

Records Preservation and Access Committee

GENEALOGISTS' DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

27 April 2014

WHEREAS, Americans have pursued the research of their family heritage since the beginning of our country; and

WHEREAS, millions of Americans derive enjoyment from genealogical exploration, consistent with the pursuit of happiness recognized by the founders of our country in our Declaration of Independence; and

WHEREAS, Americans derive substantial emotional benefit from genealogical exploration into their heritage; and

WHEREAS, many Americans derive financial benefit from the practice of professional genealogy and have performed such throughout this nation's history; and

WHEREAS, genealogists make meaningful contributions to the fields of forensic genealogy, identification of kinships, determining the facts in legal cases such as probate court, cases involving tribal and other relationships; and

WHEREAS, thousands of genealogical and historical societies, libraries, museums, and other institutions and associations have been established throughout our land to assist all Americans in the pursuit of their family heritage; and

WHEREAS, genealogy adds substantially to the ethnic, cultural, and racial richness of which our country is composed; and

WHEREAS, the American people have recognized that the right to open government and unfettered access to the records of our government are rights which find expression in the constitutions and legislation of our federal and state governments and which enrich the lives of all Americans; and

WHEREAS, genealogists have been at the forefront of efforts to protect and preserve the precious records and documents of our genealogical and historical heritage; and

WHEREAS, genealogists, no less than other Americans, are vitally concerned for personal privacy and safety from untoward acts that diminish our freedom; and

WHEREAS, most records, including vital records, have, for all of our nation's history, been substantially open to access,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT KNOWN

That we, the undersigned genealogists, in pursuance of our individual and collective rights as Americans, do hereby

DECLARE

That genealogists possess the right to the pursuit of genealogical exploration through unfettered access to the records of our government; and

WE CALL upon our governmental representatives to recognize our rights by;

PRESERVING the freedom of the American people to access the public records of our government in a timely and orderly manner through appropriate legislation; and

REFRAINING from legislation which would prevent or render extraordinarily difficult access to the public records, principally birth, marriage, and death records collected by our state and federal governmental agencies; and

PROMOTING those principles that enhance, not diminish, our freedom of access to records; and

CELEBRATING with genealogists the valuable benefits of exploring, researching, and compiling the histories of our families, and as a result, the history of our exceptional nation.

WE SIGNED,