



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

Inside This Issue:

[Upcoming Meetings](#)

[President's Message](#)

[January Training: Get Involved With WMGS](#)

[Tom MacEntee's GenSocSoup Webinar Series](#)

[Thank You, GivingTuesday Donors!](#)

[Genealogy Tidbit: FamilySearch Research Wiki](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions About WMGS](#)

Upcoming Meetings

January 2026 Meeting



The 1890 census was uniquely detailed, including household relationships, occupations, literacy, housing conditions, and special schedules for Union Civil War veterans and widows. Nearly the entire 1890 census was destroyed in a 1921 fire and subsequent water damage at the Commerce Department. Only fragments covering about 6,000 individuals survived out of over 62 million enumerated.

At our January monthly meeting, genealogist Sara Cochran will present "**Who Needed It Anyway? Getting Around the Missing 1890 Census**" and tell us some of the resources that may be available to address this gap.

As Sara describes her presentation, "The loss of the 1890 Federal census is a source of great frustration for American genealogists, but all hope is not lost! Learn strategies and gather tips for success in locating your family in other records between the 1880 and 1900 Federal censuses."

Sara will present a follow-up presentation to explore even more resources and complete a case study at our April 1 monthly meeting.

Sara is a full-time professional genealogist with thirty years of research experience. Her research has taken her to nearly every state in the USA and Ireland. She especially enjoys breaking down brick walls, discovering the stories of unconventional ancestors, and helping individuals preserve their photographic legacy.

She holds a genealogical research certificate from Boston University and a bachelor's degree in library science. She is an alum of the ProGen Study Group and a member of the DAR and other lineage societies, the Association of Professional Genealogists, and the Genealogical Speakers Guild.

If you'd like more information about Sara or want to sign up for her weekly newsletter, you can find her online at TheSkeletonWhisperer.com.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, January 7 at 6 p.m. ET** on Zoom. Members will receive an email to register for the Zoom link.

This presentation will be archived in the Members Only section of our website for 90 days.

February 2026 Meeting



We're delighted that nationally-known genealogist, Annette Burke-Lytle will join us again to present **"Ancestors on the Move: Migration from Farms to Cities, 1870-1920."**

Between the Civil War and World War I, Americans faced dramatic changes that shaped where and how they lived. Push and pull factors, financial panics, the reality of daily life in rural areas, and the rise of manufacturing were some of the factors that led to decisions to move from farms to cities.

Annette will guide us through the records that capture those movements — from census schedules and land deeds to city directories, newspapers, military files, and other sources. We'll learn what factors

influenced our ancestors' choices and discover practical strategies to locate the documents that bring their journeys to life.

Annette Burke Lyttle owns Heritage Detective, LLC and provides professional genealogical services in research, education, and writing. She speaks on a variety of genealogical topics at the international, national, state, and local levels and loves helping people uncover and share their family stories.

She is past president of the Association of Professional Genealogists and editor of The Florida Genealogist.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, February 4 at 6 p.m. ET** on Zoom. Members will receive an email to register for the Zoom link.

This presentation will be archived in the Members Only section of our website for 30 days.

Message From the President

by Jeanne Leblond



The start of a new year always brings a mix of nostalgia for the past and excitement for the opportunities that lie ahead. It's a time for reflection, but also a time to look forward and plan. As we enter 2026, WMGS is doing just that — laying the groundwork for an exciting year for our society and for our members.

In January, we'll be launching our subscription to Thomas MacEntee's GenSocSoup webinar platform, a new benefit we believe our members will truly enjoy. Tom has long been one of our most popular presenters, and we're delighted that his expertise will continue to enrich the genealogy community.

We are also in the early stages of exploring a Genealogy Helpers program designed to offer additional support and connection for our members. Many of you have shared how much you miss the chance to interact, exchange ideas, and enjoy the camaraderie we had during our pre-pandemic monthly meetings.

While those days are behind us, we hope this new program might offer a meaningful alternative. I encourage you to join us for our Volunteer & Discussion Night on

January 22, where we'll talk more about this idea and ways our members might contribute to our society. We'd love to hear your thoughts and ideas.

