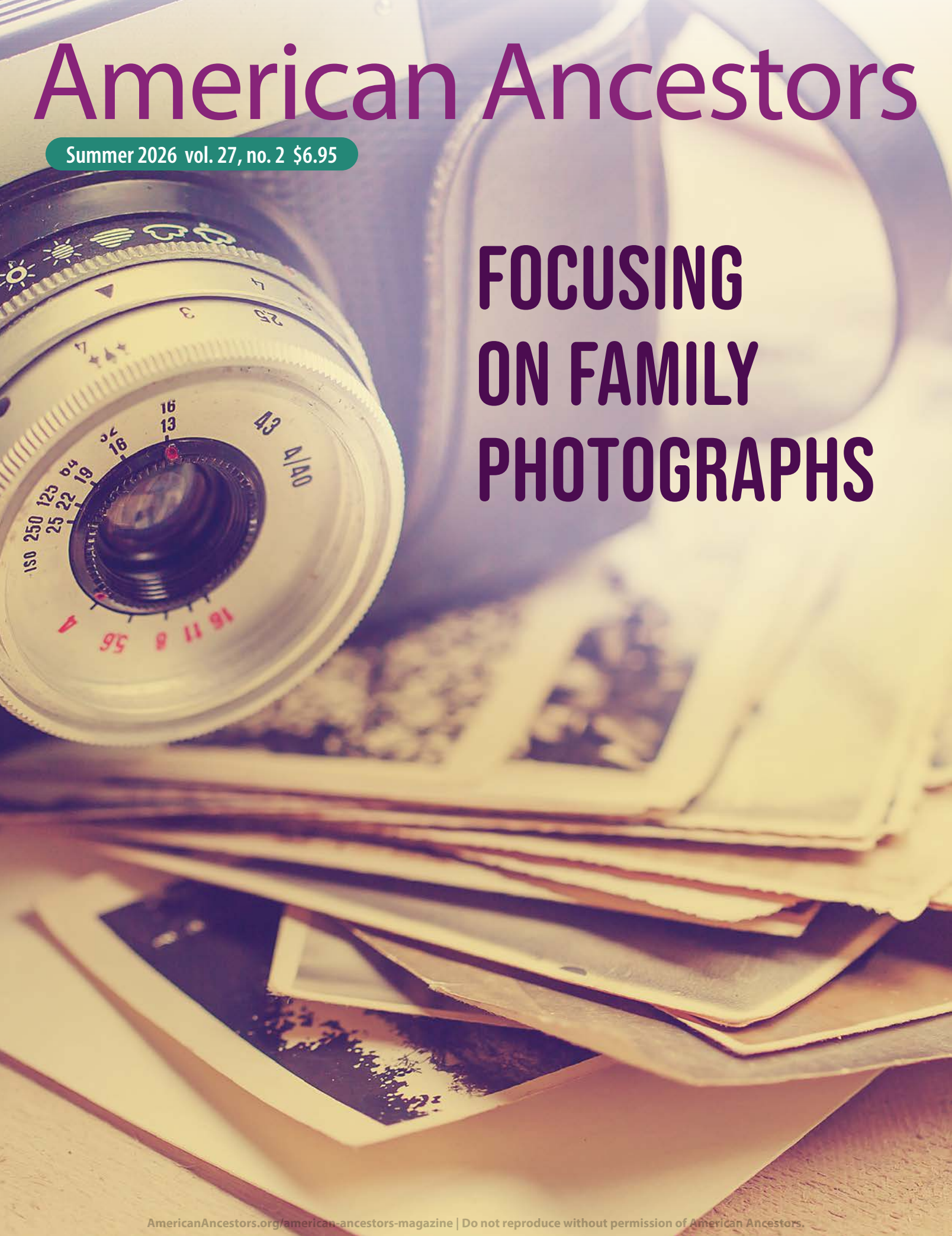


American Ancestors

Summer 2026 vol. 27, no. 2 \$6.95

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October 15–22, 2027



For more information, please contact us at heritagetours@americanancestors.org

Summer 2026

vol. 27, no. 2



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A Message from the President & CEO

When my grandmother celebrated her ninetieth birthday many years ago, members of my family gathered generations of photographs into a slideshow and a set of albums.

Today, those albums have a new audience. My children pore over the pages, searching for resemblances and asking me one question after another. They want to know who these people are.

