



# Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

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## Upcoming Meetings

### July 2026 Meeting



What happened after the ink dried on the Declaration of Independence? For many of our ancestors, the Spirit of '76 was immediately tested by the grueling reality of the New York campaign and a desperate winter retreat across the Jerseys.

At our July monthly meeting, John Putnam will present **"Sacred Honor, Frozen Feet: Finding Your Ancestors in the 'Times That Try Men's Souls.'"**

This presentation explores the pivotal 14-month window from the spring of 1776 to the summer of 1777. John will trace the political courage required to sign a document of

"high treason" and the physical endurance of the Continental soldiers who saved the Revolution at Trenton and Princeton.

Designed specifically for genealogists, this talk goes beyond the history books to focus on the records. John will discuss how to locate your Revolutionary ancestors in NARA record groups, interpret pension narratives of the Ten Crucial Days, and find the hidden stories of those who risked their lives during the nation's darkest hour.

A Colorado resident, John is a native of Western Massachusetts with deep colonial roots. He grew up on a farm in Southwick, graduated from UMass Amherst, and earned a master's degree in political science from the University of Colorado. He's the past president of the Pikes Peak Genealogical Society, a current WMGS board member, and a fascinating speaker.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, July 8 at 6 p.m. ET** on Zoom. Members will receive an email to register for the Zoom link. Please note the date, as we will be meeting one week later than usual because of the July 4 holiday.

*This presentation will be recorded and archived in the Members Only section of our website.*

## August 2026 Meeting



Two newspapers — published miles apart in separate counties — announced the baptism of Louis White Strickland in the Congregational church in Cold Spring, Massachusetts.

The notice named Louis's parents as Mr. and Mrs. Warren Strickland, and local records confirmed that the church and minister were correctly identified. Yet a thorough search of vital records turned up no birth record for Louis, nor any evidence that his parents ever lived in Massachusetts.

Who were Louis and his parents? And where, exactly, was Cold Spring? WMGS member Ed Strickland unraveled this intriguing genealogical mystery. At our August meeting, he will share the twists and turns of his research journey, including the false leads and unexpected detours.

Ed is a life member of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists and the Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor (DFAW), being a past president of both. He has served DFAW as a genealogist for nearly 40 years and is a member of the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council, where he is a consultant for the Ancestors Road Show project.

Mark your calendars and plan to join us on **Wednesday, August 5 at 6 p.m. ET** on Zoom. Members will receive an email to register for the Zoom link.

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

## Message From the President

**by Jeanne Leblond**



This year, our nation is celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution. Some of us will celebrate at a parade or local event. Others may be home, learning more about ancestors who served in the military or lived through that time. No matter how we mark the anniversary, we honor our ancestors when we learn about them and their experiences.

Even those without identified ancestors in the colonies can appreciate the courage, sacrifices, and choices made by people of that era to create a better world for the future. Without them, our immigrant ancestors would have had much different experiences in coming to this country. And our lives might be much different as well.

Not traveling this summer? Then check out the Museum of the American Revolution described in this month's Genealogy Tidbit. Heat, traffic, and high gas prices may keep us home, but we can still explore this museum!

We are looking forward to our annual summer presentations by fellow members John Putnam and Edwin Strickland. John will explore the realities of daily life during the

Revolutionary period, making history seem alive. Ed will present an intriguing family story based on a short newspaper article. We all love a good family mystery!

July always feels like the perfect month to relax, recharge, enjoy a good book, and spend time on genealogy, especially when the weather keeps us indoors. Our summer reading list offers plenty of inspiration, and on sizzling days, nothing beats settling in for some genealogy research.

If you prefer video learning, explore the many genealogy-related topics available on YouTube. Dave Lapierre's June Tech Talk provided excellent guidance for navigating YouTube's resources. If you missed it, the recording and handout are available in the Members Only section of [our website](#).

And for those of you wondering, our first Special Interest Group (SIG) session was enjoyable, productive, and well attended. We almost had to turn the lights out to end the session! You can check out the resources list in our website's Members Only section. The brick walls we discussed can be found under the Brick Wall Queries tab on our website.

We are looking forward to more SIG sessions this fall and hope many of you will consider sharing what you are working on, sending us your brick walls to discuss, and most of all, joining us at the sessions.

We wish you a wonderful month of July!

## **It's Almost Time to Renew!**



It's almost time to renew your membership to WMGS. Memberships in our society run from September 1 through August 31 of each year.

In late July, we'll send members an email reminding them that it's time to renew and explaining the two options for doing so. The easiest way to renew is through our website. Just click on the Join/Renew tab and renew by PayPal. The other option is to mail a check to our society (WMGS, P.O. Box 418, West Springfield, MA 01090-0418).

