



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

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Upcoming Meetings

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. 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.)

December 2026 Meeting



Curious — or confused — about your DNA test results? Maybe you don't recognize many of the names in your match list, you're wondering why you don't share DNA with someone you expected to, or you've noticed your siblings' results look surprisingly different. And what exactly do terms like *endogamy*, *pedigree collapse*, and *consanguinity* mean for your research?

Join us at our December 2 monthly meeting as genealogist Peggy Jude presents "**DNA – Just Beyond the Basics – Adding to Your Solid Foundation.**" Peggy will discuss how the effective use of DNA can further your genealogical research. Building on the basics, this session covers working with your match list, determining relationships, prioritizing matches, using advanced tools, and understanding the impact of endogamy and pedigree collapse.

Peggy is a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists and the Genealogical Speakers Guild. She was the instructor in the 2023-2025 DNA foundations course at IGHR. She is a graduate of ProGen and multiple advanced genealogical institutes.

Peggy specializes in five areas of genealogical interest: DNA, genealogical technology, preserving family history and family heirlooms, genealogical methods and records, and Swedish genealogy. She serves as the vice president and a board member for the Manatee Genealogical Society in Florida, and she leads both the DNA and the technology for genealogy special interest groups for their society.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, December 2, 2026, 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



November is a meaningful month for families, as we take time to honor our veterans and celebrate the traditions that connect us across generations.

The devastating 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis continues to affect both veterans and genealogists. For veterans, the loss of millions of service files has made it far more difficult to document military service and secure benefits. For genealogists, it has created frustrating gaps in the military histories of our World War I, World War II, Korean War, and other 20th century ancestors.

At this month's meeting, Sara Cochran will present **"No OMPF? No Problem!"** — an important program on locating alternative sources when Official Military Personnel Files are missing. Her presentation will help us uncover the stories of our ancestors' service, allowing us to preserve and share them. Telling these stories remains one of the most meaningful ways we can honor those who served.

Following the strong interest in Rob Weir's recent presentation on ChatGPT, we're excited to launch our first AI special interest group. This SIG will be a place to share how you're using AI tools in your research, ask questions, and learn from one another. Whether you're already enthusiastic about AI's potential in genealogy or still deciding how — or if — it fits into your research, we hope you'll join us.

To me, genealogists have a unique advantage when it comes to celebrating family traditions: We know the people behind them. When we approach holidays with a genealogist's mindset, occasions like Thanksgiving and birthdays become richer and more meaningful. Cooking family recipes, using heirloom dishes, or sharing the stories behind treasured objects allows us to bring history forward in subtle but powerful ways. These traditions quietly teach others, especially younger generations, about their ancestors through experiences that help us all form a connection.

We wish you a warm and memorable Thanksgiving season, filled with family, stories, and traditions.

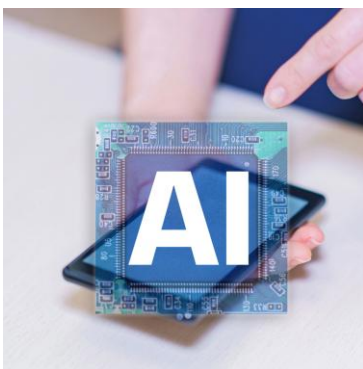
November SIG — AI & Genealogy

At our November special interest group (SIG) meeting, we'll explore how AI is rapidly becoming a practical tool in family history research.

Have you used an AI platform to:

- Transcribe or translate a document in a foreign language?
- Create a research plan or identify records and resources?
- Organize data, summarize documents, or interpret hard-to-read records?
- Analyze, date, or enhance a photograph?
- Research historical events or time periods for an ancestor sketch or family biography?

Or have you used AI in another way?



We invite members to share the ways they have used AI to support their genealogy research. Our agenda will be shaped by your submissions, and we welcome anything related to AI and genealogy.

Whether you're already using AI, just beginning to explore it, or simply curious, we encourage everyone to attend this session. It's a great opportunity to learn from one another, discover new tools, and see how AI can support both beginners and experienced researchers.