Although most of the people pictured died long ago, my children's connection to them is real. Through these photographs, my children are linked to a past they never experienced and to people they never met. These images became part of my children's stories long after the subjects were gone. This visceral connection to the past may be one of photography's greatest gifts.

Family history is usually built from records. We rely on census schedules, vital records, military files, old newspapers, and other data to reconstruct lives and to place people within families and communities. Records tell us what happened.

Photographs tell us something else. They remind us that the people listed in those records were real, that they had worries and hopes of their own, and that they left

behind something more personal than a date in a ledger.

For most of human history, the likenesses of all but the wealthiest people simply vanished after they died. A family might pass down stories and a few heirlooms, but the physical appearance of earlier generations was left to imagination. With the advent of photography, the image of an ancestor could survive and be known by generations of descendants.

At American Ancestors, we talk a great deal about why family history matters. Photographs help explain why. They transform family history from something that is merely known into something that can be seen and felt.

Perhaps that is why my children return to those albums so often: they are not simply looking at old photographs; they are discovering where they belong.

Ryan J. Woods
President & CEO



Above: The Woods siblings; and a family group showing their great-grandmother.

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In this issue

When I began researching my family history at 14, my paternal grandfather gave me two studio portraits from 1910. One showed his father, Joseph Betlock (center), with his brothers. The other pictured his mother, Hannah Peterson (last row, second from right), with her family. I couldn't believe my good fortune! These photographs fired my imagination, guided what I researched, and added a personal dimension to my genealogical pursuits. The connection between family history and photography is powerful; for me, that realization began with these two images.

Our photography-focused issue begins with "Photos and AI for Family Historians." Maureen Taylor describes AI tools that can assist genealogists with their photo collections—and offers some cautions.

Two articles address best practices for preserving family photographs. Digital Archivist June Henry discusses digitizing images, while Conservator Todd Pattison provides advice for storing and conserving physical images.

Several authors highlight photo archives. Senior Genealogist of the Newbury Street Press Kyle Hurst identifies digital image collections for each state. Special Collections Manager Judith Lucey shares photographs from our R. Stanton Avery Special Collections. Darius Brown, Research Assistant at the International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, examines "Pre-20th-Century African American Photographs."

Some of the fun of historic photographs comes from following clues and solving mysteries. Several case studies appear in "Identifying Antique Store Photographs" by J. Homer Thiel, and in "The Stories Hidden in Three Family Photographs" by Director of Research and Library Services Sarah J. Dery and Senior Researcher Kimberly Mannisto.

In 2001, Maureen Taylor wrote "Photographs in Your Family History" for our predecessor magazine, *New England Ancestors*. A sentence from that article particularly resonates with me: "Never underestimate the genealogical value of a photograph." We hope the articles in this issue will help you unlock the full potential of your own family history images.



Lynn Betlock
Managing Editor
magazine@americanancestors.org



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A NATIONAL CENTER FOR
FAMILY HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

To advance the study of family history in America and beyond, we educate, inspire, and connect people through our scholarship, collections, and expertise.

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AMERICAN ANCESTORS invites article submissions. Visit AmericanAncestors.org/publications/american-ancestors-magazine for submission guidelines.



This publication is also funded in part by the Francis G. and Ruth (Wellington) Shaw Memorial Fund.





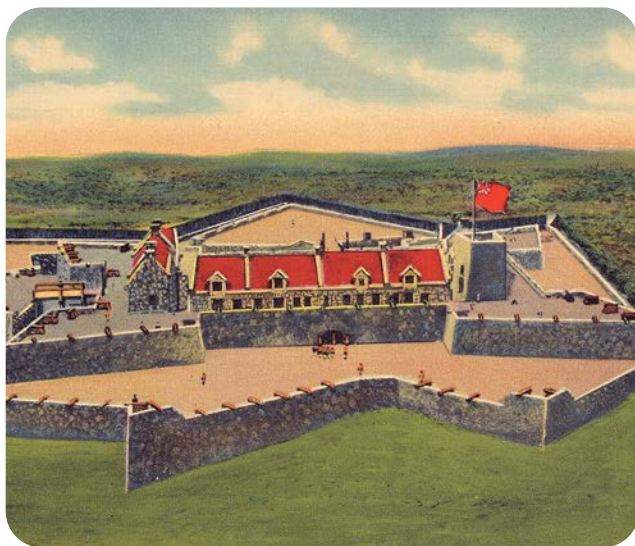
New database on AmericanAncestors.org

New York: Fort Ticonderoga

In partnership with historic Fort Ticonderoga, we've added a new searchable database that offers family historians an exciting way to discover whether their ancestors are connected to one of the most significant military collections in North America. Created to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the database draws from Fort Ticonderoga's renowned collections documenting the years 1609 to 1815 throughout North America. Its collections encompass British, European, Native Nations, and African experiences, revealing the complexities of a shared Atlantic history and the people who shaped it.

