Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

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Upcoming Meetings

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.

January 2027 Meeting



Family history is not only a story of success and survival. Many of our ancestors endured poverty, debt, unemployment, illness, and other hardships that shaped the course of their lives. Their experiences are often preserved in unexpected records that reveal compelling stories.

At our January 6, 2027 monthly meeting, genealogist Pamela Vestal will return to WMGS to present **"Strapped for Cash: Records of Poor Ancestors and the Stories They Tell."**

Researching ancestors who had financial struggles often requires a strategic approach and unfamiliar records. Some ancestors were born poor; others fell on hard times later on. We'll explore their stories through town minutes; records of almshouses, sheriffs, and charities; legal and financial documents; and more. We'll also consider indirect evidence, such as changes in crop prices and the value of wages, that may suggest reasons for our ancestors' struggles.

Pamela Vestal is a professional genealogist and speaker who turned her focus to her longtime love of genealogy after a 20-year writing career. Her articles have appeared

in the Association of Professional Genealogists Quarterly, Forum magazine (published by the Federation of Genealogical Societies), and the National Genealogical Society magazine. Her lectures take her from coast to coast. Pamela specializes in conducting genealogical research and then transforming that information into illustrated stories that even non-genealogists can enjoy.

We hope you'll join us on **Wednesday, January 6 ET at 6 p.m.** for a virtual presentation 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



The winter season seems to have arrived especially quickly this year. It has been a busy and productive year for WMGS, and we are grateful for the support and participation of our members. As we look ahead to the coming year, we also have several exciting events and programs to come this month.

Our main fundraiser, GivingTuesday, is almost here. As you consider your year-end charitable giving, we hope you'll think of WMGS. Your support helps us continue providing educational programs, research resources, and opportunities for family historians to connect, learn, and share their discoveries.

This holiday season, we're again offering discounted gift certificates for new WMGS memberships that continue through August 31, the end of our membership year. This allows new members to enjoy the remaining nine months of our membership year at a reduced rate.

Our virtual holiday party will be held on Thursday, December 17, and we hope you'll join us. If you've never attended one of our virtual celebrations, this is a great opportunity to connect with members from across the country.

As the year draws to a close, many of us take time to reflect on the people, stories, and traditions that have shaped our families. Across cultures and communities, winter celebrations often center on gathering, remembrance, gratitude, and hope for the year ahead. While customs may differ, many share a common purpose: bringing people together and strengthening connections across generations.

As genealogists, we understand the importance of preserving family traditions and recording the stories behind them. We preserve these traditions in many ways: by preparing special foods, gathering with family and friends, displaying meaningful decorations or symbols, sharing stories, participating in cultural or religious observances, or simply spending time together. Each tradition, no matter how large or small, contributes to a family's unique history and legacy. They all help to tell the story of who we are and where we come from.

Though seasonal decorations may only come out once a year, displaying those I've inherited and accumulated over the years always puts me in a holiday spirit. Traditions naturally evolve over time, and they remain touchstones that families come to expect and treasure. How I wish I had my grandfather's turkey stuffing recipe or a few treasured ornaments from my childhood. Small items and family customs often become some of the most meaningful links to those who came before us.

No matter which holidays, observances, or seasonal traditions you celebrate, we're grateful for the many ways family history is carried forward from one generation to the next. Through stories, recipes, photographs, heirlooms, and shared experiences, each of us plays a role in preserving the past for the future.

We wish you a joyful season filled with connection, reflection, cherished memories, and the creation of new family stories.

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.)

WMGS Holiday Party – December 17



We're delighted to host our 5th virtual holiday party on **Thursday, December 17!**

Over the past few years, this event has become a WMGS tradition, and this year's party promises another enjoyable evening of laughter, storytelling, and genealogical fun.

As in past years, we'll explore holiday traditions and genealogy-themed topics designed to spark conversation, memories, and connections. If you've never attended one of our virtual holiday parties, we

encourage you to join us this year. It's a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the season together and share the holiday spirit, no matter where you live.

Share Your Family's Favorite Holiday Recipe



This year, we're introducing a new segment featuring our members' favorite holiday recipes!

Do you have a treasured family recipe that has been passed down through the generations and is still part of your holiday celebrations today?

We'd love to hear about it! Here are some ideas:

Share a favorite main dish, dessert, cookie, candy, ethnic specialty, or other recipe item.

Tell us the story behind the recipe and the ancestor or family member associated with it.

Include any special memories or traditions connected to the recipe.

We'll compile the submissions into a collection of members' favorite recipes and make them available on our website.

