

Papers of Thomas W. Westerfield (1926-1980)

By Jerry Long, Owensboro, Ky., 1990



Thomas W. Westerfield (1926-1980)

The Bulletin, Vol.13, Summer 1980, West-Central KY Family Research Association, Owensboro, KY, McDowell Publications, p.19:

In Memory
THOMAS (T. W.) WESTERFIELD
23 October 1929 - 7 April 1980

T. W. Westerfield, of 2517 Lewis Lane, Owensboro, died on Monday April 7 at his home. He is survived by his wife, Veronica, son Thomas A., daughters, Rebecca, Theresa, and Cindy, two sons-in-law, a grandson, two brothers, and two sisters.

He was a careful and dedicated researcher in genealogy and history, and was always interested and helpful to those who came to the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library during his fifteen years of service there.

It was in the mind of T. W. Westerfield that the idea for West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association originated. In his work at the library he observed persons working on the same families who did not know each other, and he envisioned an organization to bring them together to share data and to help each other. Thus WCK:FRA began at a resting In his home in May 1968 with four persons. He gave their names to "The Bulletin" and "Kentucky Family Records" and he donated untold hours in printing, mailing, etc., until illness intervened.

In 1969 he published the first of five volumes of "Kentucky Genealogy and Biography", a reprint of the biographical sections of the "Perrin's History of Kentucky" (ca 1885-86). This made available genealogical information which had previously been 'buried' in the scarce, unindexed "Perrin's". Countless genealogists should be forever grateful.

The cause of genealogy in Kentucky has suffered a great loss, but more importantly, all of us who knew him suffer a great personal loss. Our deepest sympathy to his wife and family.

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Messenger & Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 April 1980:

Thomas (T. W.) Westerfield, 53, of 2517 Lewis Lane, Owensboro, died Monday, April 7, 1980, at his home. He was born in Owensboro, retired from Owensboro-Daviess County library after 15 years Of service and Owensboro Fire Department after 18years. He was a member of Immaculate Catholic Church was the founder of West Central Kentucky Family Research Association, was a member of Daviess County Historical Society and a life member of Kentucky Historical Society.

Survivors include his wife, Veronica Westerfield of Owensboro; a son, Thomas A. Westerfield of Owensboro, three daughters, Rebecca and Theresa Westerfield, both of Louisville and and Mrs. Cindy Trigg of Albany, N.Y.; a grandson; two brothers, John and Charles Westerfield; two sisters;. Sis Worthington and Sarah Judge, all of Owensboro.

Services are at 1:30p.m. Thursday at Immaculate Catholic Church. Burial in Resurrection Cemetery. Visitation after noon today at James H. Davis Funeral Home where prayers will be said at 6 p:m.

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From "Notes on the Ancestry of the Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY", by Jerry Long, Kentucky Family Records, Vol. 31, West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, McDowell Publications, Utica, KY, 2007, pp.17-20:

Thomas W. Westerfield, a 14-year employee of the Library, was made departmental head of the Kentucky Room on 19 February 1975 and immediately commenced working there. Previously there had been no director or regular attendant for the department. He was supervisor of the library's Audio Visual department from 1960 until being transferred to the Kentucky Room. He had formerly worked as a driver for the Owensboro Fire Department for nineteen

years. During the years of 1960-1972 he alternated between the two jobs, working two days at the library and then was on duty at the fire department for the next two days. When he first started working at the library he was one of only six employees. Former library director, Evelyn Triplett, said that the 60's were a turbulent period for the Library. Things were very unsettled because of many changes and a rapid succession of directors. During this period, she said, "Mr. Westerfield was the glue that helped to keep things together."

In the years previous to him being officially appointed in charge of the Kentucky Room T. W. Westerfield had assisted in improving the collection there and periodically had helped patrons using the room. In an autobiography he noted "I worked as director of Audio-Visual Service and head of the Local History and Genealogical sections of the Carnegie Free Public Library, Owensboro, KY since Sept. 1960 on my days off from the Fire Dept." His role in the Kentucky Room prior to 1975 was informal and on an as needed basis. During a special family night at the Library during National Library Week in April 1962 he was in charge of a history & genealogy display related to Owensboro and the vicinity. A 1967 newspaper article chronicled his research documenting that characters in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had been residents of Daviess County. He was a member of the Daviess County Historical Society and a life member of the Kentucky Historical Society. He was an avid genealogist and was the founder of the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association. He had conceived the idea for the organization and named its two publications, The Bulletin and The Kentucky Family Records. In a memorial to him by WCK:FRA it was stated "In his work at the library he observed persons working on the same families who did not know each other, and he envisioned an organization to bring them together to share data and to help each other." The group was organized at a meeting at his home with three other founding members in May 1968.

