



# Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

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## Upcoming Meetings

### 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.)

## September 2026 Meeting



Do you have children in your family lines who seem to have vanished or who turn up in unexpected places, such as in the Midwest or western part of our country?

The orphan train movement (1854-1929) relocated over 200,000 children to foster homes across the country, in hopes of providing them with better lives. Historians estimate that only about one-third of the children placed on orphan trains had no living parents. Who were these children and why were they sent away from their families?

To kick off our 2026-2027 membership year, genealogist Karen Fortin will present **"Orphan Trains and the Children Who Rode Them."**

The story of the orphan trains, which relocated children from the eastern cities to rural farmlands, has become a part of American popular culture. Karen's presentation explores the facts behind the legends, follows a group of children "placed-out" in 1880, and provides information on resources available to learn more about the orphan trains and their riders.

Karen Fortin received a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in library and information science from the University of South Florida. She worked at the Barbara S. Ponce Public Library in Pinellas Park, Florida for 30 years before deciding to focus on genealogical research. She's a frequent lecturer at genealogical societies, public libraries, and other organizations. One of her goals is to help people explore

historical periods, places, and events so that they can better understand their ancestors and the world in which they lived.

We hope you'll join us on **September 2 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 60 days.)

## Message From the President

**by Jeanne Leblond**



Summer offers us more than sunshine and fresh produce — it gives genealogical researchers an opportunity to experience continuity with the past. When we bite into a fresh ear of local corn or into a juicy tomato, we're not just enjoying seasonal foods. We're tasting the very crops our ancestors planted, harvested, and relied upon. These small things can help us imagine their daily lives more vividly than records alone ever could.

Walking where they walked deepens that connection even further. Attending a town fair, an agricultural exhibition, a patriotic parade, or a visit to a centuries-old tavern places us directly in the environments our ancestors knew. Many of the paths through town centers, harbor fronts, and riverbanks follow the same routes. The architecture, the landscape, and even the breezes off the water would feel familiar to our ancestors. For genealogists, these experiences help transform names in our family trees into real people with real surroundings.

While our modern routines differ from theirs, these shared summertime activities remind us that our ancestors were not just names in a family tree but individuals who found joy, faced challenges, and lived within landscapes that still shape our towns and cities today. For genealogical researchers, these experiences can help us understand context, culture, and environment — all essential for interpreting records, reconstructing family stories, and appreciating the lives behind the documents.

If you missed John Putnam's wonderful presentation on our ancestors' experiences during the American Revolution, the recording is available in the Members Only section of our website. We're looking forward to Ed Strickland's August presentation on how he solved an intriguing family mystery.

As a reminder, our new membership year is just around the corner, and we hope you'll renew your membership in our society. Genealogy is both more rewarding and successful when we keep learning and sharing together and stay connected with fellow genealogists.

We have exciting opportunities planned for our next membership year – from more presentations to increase our genealogy education to new ways to connect with each other.

We wish you a wonderful summer and look forward to learning, exploring, and sharing more genealogy with you next year.

## September SIG: Explore Your Western Mass Roots



If you missed our first Western Mass Ancestors Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting in May, another opportunity is just around the corner. Our next session will take place on **Thursday, September 17 at 7 p.m.**

At our first session, members enjoyed short presentations on local companies and uncovered Quabbin-area ancestors, as well as a demonstration of how AI prompts can support genealogical research. We also tackled two brick wall challenges submitted by members with roots in Chester, Massachusetts. The conversation was lively, informative, and could easily have continued well into the night.

As we prepare for our September session, we're inviting contributions from members. This gives you time to gather materials, organize your thoughts, and decide how you'd like to participate.

We welcome:

- **Short presentations (5–15 minutes).** Discuss your Western Mass ancestor, family line, or research topic. Please highlight the resources you used — databases, archives, websites, books, maps, or tools.
- **Brick wall challenges.** Have a research puzzle you can't crack? Share a brief summary of the ancestor or problem, along with any clues or documents you've collected, and we'll add your challenge to the agenda.
- **Helpful resources and tools.** If you've discovered a useful website, updated database, research technique, or practical tip, we'd love for you to share it with the group.