A Holiday Stroll Through Western Massachusetts History

One of the highlights of our annual holiday gathering is a trip down memory lane through local newspapers and historical photographs. Together, we'll explore how holidays were celebrated in Western Massachusetts throughout the years.



Were you, a family member, or an ancestor featured in a holiday newspaper story or photograph? We invite you to search local newspapers and share holiday-related clippings that might spark memories, stories, or conversation during our gathering.

Holiday Genealogy Trivia Returns!

Get ready to test your knowledge with our annual holiday genealogy trivia challenge. Discover fascinating facts about holiday customs, celebrations, and family history traditions from around the world.

We'll do our best to stump you while helping you learn something new along the way!

Join the Celebration



Pour your favorite holiday beverage and come dressed in your holiday best, your ugliest holiday sweater, or simply your coziest attire.

Let's celebrate the season together, genealogy style!

If you have holiday photos, recipes, newspaper clippings, or other materials to share, please send them to westmassgen@gmail.com by **Friday, December 11.** Our production crew will incorporate your submissions into our holiday slideshow.

We look forward to celebrating with you on Zoom on **Thursday, December 17 at 7:00 p.m. ET.** Watch for an email with registration information in early December.

Limited-Time Offer: A Discount on WMGS Memberships

Give the Gift of Discovery — Or Start Your Own Journey!

Looking to explore your roots or help someone begin their research? WMGS is offering a special membership rate for new members — now through Monday, January 4, 2027 — at a discounted rate of **$20.00**. Whether you're gifting a membership or joining yourself, this is the perfect time to connect with a vibrant community of family historians. This discounted rate provides membership in our society for the remainder of our membership year ending on August 31, 2027.

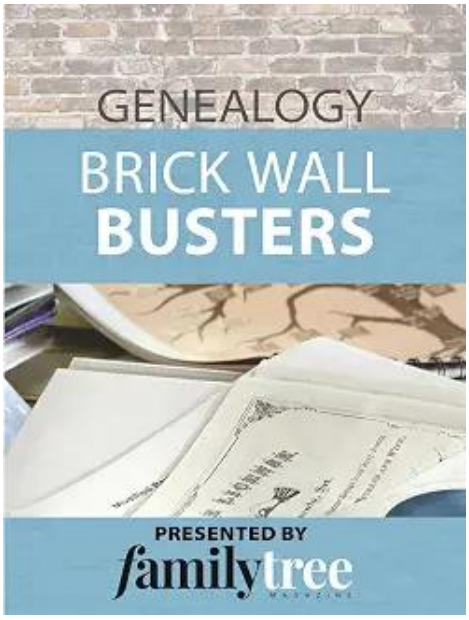
To purchase a membership, go to the Join/Renew page on our website and select Gift Membership in the PayPal options. To gift a membership, send us an email letting us

know the recipient's name and email address and whether you'd like the PDF gift certificate sent to you or directly to them.

Note: This offer is valid for new members only, not for renewals from anyone who has been a member in the past 18 months.

Holiday Book List - 2026

Looking for a few genealogy-inspired gifts this holiday season? This year's book recommendations offer something for everyone, from exploring the growing role of artificial intelligence in family history research to tackling brick walls and uncovering New England ancestors.



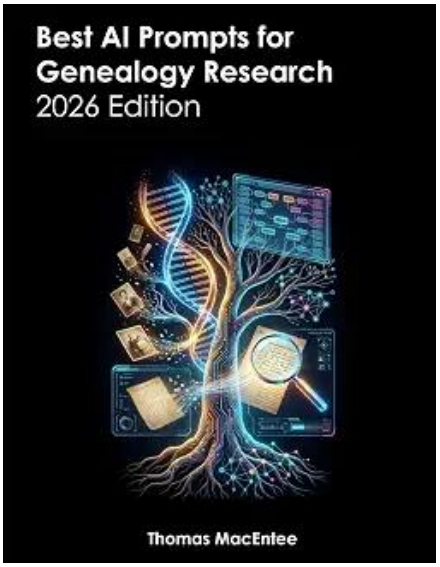
"Genealogy Brick Wall Busters" by Family Tree Magazine (Yankee Publishing, 2026)

Every family historian knows the frustration of hitting a brick wall. For researchers of all levels, "Genealogy Brick Wall Busters" offers practical strategies for overcoming some of the most common challenges in family history research.

Published by Family Tree magazine, this helpful guide covers topics ranging from locating elusive female ancestors and making sense of early U.S. census records to organizing research materials and improving search techniques. A collection of respected genealogy experts, including Lisa A. Alzo, Rich Crume, Denise May Levenick, Maureen A. Taylor, Sunny Jane Morton, Rhonda Lauritzen, and many others, share proven methods and real-world solutions.