On 10 January 1969 Thomas W. Westerfield, president of WCK:FRA, was the speaker at a meeting of the DAR chapter at the Owensboro Public Library. At this meeting he outlined the purposes of this new organization as: To encourage and to further genealogical research; to collect and to preserve family genealogical records of Western Kentucky; and to encourage public officials to make genealogical records available to persons who wish to do research. In 1969 he published the first of five volumes of Kentucky Genealogy and Biography. This series was a reprint of the biographical sections of Kentucky: A History of the State, originally published by Battle, Perrin & Kniffin in 1885-6. This made available information from this scarce and previously unindexed cornerstone of Kentucky genealogy.

T. W. Westerfield, of the Kentucky Room, was interviewed in April 1975 for an article that was published in the Evansville, IN newspaper, Courier & Press. He stated "In its Kentucky Room, the Owensboro library has what is probably the area's premier collection of genealogical materials and local history." In the article he listed some of the materials found there and ended by saying

The library's more than 4,000 volumes of material now occupying the Kentucky Room have outgrown their space and will occupy an area of about 2,000 square feet on the lower level when construction is completed in late summer. This mass of material has been accumulated through purchases by the library and contributions and loans by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association.

On 14 August 1974 the Library Board passed a motion that a part of the basement would be used for future expansion of the Kentucky Room. Three months later T. W. Westerfield addressed the Board about the need for expanding the Kentucky Room and discussed his vision for the room. The Kentucky Room was opened in the basement of the library on 13 February 1976. One hundred people attended the dedication ceremony at which US Senator Wendell H. Ford spoke. During his term as Kentucky Governor, Ford, in 1974 had approved \$35,000 from his contingency fund for the project. The new room (about 2000-sq. ft.) was 2½ times the size of the former room on the first floor (800-sq. ft.) and over 10 times the size of the Kentucky Room at the old library. T. W. Westerfield, the director of the Kentucky Room, in a newspaper article on the day of the opening was quoted as saying that the room contains the largest reference works on Kentucky history to be found in a public library outside of Louisville. "The ancestor of the spacious modern room", he said, "was the Daughters of the American Revolution Room" at the old Carnegie Library at 9th and Frederica streets. "By 1960, it had expanded somewhat to become the Kentucky and Genealogical Collection." He added that: "The West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association has \$10,000 worth of books on indefinite loan to the room". A card catalogue of its own was created for the new room. With the opening two new assistants, Debbie Mesplay and Karen Potter, had been added to assist Westerfield... On 3 May 1978 T. W. Westerfield retired from his position in the Kentucky Room.

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The Bulletin, Vol.15, Fall 1982, West-Central KY Family Research Association, Owensboro, KY, McDowell Publications, p.47:

VERONICA GENEVIEVE WESTERFIELD, 50, widow of WCK:FRA founder, T. W. Westerfield, died at her home in Owensboro, on 24 May 1982, after a long illness. She is survived by a son, Thomas A., three daughters, Rebecca, Theresa, and Cindi, one grandson, her father, George S. Hagan, Jr., five brothers and four sisters. We extend our sympathy to all of the family.

The son and daughters of T. W. and 'Gene' Westerfield have presented to WCK:FRA a portion of his genealogical collection. Family papers which they retained are in the possession of daughter, Rebecca. The materials which we received are being examined by Mrs. Cox for possible use in Kentucky Family Records, and will be placed in the WCK:FRA Study and/or the Kentucky Room, 0/Dc library. It is expected that it will take several weeks for processing to be completed.

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Notes by Jerry Long

The loose family files of the late Thomas W. Westerfield that were donated to the genealogy society, West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, of Owensboro, KY, were duplicated, organized and bound into a volume in 1990 by Jerry Long. The volume was placed on the shelves in the family histories section of the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library in Owensboro, KY (catalog # KR G West).

Thomas William Westerfield was born 23 October 1926 in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY and died 7 April 1980 in Owensboro. He married Veronica Genevieve Hagan (1932-1982), 23 April 1949 in Owensboro. They were buried in the Resurrection Cemetery in Daviess County, KY. T. W. Westerfield served in the US Navy (1943-1952). He was employed at the Owensboro Fire Department (1952-1965) and the Daviess County Public Library in Owensboro (1960-1978). He conceived the idea of organizing a genealogy society. He along with Margaret Alford, Michael Edgeworth and Elizabeth Cox became the founding members of the West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association in May 1968. The organization in 2010 was relocated to Calhoun, KY and was disbanded in 2014.

Thomas W. Westerfield was the son of Thomas Westerfield (6 April 1900 Ohio County, KY – 28 December 1968 Daviess County, KY) and Irene Elizabeth Short (7 March 1902 Ohio County, KY – 23 April 1976 Daviess County, KY). His grandparents were John Daniel Westerfield (1858 – 1907) & Edmonia Evans (1862 – 1961). His Westerfield line of descent was: Thomas W. – Thomas – John Daniel – William M. – James Bruce – Cornelius – James – Jacobus.

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Resurrection Cemetery, Daviess County, KY