Designed as an accessible research tool, the database allows users to search by first and last name, years, record type, location, spouse, and parents (where available). Search results link directly to the Ticonderoga Online Collections and provide digital images when available.

We are grateful to Fort Ticonderoga for their partnership and support in bringing this important resource to the public.



"FORT TICONDEROGA, N.Y. IN 1777," 1908, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



Family Heritage Experience spotlight

Our Family Heritage Experience is an interactive, state-of-the-art exhibition that introduces visitors to the joy of family history research. In this issue and future issues, we will highlight some of the engaging items on display.

The Lippincott family tree

At first glance, the Lippincott family tree appears to tell a settled account of the first ten generations of Lippincotts in America. But closer inspection reveals two small white leaves pasted on the original 1880 print. Beneath these leaves, half-brothers Isaac and Barclay Lippincott were originally assigned to the wrong maternal lines, misplacing generations of their descendants. Later research, likely based on detailed Quaker records, uncovered the error and prompted these revisions in the mid-twentieth century. The Lippincott tree serves as a reminder that family history is redefined over time as new evidence comes to light and earlier assumptions are revisited.



Scan Me

Free admission to the Family Heritage Experience is a benefit of American Ancestors membership. Plan your visit today to view the Lippincott tree and other fascinating artifacts! Visit AmericanAncestors.org/about/visit to learn more.

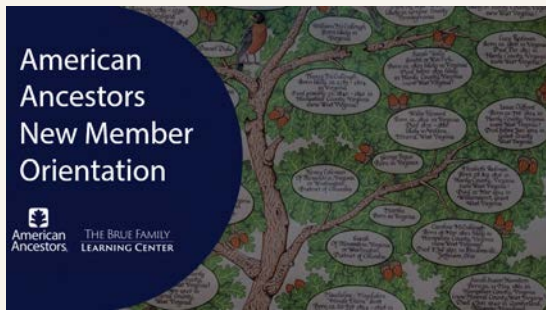
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American Ancestors has partnered with Historic Hotels of America to offer our members up to 30% off a Historic Hotel stay. Visit historichotels.org/us for more information. Visit My.AmericanAncestors.org/account/memberships to see all your member benefits.



Scan Me

Learn more at AmericanAncestors.org/american-ancestors-new-member-orientation.

Watch our new member orientation video!

American Ancestors now offers a New Member Orientation video to help those who have recently joined make the most of their memberships. (The video is a good refresher for longstanding members, too.) Highlights include the basics of searching on AmericanAncestors.org, a review of our many educational resources and our expert help options, an introduction to lesser-known American Ancestors resources, and tips and tricks from our staff.

Brick walls

Send a brief narrative (under 175 words) about your “brick wall” to magazine@americanancestors.org or to AMERICAN ANCESTORS magazine, 97 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116. Please include your member number. We regret that we cannot reply to every submission. Brick walls will be edited for clarity and length.

I am seeking the parents of my ancestor **Seth Foster** (abt. 1758–1836), who served as mayor of Norfolk, Virginia, in 1795–1796 and 1800–1801. Born about 1758, Seth was described in his death notice as a native of Boston, but biographer S. Bassett French suggested Gloucester County, Va. On August 7, 1785, he married Ann(e) Starke (abt. 1754–1838) in Bristol Parish, Dinwiddie Co., Va. Their known children were William Partridge “Pat” (abt. 1785–1834), Winslow (abt. 1787–1858), and Seth Belfield (abt. 1790–1837). In 1801, the older Seth was appointed the first Clerk of the US District Court at Norfolk, serving until his death. My research tentatively suggests that Seth’s parents were Thomas Foster (1705–1777) and Mary Morton (1721–1781) of Plymouth, Massachusetts, but I lack proof.

