

Bio for Nancy Stearns Theiss

I am an Oldham County native and still live on the family farm that my parents purchased in 1954. I graduated from Oldham County High School and got my B. A. in Biology from the University of Louisville. I taught science in the Jefferson County School System then went to Murray State University, serving an internship at Land Between the Lakes and receiving a master's degree in environmental education.

I was the Environmental Education Consultant for the Kentucky Dept. of Education from 1978 through 1982 and helped to coordinate environmental and energy education programs throughout the state. In 1988 I became the Director of the Louisville Nature Center where we conducted nature programs in conjunction with the Operation Brightside Program. We trained high school students to become naturalists, conducted summer programs through Louisville community centers and managed the Beargrass Creek State Nature Preserve.

From 1993-1998 I was the Director of the Division of Information and Education for the Ky. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. During those years we constructed the Salato Wildlife Center that focused on native plants and animals. We also began a native plant program and started the Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program.

From 1998 through 2009 I began and completed a PhD program at the University of Louisville. For my dissertation I studied Aldo Leopold and his teaching methods for his class Wildlife Ecology 118 at the University of Wisconsin. Leopold is known as the father of Environmental History and wrote *The Sand County Almanac* which is a classic treatise of interactions of people with nature. Wildlife Ecology 118 was the first environmental education class in the United States.

In 2004 I became the Executive Director of the Oldham County History Center. Recently we completed a \$2 million renovation project of our campus that includes: 1880 Rob Morris Chapel Education Building, The Dahlgren Barn, Colonial Garden, 1840 Root Cellar, 1840 Peyton Samuel Head Family Museum and the 1840 J. C. Barnett Library and Archives.

In 2016 we became a part of the National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom for two sites: 1) The J.C. Barnett Library and Archives for the Mount Family Papers which include slave documents as well as slave papers from the Oldham County Court Documents and 2) the Bibb Escapes/Gatewood Plantation where Henry Bibb was enslaved until he eventually escaped enslavement. Bibb established a refuge colony in Canada for freedom seekers and became the first Black editor of a newspaper (Voice of the Fugitive) in Canada.

At the Oldham County History Center, we have a very active oral history program. Under the leadership of Anita Fritz, in 2002, we began the Veterans Oral History Project and have continued that program with archiving over 75 oral histories of WWII Veterans. In 2007 we started the Living Treasures Oral History Program in partnership with the Oldham Era newspaper. Each month, we record oral histories of our community mentors who are cherished for their contributions to community and family.

In 2019 we received the Morris Mount Roberts Fellowship to support research on local African American history. This year's recipient, Robert Bell, is currently researching the contributions of our local African American soldiers in Oldham County, who served the Union during the Civil War.

At the Oldham County History Center we focus on the value of local history and its place in giving us identity and foundation for building a better community where we live.