If your contact information has changed in the past year, please let us know. If you pay by check, please include a copy of your invoice with the corrected contact information. You may also notify us by email at [westmassgen@gmail.com](mailto:westmassgen@gmail.com).

It's important to renew by August 31 so that you won't miss out on any membership benefits. We'll update the password to the Members Only section of our website on or about September 1. If you haven't renewed your membership, you will no longer receive invitations to register for our Zoom events.

We're excited about the programming we'll offer during our 2026-2027 membership year:

- A variety of intriguing and useful presentations to help further your search
- Training sessions, including more Tech Talk with Dave sessions
- Special Interest Group presentations, including sessions on Western Mass ancestors, colonial ancestors, and Canadian ancestors

Other topics under consideration include AI for genealogy, military ancestors and ethnic research.

We'll also introduce two new benefits:

- A member directory to share the surnames, places, and topics that our members focus on
- A Gen Helpers group for members who need individualized help

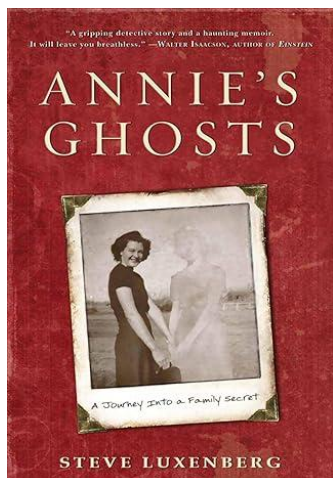
We hope that you will renew your membership in WMGS. We value your membership and interest in helping WMGS achieve its goal of offering quality genealogical education for many more years to come.

It's not too early to renew. You don't need to wait for the invoice to send in your renewal. Memberships that are renewed now will extend through August 31, 2027.

Don't forget to renew your membership by August 31!

## Summer Reading

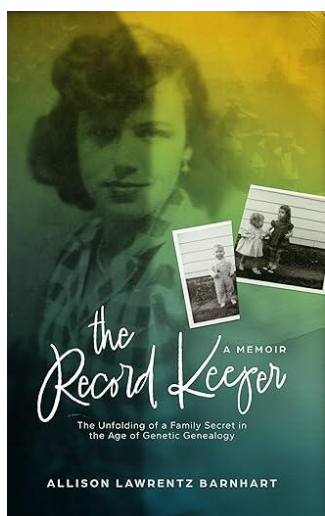
Whether you are looking for a beach read or planning a staycation project to work on a brick wall or learn a new skill, we have something for everyone. Our list includes several books that rival the best detective stories, an intriguing book on female ancestors, and an excellent work on using ChatGPT in your research.



### ***Annie's Ghosts: A Journey Into a Family Secret***

by Steve Luxenberg  
Hyperion, 2009

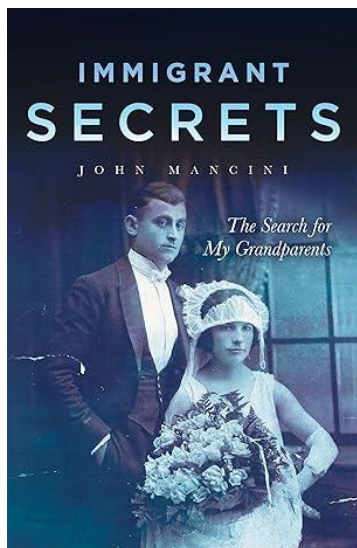
Steve Luxenberg's *Annie's Ghosts* is a gripping blend of memoir and genealogical detective work. A deathbed confession — that his mother had a hidden sister — launches Luxenberg into an investigation using many tools familiar to genealogists: immigration records, institutional archives, interviews, and careful timeline reconstruction. His search uncovers the story of an immigrant family shaped by stigma, secrecy, and the social history of 20th century institutional care. For family historians, the book is a powerful reminder of how persistence and thoughtful research can illuminate long-buried truths.



### ***The Record Keeper: The Unfolding of a Family Secret in the Age of Genetic Genealogy***

by Allison Lawrentz Barnhart  
Legacy Book Press, 2024

In *The Record Keeper*, Allison Lawrentz Barnhart uncovers a long-hidden family secret through the tools of genetic genealogy. A simple DNA test purchased for her father produces unexpected results, prompting her to examine the carefully preserved photos, scrapbooks, and memorabilia left by her grandmother. Using DNA evidence alongside traditional records, Barnhart pieces together a sixty-year-old story while navigating questions of identity, family loyalty, and whether to reveal the truth.



