



American Ancestors®

A NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILY HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

American Ancestors® Names Ryan J. Woods as President and CEO

[Watch Video:](#) Filmmaker and PBS host of *Finding Your Roots* Henry Louis Gates, Jr., interviews Woods about “the power and promise of family history.”

May 16, 2024—Boston, Mass.—The Board of Trustees for American Ancestors, a national center for family history, heritage, and culture, is pleased to announce the appointment of Ryan J. Woods to the role of President and Chief Executive Officer. Woods has held multiple positions at the nonprofit since joining the staff in 2007, including managerial roles for web technology and educational programs. Over his long tenure, he has helped grow and diversify American Ancestors’ services and offerings, further establishing its reputation as a national resource for family history research and public programming about genealogy and heritage.

In his most recent position as Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, Woods oversaw the launch of major initiatives that have received national attention and praise, including 10 Million Names, a project to recover the names of the 10 million people of African descent who were enslaved in what is now the United States of America; the Boston Tea Party Descendants Program, an initiative celebrating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, in cooperation with the Boston Tea Party Ships and Museum, to trace the full lineages of the Boston Tea Party participants; Historic Catholic Records Online, an initiative to make the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston historical sacramental records publicly accessible and searchable; and Mayflower 2020, a multifaceted project that included publicly searchable lineages of the *Mayflower* passengers and their descendants, alongside perspectives from descendants of the Native peoples they encountered.



Ryan J. Woods, President and CEO, American Ancestors

“Ryan is the right person to take American Ancestors further into the 21st century. He has an expansive, inclusive vision and the experience and ability to realize that vision,” commented American Ancestors Board Chair David M. Trebing. “My colleagues will agree with me that Ryan has proven himself time and again to be an inspiring leader with a deep dedication to family history.”

“I am honored to be the temporary steward of this extraordinary organization,” said Woods. “American Ancestors can help anyone learn more about their family history, and that knowledge builds a foundation for increased self-esteem, social awareness, and civic pride. Though our collaborative work with our many partners, colleagues, and friends in the cultural and historical space, we intend to bring the power and promise of family history to as many people as possible.”

Woods succeeds D. Brenton Simons, who, after serving as CEO for eighteen years, remains on staff as President Emeritus and Chief Stewardship Officer.

[In a recent interview with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.](#), filmmaker and host of the PBS show *Finding Your Roots*, Woods talked about his vision for American Ancestors. Gates and Woods discussed how knowing one’s own family history can create positive change. Woods provided context for the organization’s many projects, including its national youth education program, designed to help educators reap the benefits of teaching genealogy in the classroom. Woods also revealed details about the upcoming Family Heritage Experience, a unique in-person, exhibit-based experience scheduled to open in late fall 2024 on Newbury Street in Boston.

[Watch the Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Ryan Woods interview](#)

Prior to joining American Ancestors, Woods held executive positions at cultural and historical institutions, including the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), at which he received the Archivist of the United States' Award for Outstanding Public Service. Woods also serves in leadership roles for several nonprofit historical and cultural organizations. He was recently appointed commissioner of the Special Commission for the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; he is on the advisory board for the 250th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party and is a past President of the Boston University School of Education Alumni Association.

About American Ancestors®

American Ancestors is a national center for family history, heritage, and culture based in Boston, Massachusetts, and one of the world’s top destinations for family history research, according to *USA Today*. American Ancestors is the global brand of New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS), America’s oldest and largest genealogical society (founded in 1845). American Ancestors serves more than 450,000 members and online subscribers engaged in family history nationally and around the world through its website, AmericanAncestors.org, with more than one billion names in its databases. Located in Boston’s Back Bay, American Ancestors is home to a world-class research center and archive, an expert staff, and the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center. It maintains a publishing division that produces original genealogical research, scholarship, and educational materials, including the *Register*, the flagship journal of American genealogy since 1847, and *American Ancestors*, its award-winning magazine.

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