



**Colorado Genealogical Society**

# **Computer Interest Group**

# **Newsletter**

*Special Edition*

[www.cogensoc.us/cigmain.htm](http://www.cogensoc.us/cigmain.htm)

*Denver, Colorado*

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*In Memory of*

***Birdie Monk Holsclaw***



**August 23, 1948 – May 13, 2010**

Birdie's memorial service will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 22 at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 1000 15<sup>th</sup> Ave., Longmont, Colorado.

Cards and expressions of sympathy may be sent to:

Russ & Will Holsclaw  
7472 Mt. Sherman Road  
Longmont, CO 80503-8678

Arliss Monk  
2311 W. 16th Street  
Greeley, CO 80634

Read her obituary at:

[http://www.dailycamera.com/obits/ci\\_15090054#axzz0o8VFh36h](http://www.dailycamera.com/obits/ci_15090054#axzz0o8VFh36h)

*Roberta "Bobbi" King wrote this for Eastman's Online Genealogical Newsletter, May 16, 2010:*

It's a sullen, grey day when I hear the news of the passing of our friend and colleague, Birdie Monk Holsclaw.

Birdie was a mentor, program leader, and unfailing cheerleader for Colorado genealogy societies to which she contributed enthusiasm, the newest techie news, and light-hearted friendship.

Birdie, her husband Russ and their son Will were founding members of the Colorado computer interest group over twenty-five years ago. Birdie remained active in CIG throughout the years, meeting up with the TMG group in her usual capacity as advisor and guide only four weeks ago. She was an active, influential Colorado genealogist who served on boards, lectured for programs, offered seminar planning advice, and instilled confidence to the new members with her fervent encouragement and support. She was a conciliatory soul, averse to hurting feelings but standing her ground in the debate of the genealogical proof standard and ethics. She served as Colorado society president, board member, advisor, and mentor to genealogists she met everywhere.

Birdie confronted cancer in early 2009, heard a grave prognosis, then struggled through debilitating treatments gaining months of more life with family and friends. We breathed our silent "Thank You" to Russ every time he brought her to our society meetings, were unnerved by her progressive fragility, but then we banished illness out the room and willed ourselves into easy familiar genea-talk with her. We knew these meetings with her would end, she the cheery genealogist, respected professional, nationally-known person, who never gave up on the Computer Interest Group she helped found, and the Colorado genealogists who were her center and her core devotees, and who followed her example and modeled her work.

We all knew this was coming. We deal in past lives and read gravestones, we've already endured loss of loved ones, but it never lightens when it happens again. It's hard to believe she's gone, but her suffering is over and our loss remains.

She will be missed for a long time.



*Photo courtesy of Julie Miller*

*The following article was taken from Genealogical Computing, April/May/June 2003 and used with the permission of the author, Roberta "Bobbi" King. Bobbi tells the story of Birdie and the beginnings of the Computer Interest Group of the Colorado Genealogical Society.*

Roberta "Birdie" Monk Holsclaw has been a mainstay of the Colorado genealogical community since the 1980s. She credits her husband Russ for advancing her computer knowledge; nevertheless, her own talent for writing, teaching, and preaching the value of the scholarly approach to genealogy has made her a favorite in the field.

Researchers serve as willing audiences when she is developing her lectures, and she invites their criticism, acknowledging feedback with thoughtfulness and appreciation.

I haven't known Birdie for many years, but what I lack in number has been counterbalanced with substance. I've realized that being in the company of Birdie Holsclaw has advanced my genealogy far beyond what my lonely research would have yielded.

Early on, I asked her about her name. She and I share the distinctive "Roberta" moniker, but I had never met a "Birdie" before. She explained, "When I was in elementary school, there were two other Bobbies in the class, so I obviously couldn't be another Bobbie. So they called me Birdie, and I've had the name ever since."

### **The Early Years**

Birdie had auspicious beginnings. Her mother, Arliss Monk, was one of the first Certified Genealogists in Colorado. As genealogists are wont to do, Arliss was the family collector of family stuff. Birdie continued the collecting tradition, but it was in the early 1970s, when Birdie was living away from home, that she made her first forays into outside records. Birdie became acquainted with the staff of the local LDS Family History Center, and there she first saw Everton's Handybook. With this book, Birdie realized the potential that public records hold. When she returned to Greeley, she urged her mother to begin examining the courthouse records, and they started to collaborate. In the mid-70s, Arliss became a Certified Genealogist.