Our Program Committee has also assembled an outstanding lineup of speakers for the remainder of our 2025–2026 membership year. This winter and early spring, we'll welcome Sara Cochran, Annette Burke Lyttle, Julie Miller, and David Allen Lambert — an impressive group of presenters on topics that will enhance your research.

As the holiday season winds down, I'm looking forward to a quieter stretch of weeks. There's no rush to pack away the decorations, and I'm eager to dive back into my own family history research.

Wishing you all a bright start to the new year — good health, happiness and many rewarding family history discoveries in 2026.

January Training: Get Involved With WMGS!



WMGS is seeking more volunteers to help keep our society thriving. There are many ways to contribute and share new ideas. Routine tasks often require only a few hours each month, while special projects offer opportunities for deeper involvement. Most tasks can be done from home, and since all of our meetings are held on Zoom, you can volunteer no matter where you live.

With all that in mind, January's training session will serve a dual purpose:

- Reviewing our current volunteer needs and exploring ways members can contribute to our society's ongoing success.
- Opening a conversation about the potential launch of a Genealogy Helpers program.

Attending does not commit you to volunteering — it's simply a chance to learn more.

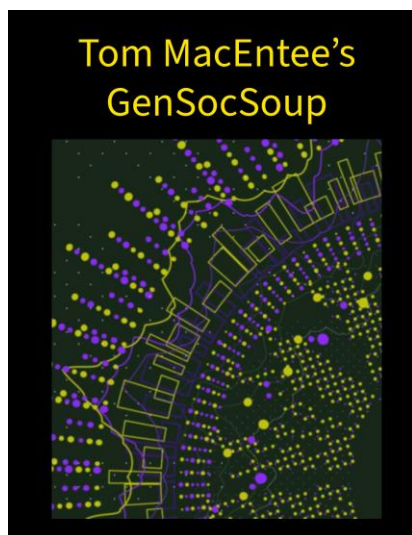
Our proposed Genealogy Helpers initiative would connect members to help each other. For example, members might review research, suggest next steps and resources, collaborate on a shared ancestor or location, or guide those just beginning their family history research.

Your input will be vital in shaping how such a program could work and what kinds of help would be most valuable. If you've participated in a similar program elsewhere, we'd love to hear about your experiences.

If you cannot join us that evening but would like information about volunteer options or have thoughts on the Genealogy Helpers program, please email us at westmassgen@gmail.com.

We hope you'll join the conversation on **Thursday, January 22 at 7:00 p.m. ET** on Zoom.

New Member Benefit: GenSocSoup Webinar Series



WMGS is excited to subscribe to Thomas MacEntee's GenSocSoup webinar series, launching January 1, 2026.

GenSocSoup is an exclusive subscription-based educational platform — similar to YouTube — that offers year-round access to genealogy webinars hosted by Tom. This subscription is available only to societies with a secure members-only website, making it a valuable new addition to our Member Benefits.

WMGS members will have 24/7 access to 15 on-demand webinars and handouts, with four brand-new webinars Tom will develop over the next year.

Some of the webinars available in January include:

- 10 Must Haves for Genealogy and Family History Success
- AI and Genealogy: Using AI to Create Better Family Stories and Narratives (updated version)

- Futureproofing Your Genealogy – Staying Up to Date on Technology (updated version)
- Genealogy Tech Troubleshooting – What Would You Do?
- Getting the Genealogy Records You Need – Privacy Laws and FOIA (updated version)
- What's Been Done: Using Someone Else's Genealogy Research

As of this newsletter posting, we are finalizing the technical details for member access through our website. Once the webinars are available, we will send an email with instructions for viewing them. In addition, our February training session will guide members through the options and address any questions about using GenSocSoup.

Finally, as many of you know, Thomas MacEntee is retiring on December 31, 2025. We wish him a happy retirement and are delighted that he will continue to share his expertise and passion for family history through this exciting new platform.

Thank You to Our GivingTuesday Donors!



We are truly grateful to everyone who contributed to our GivingTuesday campaign this year. GivingTuesday is a global celebration of generosity — a day that inspires kindness and strengthens organizations and causes around the world.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, WMGS relies entirely on membership fees and donations to sustain our programs. Thanks to your incredible generosity, we raised more than \$1,100 in tax-deductible contributions this year. These funds will play a vital role in helping us continue our mission to help our members discover their roots in Western Massachusetts and beyond.