Paul Heisholt, Oslo, Norway; paul@heisholt.net

My decades-long brick wall is **Thomas Tibbits**, my fourth great-grandfather. I am seeking his parents, place of origin, and birth date, which I estimate at about 1780. Thomas married Jane Steenburg in 1805 in Rensselaerville, Albany County, New York; the couple lived in Broome, Schoharie County. Thomas served in the War of 1812 and died before 1851, when his widow Jane applied for pension benefits. The New York State death certificate of their daughter Esther Tibbits Palmer (1806–1888) noted that Thomas Tibbits was from “one of the New England States.”

Rhoda P. Amundson, Las Vegas, Nevada; kdodio@cox.net

My ancestor **James Patrick Lang** was born about 1792 in Ireland. I am seeking the names of his parents and his immigration details. He married Lucy Rarick (Rohrick, Rorich, Rohrig), probably in New York’s Mohawk Valley, where Lucy’s family lived. The couple’s children were Peter George (b. abt. 1823), James (b. abt. 1826), John Lang (b. 1828), Clark (b. 1832), Elizabeth (b. 1833), and Happy (b. 1835). Prior to 1850, the family moved to Waterloo, Jefferson County, Wisconsin, where James was a farmer and dairyman. James likely died before 1860; Lucy was the head of the household in the 1860 census.

Hilary Wardlaw, Napa, California; napa.wardlaw@hotmail.com

My brick wall is my ancestor **Eunice (Spencer) Cleaveland**, who married Aaron Cleaveland (1730–1778) on September 4, 1778, in East Haddam, Connecticut, and had nine children. She was likely born between 1730 and 1740 and she survived Aaron, who died March 26, 1778. I am seeking information on her parentage, birth, and death. [She is NOT the Eunice Spencer (b. May 14, 1738) of Suffield, Conn., who married Wareham Gibbs on March 4, 1756, in Litchfield, Conn. I am descended from both Eunices.]

Letha A. Chunn, Prescott, Arizona; dabombmom71@gmail.com



Grace (10), Mabelle (6), and Marion (9) Forrister celebrating the Fourth of July in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, in 1926.

Dana (Forrister) Collum, Fairfax, Vermont, their great-niece



Firefighter Perley Storer Johnson (1882–1953), in front of a fire station in Milford, Massachusetts, likely around Independence Day in 1913.

Paula Sheppard, Sarasota, Florida, Perley's granddaughter

Photos relating to the American Revolution

Thank you to the many members who submitted their great photos! We wish we had room for more.



In 1962, Valerie Beaudrault visited New York's Fort Ticonderoga with her family. She is shown holding her baby sister, Marlene, and standing next to her brother, Brian.

Valerie Beaudrault, Cambridge, Massachusetts



Brothers George (flagbearer), Philip, and Arnold (drummers) Watrous and a fifer friend reenact the "Spirit of '76" for an Independence Day celebration in Chester, Connecticut, in the early 1930s.

Kathryn W. Jones, Surprise, Arizona, Phil's daughter



Frances Reed (second from the left), commemorating the Fourth of July in about 1901 with her classmates in Montpelier, Williams County, Ohio.

Kimberly Mannisto, Farmington Hills, Michigan,
Frances's great-granddaughter



Jason (6) and Amy (3) Dahlberg celebrating the Bicentennial at their home in Hanson, Massachusetts. Their mother hand-sewed their outfits.

Amy Dahlberg Chu, Cambridge, Massachusetts



Philip LaFleur (1926–1991) dressed as George Washington in 1932, the bicentennial of Washington's birth, in Hooksett, New Hampshire. His very patriotic mother, **Rachel Racine LaFleur**, was a long-time member and officer of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Janine LaFleur Penfield, Concord, Massachusetts, Philip's daughter



WANTED

Photos relating to cars!

Send us your high-resolution photos of your ancestors or relatives pictured with a favorite car (along with captions of no more than 50 words). We'll feature a few of the most striking images in our fall issue.

Email magazine@americanancestors.org.

ABOVE: WANDA OAKLEY POSING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS. COLLECTION OF DARRELL OAKLEY.



Programs & tours

AmericanAncestors.org/events

Members receive discounts on all online seminars and select in-person events!

Learning Opportunities – Online and Onsite at American Ancestors

Your family history journey never stops—there are always new records to explore, skills to learn, and stories to uncover. American Ancestors offers hundreds of educational events each year, online and in person, featuring expert instructors and access to research experiences at our headquarters and repositories across the country. Learn more at AmericanAncestors.org/events.