Given Birdie's national reputation and exposure, it's surprising to learn that in the beginning, she was terrified of public speaking. She was shy even when meeting courthouse staff during the early years of her research. Despite her personal dread of public attention, Birdie saw that public interest in genealogy was on the rise, and she wanted to teach genealogy.

Looking back, Birdie says, "I may have done okay, but when I think back on what I knew then, it's amazing that I had the nerve to teach classes. It was after the publication of Alex Haley's Roots, and you could tell that people were interested in genealogy, [and] I felt that someone ought to teach people about this."

She taught the basics: how to fill out family group sheets and pedigree charts, how to develop family collections, and even the importance of good source documentation.

Early on, Birdie grasped the notion that a computer could help her genealogy research. In 1978, she heard about “people having home computers” and she read a book called *Search and Retrieval: The Application of Data Processing to Genealogical Research*, by Warren L. Marsh (Old Saybrook, CT: the author, 1970). The book was about a genealogist who had used punch-card technology to help with his genealogy; Birdie was convinced that the “complexity of genealogy could benefit from the use of a computer.”

She bought a Radio Shack TRS-80, took it home, and wondered what she had gotten herself into. There were no pre-written programs; she read the manual and started playing with machine language, in order to “make this poor little stupid machine do genealogy.” The 4K memory was too small, so Birdie upgraded to 16K, a dramatic improvement.

Fate stepped in and matters shifted into high gear. Birdie was working as a salesclerk in a small store when Russ Holsclaw, a programmer working for IBM, dropped in to pick up a part he had ordered. He was wearing his IBM work badge, and before he had the chance to leave, Birdie remarked, “You must know something about computers.” He answered yes, and that he even had one at home.

They talked programming. Birdie explained that the most important function she wanted from a genealogy program was the ability to record source documentation.

After discovering their mutual interest in personal computers, a friendship developed. But first they had to learn to communicate. “Source” to a genealogist and a programmer, and “documentation” to a genealogist and a programmer hold vastly different meanings.

“We had a few spats,” Birdie says, but they eventually resolved their differences. The couple married soon thereafter and now have a grown son.

### **Genealogy and Computing**

In the early 1980s, Birdie heard about a small group of genealogists who had started a computer group. By now, Russ and Birdie had been out on the Internet reading bulletin boards, and were continuing to upgrade her machines. They attended the second meeting of the new computer group, but Russ was the active participant while Birdie cared for baby Will upstairs. These were home meetings, and eventually the group began calling themselves a Steering Committee for the Computer Interest Group.

This group evolved into the Computer Interest Group of the Colorado Genealogical Society. In 1984, Everett Geurink, editor of the CGS Quarterly, asked this Steering Committee to put together a computer/technology issue. They published a very large issue, very cutting-edge, and it was a resounding success. This put the Steering Committee on the genealogical map, and they felt they had arrived.

Birdie has never strayed far from this group, being a presenter, spokeswoman, officer, writer, and supporter of the group of computer genealogists whose membership and influence continues to grow.

Russ had contributed to the CGS publication, and Glenn Harris, having read Russ's article, asked him to speak at the 1985 National Genealogical Society conference.

At that conference, Birdie remembers one outstanding evening. “We met Paul Andereck, the founder of Genealogical Computing, and we had an exhilarating, exciting conversation about genealogical computing,” she says. “It was a memorable night.”

Within a few weeks, Paul Andereck asked Russ to do some writing for Genealogical Computing.

Although the byline was given to Russ, Birdie was at Russ's shoulder, involved with the writing of the article; the topic was GEDCOM, and the article was published.

The first genealogy programs, ROOTS and PAF, were beginning to come into use. Birdie was using PAF, but the repetitive nature of the data input and the lack of resourcefulness for source documentation made for frustrating work. She was a ROOTS alpha tester, enjoying the opportunity of being involved in the creative process of a genealogy program. ROOTS III introduced the use of source notes, and Birdie moved her data from PAF to ROOTS III. The ROOTS program was renamed Ultimate Family Tree (UFT), and Birdie was a user until its demise a few years ago.

