother rather than the father. From that point in time until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, all children born of slaves were also slaves. The effect of this was beneficial to slave owners who no longer had to acknowledge the children, were free to use them as lifetime labor, or could sell them, thus closing any opening to freedom.

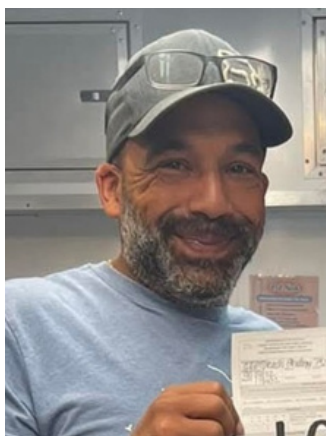
Like so many others who migrated from the area where Melungeons lived, so too did the descendants of Elizabeth Key and William Grinstead. They left Virginia after the Revolutionary War and settled in Barren and Warren Counties of Kentucky, where many still live. We three cousins, all natives of Kentucky, have ancestors we can be proud to share.

Elizabeth Key Grinstead was a strong and brave woman who successfully took on the entire House of Burgesses. She was my 9<sup>th</sup> great-grandmother, Wade Grinstead’s 8<sup>th</sup> great-grandmother, and Johnny Depp’s 8<sup>th</sup> great-grandmother. And this is the good and true story that I told to Wade Grinstead on that day in a Lexington gallery.

Three cousins:



**Johnny Depp**



**Wade Grinstead**



**Paula Holmes**  
**IRGS Member since**  
**2018**

# GIG News

OUR GENEALOGY INTEREST GROUPS MEET MONTHLY.

## DNA GIG



Janet Hunter, GIG Leader  
meets the third Thursday, 2-3:30 p.m. via Zoom

The DNA GIG aims to provide a comfortable place to learn ways to use DNA testing as a tool to advance genealogical research. All skill levels are welcome to participate and to bring their questions. Those new to DNA can benefit from a number of tutorials in our Members Only area. Discussion topics are based on member interest. If you are considering adding DNA to your genealogy toolbox or have already tested, consider joining the GIG!

## Irish GIG



Colleen Butler, GIG Leader  
meets the first Tuesday, 2-4 p.m. at the library

Each month the GIG leader will plan a program or we will research something of interest in Ireland and Northern Ireland. These are just starting points that evolve into lively, and very informative discussions among members, many of whom are very knowledgeable in Irish history and are willing to help other members. Join us the first Tuesday from October to April, at 2 p.m. in the Indian River County Main Library. For more information, email [info@irgs.org](mailto:info@irgs.org)

## Scottish GIG

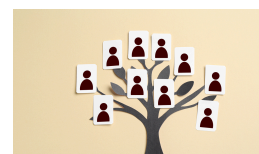


Roy Thompson & Mason Russell, GIG Leaders  
meet the fourth Tuesday 10 a.m. at the library

Our Scottish GIG meetings are the fourth Tuesday each month starting at 10 a.m. in the library. All are welcome. Our focus is on all things Scottish. We focus on enhancing our participants' genealogical skills with particular emphasis on researching our respective Scottish Ancestors, Clans and Scottish History.



## FTM GIG



GIG Leaders  
Brian McQuade and Kathie Thomas  
are restarting  
the Family Tree Maker GIG  
Style: A Relaxed Work Study Group  
(come and go at your leisure)

This GIG will meet remotely  
on Zoom on the first Wednesday  
of the month at 7 p.m.

The first meeting will be  
Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2026



*In Memory of Pamela F. Cooper*

IRGS INVITES YOU TO JOIN  
IN THE DEDICATION OF THE  
DISPLAY CABINET IN  
MEMORY OF  
PAMELA J. COOPER

JANUARY 13, 2026 @ 1PM  
DEDICATION WILL LAST 30 MINUTES

ARCHIVE CENTER & GENEALOGY DEPT. -  
IRC MAIN LIBRARY

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED



**GENEALOGY  
RESEARCH  
STUDY GROUP  
"GRSG"**

Group Meets: Feb. 6, 2026 from 2-4 p.m.  
in the IRC Main Library History Room

*Special Presenter: Sue Neale*  
*Please bring your laptop!*

**Free, in-person, tackle genealogy road blocks**  
**Researchers helping other researchers**



*Michelle Wagner*

Genealogy Librarian - Indian River County Library System  
Member since 2016





## **The “six old grouches,” whoever they were, would be proud.**

The iconic signs entering the City of Sebastian along U.S. 1 were originally erected in 1963. “Sebastian, a city of 647 friendly people and six old grouches,” the signs read in a Press Journal article in November of that year. Over time the spelling on the sign has appeared as “old” or “ole.” The number of friendly people continued to grow over the years, but the number of grouches remained constant.

Right from the start, folks wondered who the six old grouches were and who came up with the slogan and the idea of the sign. In 2009, Russ Lemmon writing for TCPalm tried to solve the mystery. One popular theory, Lemmon wrote, was six old grouches referred to the first Sebastian City Council in 1924.