August

- 8/1 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour \$
- Starting 8/3 | **Online Seminar** Tides of History: Tracing Family History in Atlantic Canada, 5 classes \$
- 8/4 | **Open House** August Adventures at American Ancestors **FREE**
- 8/5 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *This Land is Your Land: A Road Trip Through U.S. History* with Beverly Gage \$
- 8/7 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture Event** A Room with a View: A Tour of Merchant Ivory's English Movie Locations \$
- 8/8 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**
- 8/8 | **Hands-On History** Preservation Roadshow, Boston, MA \$
- 8/11–8/15 | **Research Tour** Come Home to New England \$ (see opposite page)
- 8/15 | **Online Lecture** Conscience and Conflict: The Quaker Experience in the American Revolution \$
- 8/18 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *The Bright Edges of the World: Willa Cather and Her Archbishop* with Garrett Peck **FREE**
- 8/20 | **Online Lecture** Women in the Workforce: 19th– and 20th–Century America **FREE**
- 8/21 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture Event** Lost Mansions of Philadelphia's Main Line **FREE**
- 8/27 | **Lecture** "Have a Cheap Day": Remembering the Golden Age of Building 19 Advertising, Boston, MA **FREE**

September

- Starting 9/1 | **Online Seminar** Tracing Women in Your Family Tree, 5 classes \$
- 9/9 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture Event** *Why We Talk Funny: The Real Story Behind Our Accents* with Valerie Fridland **FREE**
- 9/10 | **Online Lecture** Court Records 101: Finding Family Stories in the Legal Record **FREE**
- 9/11 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Glorious Country: How the Artist Frederic Church Brought the World to America and America to the World* with Victoria Johnson **FREE**
- 9/12 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**
- 9/12 | **Hybrid Lecture** Tracing Loyalist Lineages: Sources and Strategies \$
- 9/13–9/20 | **Research Tour** FamilySearch Library Tour, Salt Lake City, UT \$ (see opposite page)
- 9/19 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour \$
- 9/22 | **Online Lecture** Travel with American Ancestors **FREE**
- 9/23 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Freedom Lost, Freedom Won: A Personal History of America* with Eugene Robinson **FREE**
- Starting 9/30 | **Online Seminar** Unlocking Court Records for Family History: Cases, Conflicts, and Connections, 5 classes \$

October

- 10/1 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Small Town Girls: A Writer's Memoir* with Jayne Anne Phillips \$
- 10/3 | **Open House** Discover Your Revolutionary Roots, Boston, MA **FREE**
- 10/3 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**
- 10/3 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour \$
- 10/8 | **Online Lecture** Applying to Colonial Lineage Societies **FREE**
- 10/9 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** Creating Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library **FREE**
- 10/13 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Stealing America: The Hidden Story of Indigenous Slavery in U.S. History* with Linford F. Fisher **FREE**
- 10/15 | **Hybrid Lecture** Jewish Patriots in the American Revolution \$
- 10/17 | **Hands-On History** Home Movie Day, Boston, MA **FREE**
- 10/22 | **Hybrid American Inspiration Author Event** *Two Ships: Jamestown 1619, Plymouth 1620, and the Struggle for the Soul of America* with David S. Reynolds \$
- 10/27–10/29 | **Research Tour** Fall Research Getaway, Boston, MA \$ (see opposite page)
- 10/30 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** Portraits of Patriots: Colonel John Trumbull and Five Fellow Patriots from Connecticut in the American Revolution **FREE**

November

- Starting 11/3 | **Online Seminar** Conflict and Community in Colonial America: A Genealogist's Guide, 5 classes \$
- 11/5 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Not Your Founding Father: How a Nonbinary Minister Became America's Most Radical Revolutionary* with Nina Sankovitch **FREE**
- 11/6 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** The Restoration of Bart's Hospital, London **FREE**
- 11/7 | **Hybrid Seminar** Puritans in the 21st Century: Politics, Myths, and the Future \$
- 11/7 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour \$
- 11/12 | **Online Lecture** The World Turned Upside Down: New York During the American Revolution **FREE**
- 11/14 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**
- 11/20 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** Inking History: Charles Schulz's Peanuts and the American Revolution **FREE**
- 11/21 | **Hybrid Lecture** No Battlefield Service Required: Uncovering the Patriotic Service of Your Ancestors During the American Revolution \$
- 11/23 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World* with Richard Bell \$

*Schedule is subject to change.

