

BYRON SISTLER
Middle Tennessee Genealogical Society

The following article has been "slightly revised" by Byron's wife, Barbara, (with a few additions of names and a personal note). The article ran in the The Tennessean newspaper Sunday, November 28, 2004.

MTGS has been privileged to have Mr. Sistler as a founder of our Society and a member for many years. We mourn the loss of Mr. Sistler.

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Byron Sistler, 83, genealogist and archivist, dies

By EVAN MAYOR For The Tennessean



Byron Sistler, a genealogist who published more than 50 major publications on census records and genealogy in Tennessee and Kentucky, died Friday at Belcourt Terrace Nursing Home. He was 83.

Mr. Sistler was a founder of the Middle Tennessee Genealogical Society and was a past president of the group.

"Thousands of people use his work every day across the country, especially here at the state library," said Mr. Sistler's son, Sam Sistler, 33, who co-authored a number of books on genealogy with his father and mother, Barbara Sistler. "The impetus was, in 1968 he was working on his own family history, and discovered how hard it was to look up his own records, so he started indexing state census records."

Those who worked closely with Mr. Sistler described his dry wit and unselfish nature.

"He was a character," said Gale Bamman, C.G., of Cross Plains. "He came across rather blunt at first ... but once you stopped and thought about what (he was saying), it was funny."

Bamman, a genealogist for 40 years, met Mr. Sistler through her interest in genealogy.

"There is nobody to compare him with, really — he was a leader in his field," Bamman said. "When he began indexing census records, there were very few state census records that had been archived.

"He helped people working with Tennessee records tremendously, not just people in Tennessee, but anyone that has had Tennessee ancestors."

The Sistlers transcribed and published Tennessee census records spanning from 1830 to 1880 and published six volumes of early Tennessee marriage records.

He also wrote and published his own family genealogy, titled "Grandfather was Always a Very Old Man".

"It brings history down to a personal level," Bamman said of Mr. Sistler's work. "You have to know your past or there is no way you know where you have been."

Mr. Sistler had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for a number of years. He died peacefully with Barbara at his side. She and Sam have been running the business since the onset of his illness.

Along with Sam and Barbara Sistler, survivors include sons Tom and Nicholas Sistler of Chicago, Anne Sistler of Boston, and four stepchildren: Karen Urquiza of Woodstock, IL; George Cook of Chicago, Peter Cook of Cincinnati and Jacob Cook of Lebanon, TN.

A memorial service is planned to be held at the Tennessee State Library in the near future, Sam Sistler said.

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A personal note from Bryon's wife, Barbara:

Byron Sistler (1921-2004)

Our founder died November 26, 2004. He will me missed.

Byron was a very special person as a husband, friend and father. It's not everyone who can take on four stepchildren, have yet another child (that's Sam) and raise them all alike. Not many a man can work at home amiably with his wife for 30 years!

A native of IL with TN roots, Byron served a tour of duty stateside during WWII and, with the GI Bill, earned a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago.

Even through the last years of Alzheimer's, he kept his sense of humor and a pleasant disposition. He could still tell you the year of the great Chicago fire and the name of the first Bears coach (needed for a crossword). He couldn't remember that I visited yesterday but he always knew who I was for which I was truly grateful. I will miss him. To quote to Byron from a John Denver song, "Perhaps Love — My memories of love will be of you".

Thank you, friends.

Barbara and Sam Sistler

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