The deadline for submissions is **Wednesday, September 9**. To offer a presentation, submit a brick wall challenge, share a recent breakthrough, or highlight a resource or technique, please email us at [westmassgen@gmail.com](mailto:westmassgen@gmail.com).

If you're unsure about format, we can provide a suggested outline and are happy to help with creating PowerPoint slides. Submissions will be added to the agenda in the order received, so if you have something you'd like discussed, now is the time.

**Looking Ahead:** Our October SIG session will focus on **Canadian ancestors** (all provinces).

## **Renew Your Membership by August 31**

It's that time of year again! As one successful membership year comes to a close, we're excited to begin another productive and inspiring year at WMGS.

### **Membership Renewal Reminder**

WMGS memberships run from September 1 through August 31, which means it's time to renew for the upcoming year. All members should have received a renewal email containing everything needed to continue their membership.

You can renew using either of these convenient options:

- **Online:** Visit [our website](#), click the Join/Renew tab, and submit your renewal through PayPal.
- **By Mail:** Send a check using the invoice included in your renewal email.

If your mailing address or email has changed in the past year, please update your information by completing the invoice form included in the renewal email or emailing us directly at [westmassgen@gmail.com](mailto:westmassgen@gmail.com).



**Renew by August 31** to maintain uninterrupted access to member benefits!

*Please note: Our website's **Members Only password** will be updated on or about September 1. Only current members will receive invitations to register for our Zoom presentations.*

## Coming Up This Fall

We have an exciting lineup planned to kick off the new membership year:

- **September:** "Orphan Trains and the Children Who Rode Them" with Karen Fortin
- **October:** "ChatGPT" with Robert Cameron Weir
- **November:** "No OMPF? No Problem!" with Sara Cochran (U.S. Office of Military Personnel Records)
- **December:** "DNA Beyond the Basics" with Peggy Jude

Our Special Interest Group sessions resume this fall, and we're introducing several new member resources, including our **Genealogy Helpers group**. We're also launching a **Surname/Place/Topic Directory** to help members connect, collaborate, and advance their research. Plus, **Tech Talk with Dave** will be returning with more hands-on training.

We hope you'll join us for another year of genealogy discovery and community.

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

## Genealogy Tidbit: Massachusetts Genealogical Council



**MASSACHUSETTS  
GENEALOGICAL  
COUNCIL**

The Massachusetts Genealogical Council (MGC) is a statewide organization committed to protecting public access to records and strengthening the genealogical community.

Since 1980, MGC has monitored legislation, advocated for open vital and historical records, and represented genealogical societies across the Commonwealth, including WMGS. Their work ensures that genealogists retain access to vital, institutional, and historical records essential for accurate and thorough research.

A major part of MGC's mission is education. Their Massachusetts: Open Records Education (M.O.R.E.) series features expert speakers on topics ranging from vital records to specialized research strategies.

These presentations are typically free and often recorded. Several recent programs are available on their website. Highlights include:

- A presentation from John D. Warner, Jr., archivist of the Massachusetts Archives
- Margaret Fortier's exploration of 400 years of Massachusetts records
- A conversation with town clerks offering practical insights into how clerk offices operate, what records they hold, and how researchers can access them

An unusual but helpful resource is their page dedicated to institutional records in Massachusetts, which provides both a history and timeline of various institutions that operated in Massachusetts and information on how to access records that may be available.

Additional resources include advocacy guides, legislative summaries and updates, and the MGC Sentinel blog, which keeps researchers informed about issues affecting access to records.

For anyone researching Massachusetts families, MGC is an essential ally that promotes access, provides education, and encourages all of us to stay informed about issues that directly affect our ability to uncover family history.

To support MGC's advocacy efforts, subscribe to their blog, or to access their resources, visit [www.massgencouncil.org](http://www.massgencouncil.org).

## 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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