Former City Clerk Sally Maio once said the earliest reference she could find was in the minutes of a 1954 City Council meeting, where the signs were adopted by a resolution, according to a TCPalm article by Janet Bagley in 2021.

When the signs were first built not everyone agreed with the message. One Sebastian resident, at a Civic Association discussion in April 1965 was quoted in the Press Journal. “I personally believe that we should have something more dignified on our highway sign than six old grouches. It is no place for levity. We don't believe we have six old grouches.”

At the same meeting, Sebastian Mayor William E. Boone said, “The sign has given our city publicity and I believe not unfavorable.”

In December 1978, the Press Journal reported that “some enterprising soul managed to make a few alternations” to the sign changing the number of grouches to eight. Sebastian officials repainted the sign and returned the grouch count to six.

Former City Clerk Florence Phelan, in a Florida Today story in January 1984, gave credit for the idea to a previous city clerk. “The only thing that I know about that is it is Col. A.T. Jordan's idea. It started with 800 people and six old grouches” about 30 years ago, she said. It was later in 1984 when the State Highway Department ordered Sebastian to repair or tear down the landmark signs. The citizens of Sebastian donated almost all of the \$1,500 needed for the new signs. The Sebastian Jaycees donated time and labor to the project. The Associated Press picked up that story and it appeared in numerous newspapers around the country.

The number of friendly residents kept climbing – 800, 1,600, 4,600, 5,042, 10,205 – until it was decided to leave off the population in 1999. The sign brought notoriety near and far. Junction City, Kansas, put up billboards along I-70 in 1966. “20,365 friendly people and 6 old grouches.” Lemmon noted JP Matty's, a restaurant on County Road 512 in 2009, served a “Six Old Grouches” sandwich. But there was no description of the sandwich. George O'Neill of the Sebastian Area Historical Society told Lemmon “The more you ask, the deeper it's going to get because nobody knows, really.”

The identity of the six grouches remains a mystery.

But we can celebrate them each year on October 15 – National Grouch Day.

- See photos of signs on next page



*Chuck Balnius*

IRGS Historian

Member since 2015



**The "six old grouches,"  
whoever they were,  
would be proud.**



## Newsletter Story Submission

**We would love to hear your story. Whatever your story, we want to hear from you.**

### Guidelines:

- Length: Stories should be between 100-1,000 words. Format: Submit your story in a Word document or Google Docs format. Content: Ensure your story is original, engaging and suitable for a general audience. Contact Information: Include your full name and a brief bio (2-3 sentences) with your submission. Deadline: Submissions are always welcome and will be published in our next edition.

Please email your stories to [pres@irgs.org](mailto:pres@irgs.org)  
with the subject line "Newsletter Story Submission."

We look forward to reading your work and sharing it with our members!



## January- March 2026 Events Calendar

### January

- 6<sup>th</sup> Irish GIG 2-4 p.m. IRC Main Library Family History Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor
- 7<sup>th</sup> FTM GIG First Zoom Meeting 7 p.m.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Monthly Meeting 10-12:30 p.m. IRC Main Library Media Room. Speaker: Miles Meyer
- 17<sup>th</sup> Genealogy Get-Together 1-3 p.m. IRC Main Library Media Room. Speaker: Miles Meyer - Hands On AI Workshop. Bring your laptop or iPad.
- 15<sup>th</sup> DNA GIG Zoom Meeting 2-3:30 p.m.
- 18<sup>th</sup> IRGS Volunteers in the IRC Genealogy Library to help patrons 2-4 p.m.
- 27<sup>th</sup> Scottish GIG 10 a.m.-noon IRC Main Library Family History Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

### February

- 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> IRGS Volunteers in the IRC Genealogy Library to help patrons 2-4 p.m.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Irish GIG 2-4 p.m. IRC Main Library Family History Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor
- 4<sup>th</sup> FTM GIG Zoom Meeting 7 p.m.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Monthly Meeting 10-12:30 p.m. IRC Main Library Media Room. Speaker: Daniel Horowitz from My Heritage.
- 14<sup>th</sup> Genealogy Get-Together 1-3 p.m. IRC Main Library Media Room
- 19<sup>th</sup> DNA GIG Zoom Meeting 2-3:30 p.m.
- 24<sup>th</sup> Scottish GIG 10 a.m.-noon IRC Main Library Family History Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

### March

- 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> IRGS Volunteers in the IRC Genealogy Library to help patrons 2-4 p.m.
- 4<sup>th</sup> FTM GIG Zoom Meeting 7 p.m.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Monthly Meeting 10-12:30 p.m. IRC Main Library Media Room. Speaker: Mark Olsen from Family Tree Maker
- 14<sup>th</sup> Genealogy Get-Together IRC Main Library Media Room 1-3 p.m.
- 17<sup>th</sup> Irish GIG St Patrick's Day Celebration at a local pub to be determined.
- 19<sup>th</sup> DNA GIG Zoom Meeting 2-4 p.m.
- 24<sup>th</sup> Scottish GIG 10 a.m.-noon IRC Main Library Family History Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

# Message from the President

---Colleen Butler



**Our Society has had an exciting and productive year, and we want to share just how much your support has helped us grow.**

We've been actively involved in our community — participating in Centennial events, expanding our presence on social media, and continually improving our new website as we learn and grow with it. Thanks to your dedication, our membership has increased by 24 percent since the end of 2024, and our Facebook following has risen from 225 to more than 300 followers in 2025.

