



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

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Upcoming Meetings

October 2026 Meeting



At our October monthly meeting, Robert Cameron Weir will return to WMGS to present **"ChatGPT for Genealogists."** Rob will explore how ChatGPT can become a powerful ally in your genealogical research.

After a quick introduction to how this AI tool works, Rob will dive into a series of hands-on examples that showcase the full range of its capabilities. ChatGPT can tackle an impressive variety of tasks, such as suggesting source material, interpreting images, and translating records.

Join us to see how AI can revolutionize your research, save you time, and reveal new insights in unexpected ways.

Robert Cameron Weir is a genealogical researcher, educator, and author who specializes in New England genealogy. He is a member of the Association for Professional Genealogists and is the Publications Director for the New Hampshire Society of Genealogists. He's also the author of the new book *ChatGPT for Genealogists: From First Prompts to Advanced Workflows*.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, October 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.)



November 2026 Meeting



Researching military records in November is a meaningful way to connect personal family history with our ancestors who served our country. It's a quiet, powerful act that says: *Your service still matters, and we still remember you.*

On November 4, we welcome Sara Cochran back to WMGS to guide us in researching our military ancestors who served during the 20th century. This presentation carries special significance, as many of us may be exploring the stories of relatives we personally knew.

In 1973, a fire destroyed millions of Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF). This is one reason why researching 20th-century veterans is especially difficult. Sara's presentation "**No OMPF? No Problem!**" will look at other ways to find the stories of the World War I, World War II, Korean War, and peacetime veterans in our families.

Sara is a full-time professional genealogist with 30 years of research experience. 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 Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the Association of Professional Genealogists, and the Genealogical Speakers Guild.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, November 4 at 6 p.m. EST** 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.)

Message From the President

by Jeanne Leblond



October is Family History Month, the perfect time to focus on our family histories and to reconnect with the stories that shaped us. With cooler weather upon us, we are focusing on just that.

This month's Genealogy Tidbit invites us to think forward as much as we think back, with a focus on how to be a good ancestor. It's a reminder that our research isn't just

about uncovering the past; it's also about the legacy we are building for those who will someday research *us*.

We are also leaning into new tools that can help us grow as researchers. Many of us are experimenting with ChatGPT and other platforms to advance our work. Some members have already had remarkable breakthroughs with AI, while others are still warming up to the idea. Wherever you fall on that spectrum, one thing is clear — the more you understand the technology, the more powerfully you can use it to support your research. Rob Weir is an expert on using ChatGPT for genealogy research and we're excited to welcome him back to our group.

Our special interest groups (SIGs) continue to shine. This month marks the launch of our first Canadian SIG, designed for anyone researching ancestors from throughout Canada. Even though many of our members have French Canadian roots, this session will broaden the scope to include all regions of Canada.

And speaking of SIGs, last month's Western Mass ancestors SIG was another standout session. The range of skills and perspectives our members bring to these sessions is an impressive reminder that our society is full of talented, resourceful researchers.

Behind the scenes, we are continuing work on our GenHelpers group. The goal is to create a supportive, accessible space where members can get guidance, share insights, and strengthen their research skills. We are excited about the progress and hope to roll it out soon.

Family History Month is a celebration of connections to our past, to each other, and to the future genealogists who will follow us. We wish you a successful month connecting to your family history.

WMGS is pleased
to welcome
a new member!

Susan Garman



October SIG — Canadian Ancestors



Our first Canadian ancestors special interest group (SIG) will take place on **Thursday, October 22 at 7 p.m. ET.**

Whether your ancestors lived in the eastern provinces, the western provinces, or somewhere in between, this session will explore topics relevant to **all** Canadian family history research.

We invite you to participate by offering a short presentation, submitting a brick wall challenge, sharing a recent discovery, or highlighting a resource that may help fellow members.

We encourage you to use the coming weeks to look over your research, gather any materials, and decide if you'd like to share something with the group.

The deadline for submissions is **Wednesday, October 14.**

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. 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 to discuss, don't delay!

We Need Your Genealogy Stories & Discoveries!