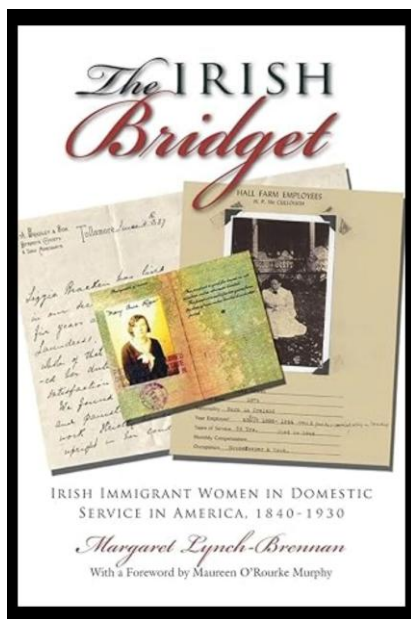
***Immigrant Secrets: The Search for My Grandparents***

by John F. Mancini  
Self-published, 2022

In *Immigrant Secrets*, John Mancini traces a family mystery that began with a childhood belief: His Italian immigrant grandparents had both died in the 1930s. Decades later, genealogical research reveals a quite different truth.

Through census records, ship manifests, and other familiar sources, Mancini uncovers that his grandparents lived long lives but spent them institutionalized at the Rockland Insane Asylum.

The book follows his determined efforts to obtain restricted hospital files, legal documents, and death certificates. It's an excellent illustration of how genealogists navigate privacy laws, archival barriers, and incomplete records. As the story unfolds, Mancini also discovers an entire extended family of uncles, aunts, and cousins, whose existence had never been acknowledged.



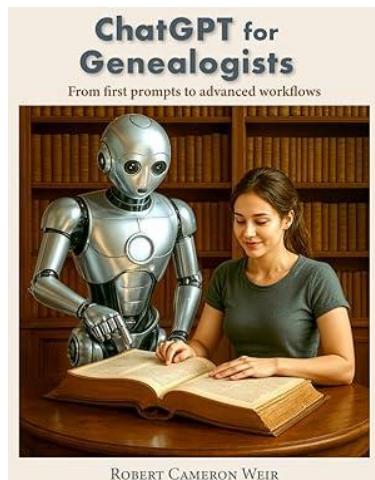
***The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930***

by Margaret Lynch-Brennan  
Syracuse University Press, 2009

*The Irish Bridget* offers a vivid and compassionate look at the thousands of young Irish women who crossed the Atlantic to work as domestic servants in American households. Drawing on letters, oral histories, and contemporary accounts, historian Margaret Lynch-Brennan brings these women's stories to life.

For family researchers, the book provides context for understanding the daily realities that Irish female ancestors may have experienced. It discusses their work routines, wages, living conditions, friendships, religious communities, and the emotional ties they maintained with family back home. Even if your own ancestors left few written records, this book helps illuminate the social and cultural world they inhabited.

Although focused on Irish immigrants, the book also sheds light on the experiences of all women in domestic service, including European, Southern, and African American women. The profiles are an interesting read, and the book is a valuable resource for researching all our female ancestors who may have worked in similar roles.



### ***Chat GPT for Genealogists***

by Robert Cameron Weir

Antic Press, 2026

*ChatGPT for Genealogists* is a practical, comprehensive guide that shows family genealogists how to use generative AI as a true research assistant. It's an excellent resource to keep close by for readers at every experience level.

The book opens with clear Quick Start Guides that explain how ChatGPT works and how to craft effective prompts, making it especially helpful for beginners. From there, it moves into hands-on genealogical applications: transcribing and translating historical documents, extracting information from census and vital records, interpreting visual clues in old photographs, and even summarizing and analyzing GEDCOM files. Later chapters address genealogical reasoning, privacy, and ethics — essential topics for anyone integrating AI into their research.

## **Genealogy Tidbit:** **Museum of the American Revolution**



The 250th anniversary of the American Revolution — and the founding of our nation — is just around the corner. While most of us won't have the chance to visit the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia, we *can* take a remarkable virtual field trip from the comfort of home.

The museum offers an extensive digital experience featuring thousands of artifacts from the Revolutionary era, including manuscripts, letters, military records, and printed works. You can view iconic objects such as George Washington's original sleeping and office tent, along with artwork that brings the people and events of the era to life. A 360-degree

online tour allows you to “walk through” exhibits and explore the museum as if you were there in person.

For genealogists, the museum’s website is especially valuable. It includes:

- A detailed timeline of the American Revolution.
- Digitized historical documents, including examples of Continental Army service records.
- Select family records that shed light on everyday lives during the war. These resources can help you better understand the world your ancestors lived in and the roles they may have played during this pivotal period in history.

Don’t bypass the educational materials designed for teachers and students. They offer clear explanations, historical context, and thematic lessons that can deepen your understanding of how the Revolution shaped your ancestor’s experiences.

Taken together, these digital exhibits provide a meaningful way to explore the Revolutionary era without leaving home. It’s an excellent resource for anyone seeking historical context, genealogical clues, or a deeper appreciation of America’s founding.

Visit the Museum of the American Revolution at: [Online Exhibits - Museum of the American Revolution](#).

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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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