

Skill-Building Tips for Genealogists

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Whatever your experience as a family history researcher, you're bound to have questions: How do I get started? What kind of records did my ancestors leave, where can I find them, and how can I understand what they mean? How can I break through this brick wall? How do I know my conclusions are right? Today, the opportunities for building our research skills are almost infinite, and include a huge variety of structured programs, a wealth of published books and articles, and social networking tools that help us tap the knowledge of other committed genealogists.

Structured Learning Opportunities

Conferences

National conferences

- National Genealogical Society (NGS) conference.ngsgenealogy.org/
May, location varies (St. Charles MO in 2015)
- Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) www.fgsconference.org/
August, location varies (San Antonio TX in 2014)
- RootsTech rootstech.org/
February in Salt Lake City

Examples of specialized conferences [Note: for an updated international listing of genealogy-related conferences, cruises, and webinars, see the Calendar of Genealogy Events at calendar.eogn.com/]

- Palatines to America National Conference www.palam.org/
- International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies Conference www.iajgs.org/
- New England Regional Genealogical Conference www.nergc.org/
- International Genetic Genealogy Conference i4gg.org/

Genealogy Institutes

- Salt Lake City Institute of Genealogy (SLIG) www.infouga.org/
January in Salt Lake City UT
- Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research (IGHR) www4.samford.edu/schools/ighr/
June in Birmingham AL
- National Institute on Genealogical Research (NIGR) www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~natgenin/
July in Washington DC
- Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh (GRIP) www.gripitt.org/
July in Pittsburgh, PA
August, location varies (Orchard Lake, Michigan in 2014)

“Streaming” Conferences: “attend” a national conference from the comfort of your home computer!

- RootsTech in February, FREE streaming, rootstech.org/
- National Genealogical Society (NGS) in May, \$65-\$145, conference.ngsgenealogy.org/
- International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in July, \$49-\$139, conference.iajgs.org/
- 2013 NARA Virtual Genealogy Fair presentations available online for free at www.archives.gov/dc-metro/know-your-records/genealogy-fair/

Audiotapes for NGS, FGS, and several regional conferences are available from JAMB Tapes at www.jamb-inc.com/ for \$12 per presentation (note: handouts and video are NOT available).

Online courses

National Genealogical Society www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/educational_courses

- PDF and Interactive Online: short courses, various topics, \$30-\$45 for members (Membership \$65)
- American Genealogy—Home Study Course: intensive training on records, repositories, and methodology, 3-parts at \$170 each plus two \$30 pre-requisites—HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Brigham Young University Online

- Free Online Genealogy Courses: is.byu.edu/site/courses/free.cfm
- Independent Study Courses for College Credit is.byu.edu/site/courses/
 - \$168 per unit (1-3 units per class)
 - Search for “family history” or “genealogist” in the Quick Search box (not the “Search for Course” under “Course Catalogue”)
 - Also, scan all history course listings to locate useful courses such as HIST 421 English Language Handwriting and Documents

Boston University Programs in Genealogical Research

onlinecourselearning.com/bu/genealogyonline/

- Genealogy Essentials: 4 week course, \$775
- Certificate in Genealogical Studies: 15 week program, \$2695 [Well worth the investment.]

National Institute for Genealogical Studies www.genealogicalstudies.com/

- 150+ courses available, basic to advanced
- classes vary in length and cost
- packages provide discounts for multiple courses

Study Groups

NGSQ Study Groups—HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

- Text: a monthly reading from the National Genealogical Society Quarterly archives
- Flexible scheduling, with text or video chat options
- Ongoing—participate at your own convenience
- No fee
- Contact: Darcie Hind Posz at darcieposz@hotmail.com

Mastering Genealogical Proof Study Groups—HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

- Text: Mastering Genealogical Proof by Thomas W. Jones
- 8-week and 16-week commitment, weekly/bi-weekly meetings, with written assignments
- Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced level groups
- Video or text chats
- No fee
- Contact: Angela McGhie, genproofstudy@gmail.com