Our upcoming special interest group (SIG) sessions are built around member contributions. Consider submitting:

Mini-Presentations (5–15 minutes): Tell us about an ancestor, a family line, or a research topic and highlight the resources that guided your search.

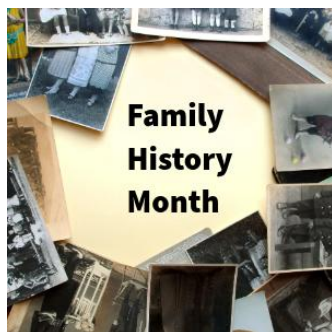
Brick Wall Mysteries: Got a puzzle you can't solve? Send a short overview of the problem and any clues you've gathered. We'll tackle it together.

Favorite Tools & Finds: Whether it's a website, database update, research trick, or time-saving tip, share what's been working for you.

Have an idea for a new SIG topic? Do you have an item to share that doesn't seem to fit into one of our SIGs? Let us know, and we'll find a spot for it!

Genealogy Tidbit:

Becoming the Ancestor You Wish You Had



October is Family History Month, a time when we celebrate our heritage and honor the people who came before us. This year, we're turning that celebration forward. Instead of focusing only on our ancestors, we're thinking about our families, our descendants, and the future generations who will someday wonder about us.

When we research our ancestors, we often find ourselves wishing they had left behind just a little more. Imagine how much easier your work would be if they had preserved items like these:

- Birth, baptism, marriage, or death records
- Lists of places they lived or moved to
- Notes about their occupations
- Labeled family photos
- Stories about holidays, school days, courtships, or honeymoons
- Recipes for beloved family dishes
- Details about heirlooms — where they came from and why they mattered

Most of us would answer yes to wanting all of these things. And most of us would also answer no when asked whether we have documented our own lives this thoroughly.

Family History Month is the perfect time to change that and start becoming the kind of ancestor future generations will be grateful for.

Why This Matters

As family historians, we've already done more research than we inherited. But the most valuable information — the stories, memories, and context only you can provide — will be lost unless you preserve it now. A few small efforts become priceless gifts to the genealogists who come after you.

Steps to Becoming a Good Ancestor

1. Write Your Story

Create a short biography that includes:

- Birthplace and childhood
- Schools attended
- Military service
- Marriage details
- Careers and places you've lived
- Hobbies, passions, and milestones

A single page can give future researchers a foundation you wish your ancestors had given you.

2. Capture Your Memories

Your descendants may never get the chance to interview you, so record your stories while you can. Here are some suggestions:

- A notebook for quick memories
- Sticky notes at the kitchen table
- A simple computer document for short entries
- A recipe binder with notes about origins and traditions

Brief reflections are just as meaningful as long narratives.

3. Label Everything

Unlabeled photos and heirlooms quickly lose their stories.

- Use a soft pencil to add names, dates, and places to photo backs.
- Sort images into labeled boxes and scan them.
- Place short notes with heirloom items, describing their provenance.
- Even better, keep index cards or a notebook describing heirlooms and their history.

These small details will save future genealogists hours of guesswork.

4. Organize Your Research

Help the next family historian by making your work accessible.

- Store vital documents together.
- Back up digital files and scanned photos.
- Use both an online tree and a stand-alone program.
- Interview older relatives.
- Ensure someone you trust knows where to find your passwords and research materials.

Think of this as creating a road map for the generations who will follow you.

Start Today

Waiting for more time often means never starting. You don't need to tackle everything at once. Each small step brings you closer to being the ancestor you wish you had.

This October, celebrate Family History Month by preserving your own story. Your descendants will thank you for generations.

Help Wanted!

Our society needs volunteers to help keep our community thriving. There are several ways you can get involved:

Board Positions

- **Secretary** – Record minutes of board meetings and support organizational operations.
- **Treasurer** – Oversee financial tracking and reporting.

Board meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of each month, except July, August, and December.

Communications & Content Contributors

- **Facebook posts** – Share updates, highlights, and engaging content.
- **Newsletter items** – Contribute short articles, genealogy tidbits, or book recommendations.

Your involvement strengthens our society and keeps our shared passion for family history alive.

There's a place for you to help!

Contact us at westmassgen@gmail.com to learn more.

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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