Birdie was invited to speak at the first GENTECH conference, where she met Bob Velke and picked up his pre-release of The Master Genealogist. Later, during Data Modeling meetings, they became friends and, after the demise of UFT, she began using The Master Genealogist. She is one of Velke's beta-testers and is an active leader in The Master Genealogist Users' Group of Northern Colorado.

### **Mapping Software**

The year 1986 was a seminal year for Birdie on a national level. She had asked Russ if he could write a program mapping land boundaries as she transcribed them from her family deeds using metes and bounds. Birdie used Russ's software in a case study in which she identified the location of a landowner's land and the probable identity of his wife's family. He named the software Black Oak Mapper for Birdie's first talk at a national conference, “Beginning at a Black Oak ...”

“I had hypothesized that my research subject had lived in a certain area, but no deeds in his name had been recorded there, and few other documents contained specific evidence of his existence,” Birdie says. “By reading the surrounding deeds of his supposed home in that neighborhood [1700s metes and bounds in Pennsylvania] and platting each one, I put them together like the pieces of a puzzle. The neighbors' deeds had used his name when describing their shared boundaries, and year by year, deed by deed, I constructed evidence that he had actually lived there.”

Birdie mapped out the neighborhood by hand from the 1760s to 1830s, platting each piece of land as it was divided by sale or inheritance, overlaying the tracts as the changes occurred. Over the years, Birdie mapped many metes and bounds deeds by hand.

“I had been doing hand land platting on a deed that was very complicated; it had a lot of little bends and about 25 little boundary lines, and as I was laboring over it, I said to Russ, ‘Hey, I wish this could be easier,’ and Russ said, ‘I could write a program.’ And he did.”

Black Oak Mapper was designed to set up the shape of a piece of land as it was described by the deed.

“As each boundary description was typed into the computer, using an easy and logical notation, one line of the screen per one line of the deed, the described boundary line would be drawn on the computer screen. You would input each boundary line per line on the computer screen, and progressively the computer would plot the tract. When you were finished, the outline could be printed out. The computer could only manage one deed at a time, but the printouts could be matched up and a neighborhood reconstruction completed.”

Now she could map out her deeds without the painstaking methodology of the protractor, pencil, and ruler.

“It was a simple program at first, but Russ added more features as users asked for more things,” Birdie says.

Russ's employment prevented him from selling his product, so he posted it as shareware on an Internet bulletin board, and shared copies of his program on 5-inch floppies with whoever wanted to use the program. It was a DOS application, but work commitments precluded Russ from keeping up with new versions, and demand for Black Oak Mapper diminished.

Also in 1986, the Colorado Council of Genealogical Societies held a seminar in Boulder. Elizabeth Shown Mills was a speaker, and after a dinnertime discussion, Birdie showed the neighborhood case study, using the mapping software, to Elizabeth. Elizabeth liked the methodology, and asked Birdie and Russ to come to Samford to teach computers. Elizabeth also asked Birdie to serve on the program committee for the next National Genealogical Society's national conference, and eventually Birdie became an indexer for the NGS Quarterly, a position she held for several years.

Birdie uses technology daily by way of her Jornada, her indispensable pocket PC. She has the Pocket Genealogist installed, but she uses that only for data storage. Birdie likes to write her genealogy using a word processor (also on the Jornada) to create her story and record documentation.

Conforming to established genealogical standards, but using her own style, she creates her genealogy in her word processor, relying on a specific genealogy program only as an organizer of facts and data. She writes her compiled genealogies as she moves through her research, a process she finds easier to do with practice and which produces satisfying reports.

Birdie continues to influence her Colorado colleagues as she moves along the national scene in genealogy. Her contributions are many, and we look forward to many more.

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*The Colorado Council of Genealogical Societies (CCGS) has set up a memorial fund in Birdie's name. The fund will sponsor a scholarship to the Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, as well as a Birdie Holsclaw Memorial Lecture Series at the National Genealogical Society (NGS) annual conference.*

*Make your check payable to CCGS, marked for "Birdie Holsclaw Memorial" and send to CCGS, P.O. Box 40270, Denver, CO 80204-0270.*