Your donations will support programming that brings outstanding speakers and presentations in genealogy to our members. We are especially excited to announce that part of these funds will provide a subscription to Thomas MacEntee's GenSocSoup webinar series, available to members beginning in January.

We are blessed by your generosity and deeply thankful to all of our donors for investing in our shared passion for discovering, preserving, and sharing our family histories.

WMGS is pleased
to welcome
our newest
member!

Caroline Levin



Genealogy Tidbit: FamilySearch Research Wiki



The FamilySearch Research Wiki is a free online genealogy guide designed to help you discover records from around the world. You'll find resources, research strategies, and information on the repositories that hold the records.

Like Wikipedia, the research wiki is a collaborative encyclopedia of genealogical research, which is available in many languages. Every country has a page, with particularly detailed coverage for the United States, Canada, and Europe. While the wiki does not host records directly, it guides you to the places where they are preserved.

You'll find research guides, learning resources, and links to a wide variety of record types. For example, a search for Hampshire County, Massachusetts, reveals a wealth of helpful information:

- A timeline of the county's history and local histories
- Details on the court system, military records, and state census records
- Lists of local funeral homes and state record offices
- Migration routes, boundary changes, maps, and gazetteers
- Guidance on locating naturalization, probate, vital, and town records

Whether you're just beginning your family history journey or tackling a tricky research problem, the FamilySearch Research Wiki is an invaluable tool to guide your way. You can access the research wiki at https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page.

WMGS Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I find a calendar of upcoming WMGS events?

We list all of our events on our website's [Events page](#).

How do I participate in a virtual meeting or event?

Members will receive an email notice in advance of the monthly meeting, training session, or special interest group (SIG) meeting. To attend a virtual event, you will be required to preregister via a link in the email. After that, you will receive another email with the link to join the meeting via Zoom at the broadcast time. Syllabuses and handouts will be sent out in advance of most events. They will be included with the preregistration information.

I'd like to attend meetings online, but I'm not too savvy with Zoom. Do you have any trainings?

Yes. WMGS Vice President Dave Lapierre gave a [Zoom training session](#) in 2023, which is available on YouTube and in the Members Only section of our website. If you still need help, don't hesitate to contact us. We'll be glad to assist.

How can I join the WMGS Members Only Facebook Group?

Our Members Only Facebook group provides an opportunity for members to help each other with their genealogical and historical research.

To join our WMGS Members Only Facebook group, you need to have a free Facebook account. Once you log into your account, enter **WMGS Members Only** in the Search box to find it. Click on our name (it has our familiar tree logo included), then on the **Request to Join** button. A group administrator will verify your membership, and you'll be admitted as a member.

I've hit a brick wall in my research. Can WMGS help?

Information on submitting and responding to queries is available on [our website](#), along with a list of archived queries. Members can also ask for help in our Members Only Facebook group.

My friend wants to join WMGS. How can they do that?

We're always happy to welcome new members! Details on membership benefits and dues can be found on our website's [Join/Renew page](#).

I'd like to write an article for the newsletter. How do I do that?

Send your article idea to westmassgen@gmail.com for editorial review. Please note that our newsletter deadline is the 15th of the month. For example, articles to be published in the July edition must be received by WMGS by June 15.

How can I contact WMGS?

Send an email to us at westmassgen@gmail.com or contact us by mail at WMGS, P.O. Box 418, West Springfield, MA 01090-0418.

How can I make a donation to WMGS?

Donations help our nonprofit society continue its mission and are greatly appreciated. Donations can be made by mail or online at our [Donation page](#).

Who is on the Board of Directors?

The WMGS Board of Directors includes:

President: Jeanne Leblond

Vice President: Dave Lapierre

Treasurer: Position is open.

Assistant Treasurer: Jeanne Lockhart

Secretary: Position is open.

Directors: Gwen Laprade, Cara Seitchek, and John Putnam

We would also like to recognize:

Membership Coordinator: Jeanne Lockhart

Webmaster & Technology Coordinator: Dave Lapierre

Newsletter Editor: Joanne Mason

Fundraising Coordinator: Cara Seitchek



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