We hope you will consider submitting an example to share with fellow members. We will send the finalized agenda a few days before the meeting.

Please send your AI examples or questions to westmassgen@gmail.com by **Friday, November 13**, so we can include them in the agenda. If you're unsure about the format or need assistance preparing an item to share, let us know.

We hope you'll join us on **Thursday, November 19 at 7 p.m. ET** on Zoom.

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!

Join Us For GivingTuesday



As the holiday season approaches, people around the world pause to focus on gratitude and giving back. WMGS is proud to take part in **GivingTuesday on Tuesday, December 1**, a global day of philanthropy that connects people to the nonprofit organizations that are an integral part of their everyday lives.

Why Your Support Matters This Year

Over the past year, your partnership has helped us achieve several milestones. Because of friends like you, we were able to offer webinars with top genealogy specialists, create a GenHelpers program, and offer a new series of lectures by Tom MacEntee.

How You Can Participate

1. **Make a Gift:** On Tuesday December 1, visit our website at westmassgen.com to make a secure online donation.
2. **Spread the Word:** Tell your friends, family, and colleagues why you care about WMGS. Share our posts on social media.
3. **Double Your Impact:** Check if your employer has a matching gift program to double your contribution!

Every gift — no matter the size — deepens our impact on the community we share. Thank you for your continued dedication to our mission.

Please add **GivingTuesday** to your calendar for **December 1**. (You don't have to wait; if you prefer to make a donation now, just go to our website at www.westmassgen.com, click on the JOIN tab, and use the PayPal button.)

Save the Date! WMGS Holiday Party

Our annual *virtual* holiday party will take place on **Thursday, December 17**. We'll continue our tradition of sharing family memories and photos, exploring newspaper clippings that show how our Western Massachusetts ancestors celebrated the season, and taking a festive stroll down memory lane.

We invite all members to contribute items — family photos, holiday-related heirlooms, written memories, or anything that reflects your family's seasonal traditions. Your contributions help make this gathering special each year.

Mark your calendars and start exploring your family archives for items to share. We look forward to celebrating with you!

Genealogy Tidbit: MACRIS Database



The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) has developed a helpful tool for understanding the places where Massachusetts families lived, worked, worshiped, and built their communities.

Though not a traditional genealogy resource, MACRIS (<https://mhc-macris.net/>) is a searchable repository of information on historic buildings, districts, and cultural resources across the Commonwealth. It draws from state and local surveys, National Register nominations, historic district reports, and thousands of photographs and digital inventory forms.

Tracing and Understanding the Places Your Ancestors Lived

With just an address or historic house name, MACRIS can reveal when a building was constructed, how it was used, and what its architectural features suggest about the social status or occupation of its residents. Some forms include early owners, construction dates, and notes on families associated with a property. Even when names are absent, architectural style and building age help you determine whether your ancestor built the home, purchased it later, or lived in an already established structure.

Reconstructing Neighborhoods and Communities

Historic district entries often include maps, descriptions of local industries, notes on immigration patterns, and explanations of how neighborhoods developed. These details help you visualize the broader community your ancestors experienced.

Identifying Churches, Schools, Cemeteries, and Workplaces

MACRIS documents far more than houses. Churches, schools, factories, farms, cemeteries, town halls, and social clubs appear throughout the database, helping you locate the institutions your ancestors likely used based on their religion, occupation, or civic involvement. While MACRIS does not list individual burials, its cemetery entries often include founding histories, notes on prominent families, and photos.

Finding Additional Records

MACRIS forms frequently cite historic atlases, Sanborn fire insurance maps, town histories, architectural surveys, and local historical society collections. These references can lead you to other sources and local records that may contain names, occupations, burials, and family details.

A companion GIS tool, MACRIS Maps, allows users to explore historic resources spatially — even tracing the routes ancestors may have taken through their communities.

Not every historic property is included, but new material is added regularly. Researching the city, town, or neighborhood where our ancestors lived can help place them within a physical and social landscape of their time and helps us understand the world in which they lived.

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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