Upcoming Research Tours & Programs*

Your next great family history discovery may be waiting *beyond* the computer screen. Archives, libraries, and repositories across the country hold a wealth of records and resources you won't find online. Let American Ancestors help you unlock these collections with expert guidance, special orientations, tutorials, one-on-one consultations, lectures, and more—whether you're just starting out or taking your research to the next level. Explore upcoming opportunities at AmericanAncestors.org/events.

Research Tour to the FamilySearch Library, Salt Lake City, UT

September 13–20, 2026

Research ancestors from any region or period at the FamilySearch Library. With more than 45 years of experience leading researchers of all levels to Salt Lake City, American Ancestors will open doors—and new research avenues—for you at the world's largest genealogy library.

Members: Single \$2,325; Double \$1,775/each; Double with non-researching guest \$2,475; Commuter \$1,200; **Non-Members:** Add \$150.

Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN

March 17–19, 2027

Join experts from American Ancestors for a series of lectures, one-on-one consultations, and assisted research at the Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center—one of America's preeminent family history research centers.

Early bird pricing before November 30, 2026!

Members: \$875; **Non-Members:** Add \$150. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Connecticut Research Tour, Hartford, CT

April 7–9, 2027

Uncover your Nutmeg State roots on a trip to the Connecticut State Library and archives. Access city directories, town records, newspapers, probate records, special genealogy files, published resources, and much more.

Early bird pricing before December 31, 2026!

Members: \$875; **Non-Members:** Add \$150. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI

May 17–19, 2027

The Wisconsin Historical Society is one of the top institutions for genealogy research in the United States. Examples of nearly every type of genealogical resource can be found—from vital and military records to passenger lists and census records.

Early bird pricing before January 31, 2027!

Members: \$875; **Non-Members:** Add \$150. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Nova Scotia Research Tour, Halifax, NS

June 20–27, 2027

Home to more than three centuries of history, the Nova Scotia Archives holds a wealth of records that can

illuminate the lives of ancestors across the province. Explore historic collections, receive expert guidance, and discover the documents that bring your family stories to life.

Early bird pricing before February 28, 2027!

Members: Single \$3,500; Double \$2,995/each; Double with non-researching guest \$3,750; Commuter \$1,750. **Non-Members:** Add \$150. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Research at American Ancestors in Boston!

Research Getaways at American Ancestors, Boston, MA

Fall: October 27–29, 2026 | Spring: June 3–5, 2027

Escape to Boston for three days of research, one-on-one consultations, orientations, lectures, and social events. You will explore the rich offerings at American Ancestors and benefit from the knowledge and assistance of our expert genealogists.

Early bird pricing before February 28, 2027, for the Spring session!

Members: \$600; **Non-Members:** \$750. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Genealogy Skills Boot Camp, Boston, MA

February 18–20, 2027

Take your research skills to the next level! This intensive three-day program will set you on the right path to getting the most out of your family history research and teach you how to tackle genealogical problems like a pro. Topics include strategies for analyzing records, online research, breaking down genealogical brick walls, and more.

Early bird pricing before October 31, 2026!

Members: \$600; **Non-Members:** \$750. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Come Home to New England, Boston, MA

August 11–15, 2026, and August 10–14, 2027

Devote almost a full week to leveraging resources and expertise at American Ancestors. Join fellow family historians for a unique opportunity to explore remarkable collections, access records not available online, attend daily lectures, and receive one-on-one consultations.

Early bird pricing before April 1, 2027, for 2027 session!

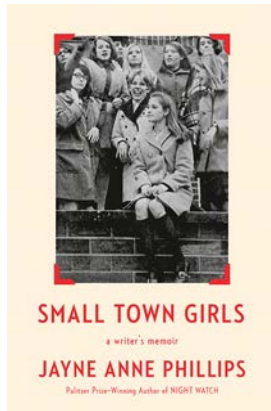
Members: \$1,200; **Non-Members:** \$1,350. **Add \$100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

*Schedule is subject to change.



AMERICAN INSPIRATION

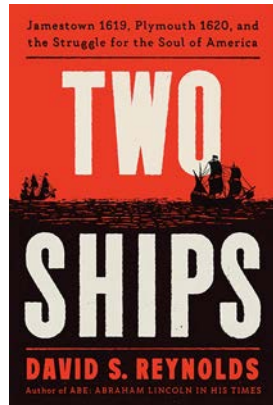
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SCAN ME

Catch up with American Inspiration!

