



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

Inside This Issue:

[Upcoming Meetings](#)

[President's Message](#)

[Upcoming SIGs](#)

[Genealogy Tidbit: Family Tree Magazine Newsletters](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions About WMGS](#)

Upcoming Meetings

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.

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.)



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 lives in Dover, New Hampshire. He specializes in hard problems related to New England genealogy, from 1620 to the present. 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.)

Message From the President

by Jeanne Leblond



I always love the start of a new membership year. It has that same feeling I used to get at the beginning of a school year—fresh notebooks, new possibilities, and the sense that we're about to learn something exciting.

As we dive in, we've already lined up events, monthly presentations, and speakers who can help us keep pace with the ever-changing world of genealogy. There are so many online learning options these days, but honestly, nothing compares to the value of local knowledge and a community that understands the history of our own area.

Behind the scenes, we're working on our new **GenHelpers** group and our **Member Directory** which we hope to roll out this fall. Both will make it easier for members to connect, share ideas, and help each other tackle research challenges. I think they're going to open up some wonderful opportunities for collaboration.

We're also excited to offer more **Special Interest Group** sessions. Our first one, which focused on Western Mass ancestors, was a big hit. If you weren't able to attend it, I hope you'll give the next session a try. You can share a short item, submit a brick wall challenge, or offer a tip you think others might find useful. Or just attend as a participant. You never know when someone's information or suggestion will be exactly the clue you need for your own research.

As summer winds down, I'm looking forward to cooler weather so I can finally get out to a few cemeteries and clean some family gravestones. Spring was just too wet, so that project stayed on my to-do list longer than I'd hoped.

To everyone who has already renewed, thank you so much for your continued support. And if renewal slipped your mind, no worries... but don't wait too long.

Wishing you a beautiful fall season, lots of genealogy breakthroughs, and, perhaps, something crossed off your own to-do list.



Upcoming Special Interest Groups

September SIG: Western Mass Ancestors



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. ET.**

At our first session, members enjoyed short presentations on local companies, uncovered Quabbin-area ancestors, and saw a demonstration of how AI prompts can support genealogical research. We also discussed two brick wall challenges submitted by members with roots in Chester, Massachusetts.

As we prepare for our September session, we're inviting contributions from all members. You do not have to be a professional genealogist or have years of experience to participate.

We welcome:

- **Short presentations (5–15 minutes)** on a 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. 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, now is the time.

October SIG: Canadian Ancestors



Our first Canadian Ancestors 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!

Genealogy Tidbit: Family Tree Magazine Newsletters



Many of us enjoy Family Tree Magazine, but their website is equally worth a visit. It offers an impressive range of free genealogy tools covering research methods, geographic areas, reference materials, and even podcasts featuring well known experts in the field.

With a simple free account, researchers gain access to a large collection of forms and worksheets—checklists, timelines, family group sheets, research logs, cemetery record forms, and ancestor profile worksheets. One standout is the Genealogy Records Checklist, a practical way to track progress across census, vital, and military records. It's especially helpful when working through persistent brick walls.

Another excellent resource is their collection of 10 Essential Genealogy Research Forms, designed to help genealogists organize searches, document findings, and maintain consistency from project to project. These tools are valuable for beginners building good habits as well as seasoned researchers looking to stay organized and inspired.

The site also offers free weekly newsletters featuring articles on a wide variety of genealogy topics, along with occasional bonus downloads. While some premium content requires a subscription, there is still a generous amount of high quality free material available. Be sure to check out the website at www.familytreemagazine.com.

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



Copyright © 2026 by the Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc. All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any way without written permission of WMGS. For permission to reproduce any article in this newsletter, contact the editor at westmassgen@gmail.com.

The editor reserves the right to edit all contributions.