ProGen

- Text: Professional Genealogy, edited by Elizabeth Shown Mills
- Split focus: 50% on professional business practices and 50% on research skills
- 19-month commitment, 10-20 hours per month: monthly meeting plus reading and written assignments
- Cost: \$95
- Apply at progenstudy.org/

Genealogy Certification

Preparing and submitting a research portfolio to the Board for Certification of Genealogists is equivalent—in the scope of work involved—to writing a Master’s thesis, but it is an unparalleled opportunity to have your skills in genealogical research, analysis, and writing evaluated by expert genealogists, who will provide detailed feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of your research methodology. Though not for the timid (especially given the \$375 fee) it is a worthwhile exercise for any genealogist, whether hobbyist or professional. For more information, visit the BCG website at bcgcertification.org/.

Self-Directed Learning

Reading

Books

Essential for every genealogist:

Eales, Anne B., and Robert S, Kvasnicka. *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*. Washington, D. C.; National Archives Trust Fund Board, 2000.

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Pub., 1990.

Hone, E. Wade. *Land & Property Research in the United States*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1997.

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2007.

Morgan, George G., and Drew Smith. *Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques*. New York: McGraw-Hill Osborne Media, 2013.

Rising, Marsha Hoffman. *The Family Tree Problem Solver: Tried-and-True Tactics for Tracing Elusive Ancestors*. Cincinnati, OH: Family Tree, 2011.

Rose, Christine. *Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures*. San Jose, CA: CR Publications, 2004.

Rose, Christine. *Military Bounty Land, 1776-1855*. San Jose, CA: CR Publications, 2011.

Smolenyak, Megan. *Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing Your Family History*. New York: Viking, 2009.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis., and Sandra Hargreaves. Luebking. *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*. Provo, UT: Ancestry, 2006. [Note: available free at Ancestry.com]

A sampler of regional research guides:

DeGrazia, Laura Murphy., and Barbara Vines. Little. *Research in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester County*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013.

Gagel, Diane VanSkiver. *Research in Ohio*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2008.

Leary, Helen F. M. *North Carolina Research: Genealogy and Local History*. 2nd ed. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Genealogical Society, 1996.

Leclerc, Michael J. *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2012.

Porter, Pamela Boyer, and Ann Carter Fleming. *Research in Missouri*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 1999.

Rapaport, Diane. *New England Court Records: A Research Guide for Genealogists and Historians*. Burlington, MA: Quill Pen, 2006.

Keep up-to-date: Amazon.com has several helpful tools to help you identify top books in the field of genealogy (or in any field, for that matter).

1. Search by Department (Books→Education & Reference→Genealogy) and sort results by “New and Popular.”
2. From any book’s main page, scroll down to the section “Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought”
3. Note books with large review counts and high star ratings, and be sure to check the negative reviews as well as positive reviews to confirm whether a book is likely to meet your needs.

“Juried” Journals

What sets these journals apart from most genealogy journals is that articles submitted for publication in juried journals go through a peer-review process that ensures that the research and writing meet standards for quality: a rigorous process for the author that ensures a valuable learning experience for the reader.

- National Genealogy Society Quarterly
- New England Historic Genealogical Register
- New York Genealogical and Biographical Record
- The American Genealogist
- The Genealogist (publication of the American Society of Genealogists)

Online guides

- FamilySearch wiki and Help Center at familysearch.org/
- Learning Center at ancestry.com
- Elizabeth Shown Mills’ Quick Lessons at EvidenceExplained.com
- Elizabeth Shown Mills’ Research articles at historicpathways.com
- Board for Certification of Genealogists website (bcgcertification.org/), particularly their links to “Skillbuilding: Your Learning Center,” “Work Samples,” and “Genealogy’s Standards.”

Blogs (focusing on genealogy research skills)

Manage your “blog feed” using a free service such as “Feedly,” which will collect your blog subscriptions in one location for easy access. Visit cloud.feedly.com to get started.