Visit AmericanAncestors.org/inspire to learn about upcoming events and view our video archive, including:

- *A Fate Worse Than Hell: American Prisoners of the Civil War* with W. Fitzhugh Brundage and moderator David Allen Lambert
- *COMBEE: Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom during the Civil War* with Edda L. Fields-Black and moderator Kendra T. Field
- *Grandma Joy and Me: A Journey of Healing, One National Park at a Time* with Brad Ryan

Hosted by Director of Literary Programs Margaret M. Talcott, our American Inspiration speaker series presents engaging discussions on newly published histories, biographies, and memoirs from renowned authors.

Our fall book talks will explore American history and identity through literature, biography, journalism, and historical scholarship. On September 11, author Victoria Johnson will introduce us to *Glorious Country: How the Artist Frederic Church Brought the World to America and America to the World* in a virtual illustrated talk. Curator of Fine Art Curt DiCamillo will moderate this event co-presented with our Art & Architecture series.

On September 23, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Eugene Robinson will discuss *Freedom Won, Freedom Lost: A Personal History of America*, in which he traces the arc of his familial lineage through repeated cycles of discrimination against African Americans. This virtual event will be co-presented with 10 Million Names and the Museum of African American History. Robinson will be joined by moderator and fellow journalist Lee Hawkins, author of *I Am Nobody's Slave: How Uncovering My Family's History Set Me Free*. (Visit our online archive to watch Hawkins's April 2025 American Inspiration talk.)

On October 1, Jayne Anne Phillips, winner of the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, will take us back to her rural Virginia hometown with *Small Town Girls: A Writer's Memoir*. Knopf Doubleday Vice President and Executive Editor Diana Miller will moderate this virtual event. Brown University historian Linford D. Fisher will reveal a darker side of America's past in his October 13 online presentation of *Stealing America: The Hidden History of Indigenous Slavery in U.S. History*.

In a special hybrid event hosted at our American Ancestors headquarters on October 22, President & CEO Ryan J. Woods will talk with David S. Reynolds about *Two Ships: Jamestown 1619, Plymouth 1620, and the Struggle for the Soul of America*. This compelling conversation will explore the process of historical research and writing.

Our 2026 presenting partners include the following anchor cultural organizations: the Boston Public Library, Museum of African American History, Grub Street, Peabody Essex Museum, 10 Million Names, and GBH Forum Network. Thanks also to Porter Square Books and series sponsors Susan K. and John D. Thompson.

See American Inspiration events in our calendar listings on [page 8](#).

News

Presenting our Patriots of Color exhibit

On April 22, we gathered for the launch of *Patriots of Color*, a new exhibit in the Family Heritage Experience that reveals the overlooked histories of Black, Native, and multiracial men and women who fought, labored, and led in the struggle for American independence across all thirteen colonies. The exhibition uncovers the courage and resilience of those whose contributions helped shape a new nation, even as they continued to confront inequality and enslavement.

This special evening brought together approximately eighty members, donors, scholars, contemporary artists, and descendants of Patriots of color. Guests explored the documents, personal narratives, and digital interactives that help bring these Patriots' stories to life. Artist Kenn Crestwell and students from the Teen Public Art program at the Community Art Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, created silhouettes of Patriots for the exhibit.

This exhibit was made possible by support from National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, Massachusetts250, and the Boston Foundation.

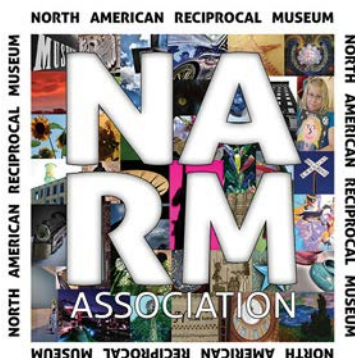
American Ancestors members and members of Daughters of the American Revolution receive free admission to *Patriots of Color*. The exhibit will be on view through December 2026.



Surrounded by descendants of Patriots of color, American Ancestors President & CEO Ryan J. Woods cut the ribbon to open our new exhibit.



Charles Shaw (left) views the name of his Patriot of color ancestor Barzillai Lew on a muster roll from the American Ancestors collection.



American Ancestors joins North American Reciprocal Museum Association

We are pleased to announce that American Ancestors has joined the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association, a cooperative organization that offers qualified members access to more than 1,500 museums and cultural institutions across North America.