As we look ahead, our 2026 budget is modest, but with continued membership growth and community support, we are optimistic that we will meet — and hopefully exceed — our goals for the coming year. One area where we, as a board, hope to communicate more effectively is the importance of our **501(c)(3)** tax-exempt status. This designation strengthens our mission and offers meaningful benefits to our donors and community partners. Under President Pamela Hall Cooper, our organization received federal approval as a **501(c)(3)**.

**Our charter clearly states that our purpose is:**

**“The promotion of genealogical education and research, and the preservation of genealogical material; exclusively scientific, literary, and educational within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.”**

Since achieving our tax-exempt status in 1987 we have also earned the Gold Star for Transparency from the Candid Foundation (formerly Guidestar) — a recognition that many nonprofits aspire to but few attain. This achievement reflects our commitment to openness, accountability, and responsible stewardship.

## The Indian River Genealogical Society Inc

Location: Vero Beach, FL

EIN: 59-2285878

Tax status: 501(c)(3) Public  
Charity

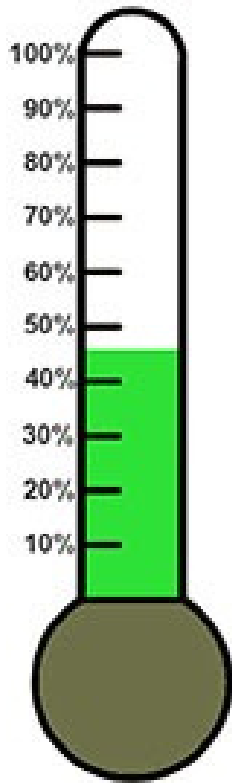


We should proudly promote this distinction and remain engaged with Candid as part of our ongoing credibility and outreach efforts.

Looking forward to 2026, we aim to pursue grant opportunities that will help support and modernize the Genealogy Library, especially in obtaining much-needed 21st-century equipment. We also want to strengthen our message that the Indian River Genealogical Society is a worthy and impactful organization for tax-deductible donations, helping preserve history, educate the public, and serve our community.

Together, we can continue to grow, inspire, and make a meaningful difference. Let's move into 2026 with purpose, pride, and a shared commitment to our mission.

# Membership Renewal Time



Does your membership expire  
at the end of 2025?

Let's push the GREEN higher!



Merry Christmas  
& A Happy New Year!

## *2026 Board Members and Committee*

President: Colleen Butler  
 Vice President: vacant  
 Treasurer: Sue Neale  
 Secretary: Jackie Riddle  
 Programming: Colleen Butler  
 Technology: Janet Hunter

Education: Colleen Butler  
 Membership: Brian McQuade  
 Historian: Chuck Balnius  
 Newsletter: Colleen Butler  
 Library Liasion: Michelle Wagner  
 Publicity: Colleen Butler

### **Things to know:**

- If you cannot log into the IRGS.ORG website Members Only section please contact: **[Membership@irgs.org](mailto:Membership@irgs.org)**
- Our mailing address has recently changed to: **P.O. Box 651404, Vero Beach, FL. 32965**
- Our upcoming membership meetings will be the second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Main Library Mary D. Snyder Multi-Media Room.
- **Membership dues.** Couple Membership is \$40 and the Single Membership is \$25. You can mail your checks to the P.O. Box listed above or you can pay via PayPal on our website or in person at our membership meetings. Membership is from January 1- December 31 yearly.
- **Donations:** IRGS is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. We have a Gold Star rating with Candid. Donations can be mailed to the P.O. Box above, paid via PayPal on our website or in person at our membership meetings. Please make sure to include your name and type of donation example: Unrestricted, Memorial, Genealogy Library, etc.
- **Genealogy Library Card** If you live out of the county, did you know a genealogy library card is only \$5? You must request it when you are in the Main Library in Vero Beach, otherwise you will be charged the out-of-county rate for a regular library card.
- We welcome your questions, suggestions and comments, please email them to: **[newsletter@irgs.org](mailto:newsletter@irgs.org)**

Thank you for reading!

<b><u><a href="http://IRGS.ORG">IRGS.ORG</a></u></b>	<b><u><a href="mailto:EMAIL_NEWSLETTER@IRGS.ORG">EMAIL NEWSLETTER@IRGS.ORG</a></u></b>
<b><u><a href="mailto:INFO@IRGS.ORG">INFO@IRGS.ORG</a></u></b>	<b><u><a href="#">IRGS FACEBOOK PAGE</a></u></b>