Packed with tips, techniques, and fresh research approaches, this book is a valuable addition to any genealogist's library, one that can help break through long-standing research roadblocks.

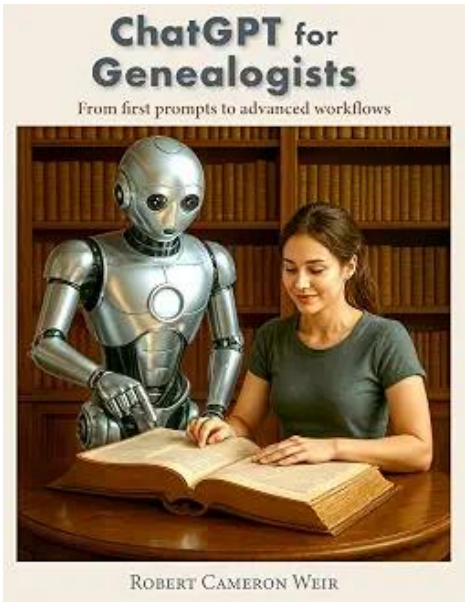
"Best AI Prompts for Genealogy Research, 2026 Edition" by Thomas MacEntee (Independently published, 2026)



The 2026 edition of "Best AI Prompts for Genealogy Research" shows genealogists how to use artificial intelligence effectively. Written by noted genealogist Thomas MacEntee, this book demonstrates how AI can help genealogists work more efficiently and creatively, while maintaining genealogy standards.

Filled with ready-to-use prompts and practical examples, the book explains how AI can help transcribe difficult documents, translate foreign-language records, analyze DNA matches, organize research findings, develop research strategies, and write family histories and reports. Just as importantly, it emphasizes verifying AI-generated information and applying the Genealogical Proof Standard to every conclusion.

We think you'll find that this accessible guide offers clear, practical advice for incorporating artificial intelligence into your genealogy workflow with confidence and accuracy.



"ChatGPT for Genealogists: From First Prompts to Advanced Workflows" by Robert Cameron Weir (Antic Press, 2026)

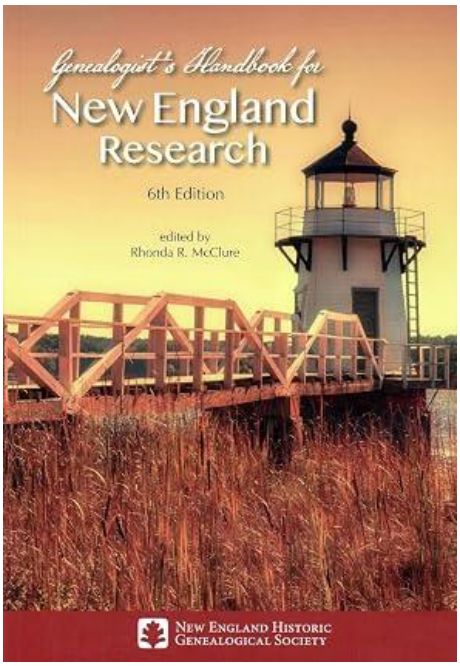
Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a useful tool for family historians, but many genealogists are not sure where to begin. Robert Cameron Weir's book is an accessible, easy-to-understand guide that explains how to use AI effectively while staying true to sound genealogical research practices.

Written specifically for genealogists, "ChatGPT: From First Prompts to Advanced Workflows" provides clear, practical advice for using ChatGPT every day.

Readers will learn how to transcribe and translate historical documents, extract information from records, analyze genealogy data, identify and date photographs, improve online searches, and even automate tasks. Full-color screenshots, graphics, and step-by-step examples make concepts easy to follow, even for those new to AI.

Just as importantly, the book explains the limitations of artificial intelligence, showing readers how to verify information, avoid common pitfalls, and use AI responsibly when researching family history. Guidance on ethics, privacy, and professional applications is also included.

This book offers practical, straightforward advice that can help beginning and experienced researchers make the most of this emerging technology.



"Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, 6th Edition" edited by Rhonda R. McClure (New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2021)

"Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, 6th Edition" is an essential reference for anyone researching ancestors in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, or Vermont. This updated, full-color edition provides clear guidance on research methods, key record collections, repositories, and state-specific resources.

The handbook also includes detailed county and town information, maps, jurisdictional changes, and other historical details that can help genealogists navigate New England's often complex records. Suitable for both beginners and experienced researchers, it is a valuable desk reference for anyone with New England roots.

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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