“MUST READ!” for any genealogist:

- Evidence Explained at www.evidenceexplained.com/blogs/ee
- The Legal Genealogist at www.legalgenealogist.com/blog

Highly recommended:

- Adventures In Genealogy Education at genealogyeducation.blogspot.com/
- DearMYRTLE's Genealogy Blog at blog.dearmyrtle.com/
- Genealogy Certification: My Personal Journal at genealogycertification.wordpress.com/
- Genealogy Tip of The Day at genealogytipoftheday.blogspot.com/
- Genea-Musings at www.gneamusings.com/
- Olive Tree Genealogy Blog at olivetreegenealogy.blogspot.com/
- Photo Detective at blog.familytreemagazine.com/photodetectiveblog/
- RootDig.com at rootdig.blogspot.com/
- Search Tip Of The Day at genealogysearchtip.blogspot.com/

Examples of outstanding regional blogs:

- One Rhode Island Family at onerhodeislandfamily.com/
- Midwestern Microhistory: A Genealogy Blog at midwesternmicrohistory.blogspot.com/
- Mississippi Memories at mymississippimemories.blogspot.com/

People

Reach out to other members of the Genealogy Society, talk to the volunteers at the West Florida Genealogy Library, and visit your local Family History Center (locate your nearest FHC at familysearch.org/locations/centerlocator). And you are always welcome to join us at the Navarre Family History Center, which meets every Saturday from 10:30 to 1:30—we dedicate the first hour to a presentation from a rotating schedule of classes focusing on online research techniques, and follow with two (or more hours) discussing and researching our brick walls.

Online forums

The Internet has opened up whole new vistas for collaborating with and learning from other researchers. Discussion forums have sprouted up all over the web, and Google makes it easy to locate a forum that had or is addressing any topic you are particularly interested in learning about. Here’s how: Enter into the google search box a search term or terms that define your topic of interest, such as *reading old german script* and hit Enter. When the results page opens, append *&tbm=dsc* to the end of the URL at the top of the page, and again hit Enter. This will filter your search results, and limit them to discussion forums. You may still have to do a little digging through the search results, or revise the search terms

you used to conduct the search (don't forget to append *&tbm=dsc* to the URL of the results page whenever you change the search terms).

Facebook

Widely heralded as the repository of choice for pictures of cute kittens and your cousin's minute-by-minute update on the Auburn football game, Facebook is actually a fantastic way to reach out to other genealogists who share your geographic or surname research interests. Conduct a Facebook search for "genealogy" combined with any location (e.g., *genealogy michigan*) or surname. A short list of results will pop up, but ignore them for the moment and instead click on the bottom link "See more results for 'genealogy michigan'." Explore the results for both Pages and Groups. You may need to request to join a Closed Group, but this is merely an administrative move to ensure that spammers can be barred from posting to the group.

Video

YouTube:

To locate videos of interest:

1. Search YouTube for a topic of interest, such as *genealogy census*.
2. From the results page, explore different Filter options to narrow the results:
 - a. choose "Long" under "Duration" to see videos that are more than 20 minutes long; and
 - b. use the "Sort by" tab to sort by "Relevance," "View Count," or "Rating."

Webinars

Keep track of upcoming genealogy webinars using the Calendar at geneawebinars.com.

- FamilySearch Learning Center Video Courses are available from the Get Help link in the top right corner of any page at the FamilySearch.org website. All webinars on the site are FREE.
- The Ancestry.com Learning Center includes taped Webinars on a variety of topics—including ethnic research such as "Polish American Genealogy"—and all are FREE, with NO subscription required.
- Legacy Family Tree (the software company) hosts an excellent series of webinars at the website www.familytreewebinars.com/. Webinars may be viewed for FREE live and for seven days following the live event. The course syllabus is not available unless one subscribes or purchases an individual webinar.
- Southern California Genealogical Society has an excellent series of webinars, presented twice monthly. Archived and live webinars are available free to members; non-members may view live webinars for FREE. www.scgsgenealogy.com/webinar/overview.html
- Likewise, the Illinois State Genealogical Society at ilgensoc.org/ allows non-members FREE access to live presentations, and members may view all archived webinars for free.