American Ancestors members at the \$150 Friend level and above are entitled to this new benefit, which includes free admission and store discounts at participating organizations. Visit narmassociation.org to learn more.



Scan Me

For information on upgrading your membership to the Friend level or above, contact our membership team at membership@americanancestors.org or visit AmericanAncestors.org/contributing-memberships.

Volunteers at American Ancestors

During fiscal year 2025, 180 American Ancestors volunteers donated 17,327 hours, the equivalent of eight full-time staff.

Members of the Committee on Heraldry and other volunteers hosted the International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences.

Web team volunteers digitized records, indexed information, and proofread records. Interns scanned books and the York Rite Mason Card collection and indexed poor records from New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Franklin Township, New Jersey.

Research and Library Services volunteers shelved and organized books and worked on the Family Registers and Bible Records project.

Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center interns processed archival collections and encoded finding aids, helped inventory archival items, assisted at events, and digitized and created metadata for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Boston Port Records, I-96.

10 Million Names volunteers indexed two volumes for the *Biographical Entries of People of African Descent in Beacon Hill* database and researched family trees for soldiers of the 72nd Infantry Regiment for the Kentucky U.S. Colored Troops Project.

We extend our sincere thanks to those who donated talent and time to American Ancestors over the year.

If you are interested in volunteering in Boston or from home, please visit AmericanAncestors.org/about/volunteer.



Volunteer Jim Gerstle digitizes membership cards for the Massachusetts York Rite Masons database.

Recognizing our long-term volunteers

From its founding in 1845, American Ancestors has relied on the contributions of volunteers. Here we list the names and lengths of service of those who have volunteered for more than a decade.

Bertram Lippincott III, 38
Maureen Dearborn, 36
Gary Boyd Roberts, 27
Linda Rupnow McGuire, 24
Eldon Gay, 23
Elizabeth Handler, 23
Robert Rainville, 23
Helen Herzer, 21
Sam Sturgis, 21
Nathaniel Lane Taylor, 21
Francis Danico, 20
Ray Luddy, 20
Nancy Johnson, 19
Bruce McKeeman, 19
Sandra Murphy Mauer, 18
Sue Richart, 18
Marie Wells, 18
Loretta Brown-Aldrich, 17
Jan Lundquist, 17
Kathleen Oberley, 17
Barbara Macken, 14
Margaret Parker, 13
Carol Botteron, 12
David C. Dearborn, 12
Gay Hyson, 12
Charlie Watson, 10

Thank
you!

The Volunteer Endowed Fund

A permanently endowed fund to benefit our volunteer program has been established in memory of longtime American Ancestors member Thomas Oliver Carlson (1943–2023) of Story City, Iowa. During his lifetime, Tom donated to our volunteer program because he believed in its importance. The fund was created after his death by Tom's sister Mary. To learn more about the fund, contact Vice President for Gift Planning Ted MacMahon at ted.macmahon@americanancestors.org.

Jewish Heritage Center 2026 research fellows

In April, the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center (JHC) announced the recipients of its two annual research fellowships. Selected by an academic fellowship review committee, the Fellows will conduct their research at the JHC this summer and give public talks on their topics in the winter.



The 2026 Genevieve Geller Wyner Research Fellow is **Jeremy Menchik, PhD**, Associate Professor of International Relations and Political Science at the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies and director of the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University.

Jeremy is author of three books, and his work has appeared in academic journals and national media. His recent research focuses on Jewish internationalism, and he will be studying the Boston Workers Circle Records in the JHC archives.



The 2026 Ronald C. Curhan and Joan Pokross Curhan Research Scholar is **Randall Geller, PhD**. Having taught and conducted research internationally, over the past ten years he has been researching and teaching US and world history at the university and high school levels in greater Boston.

Randall will be using the JHC archives for his current research on the history of the Jewish community in Boston's North End from approximately 1880 to 1910.



Employees of the year

Every year, American Ancestors honors staff excellence in three categories at our annual meeting. This year's recipients were (left to right): **SARAH QUIAT** (beyond the call of duty), **JENNIFER ZANOLLI** (outstanding service to constituents), and **SHARON INGLIS** (best contribution to the field).



On April 18, American Ancestors conducted a workshop for twenty-six classroom teachers on St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. Teachers received training and resources to incorporate family history into their curriculums.

PHOTOS BY SOPHIA AUBIN, CARIBBEAN GENEALOGY LIBRARY.

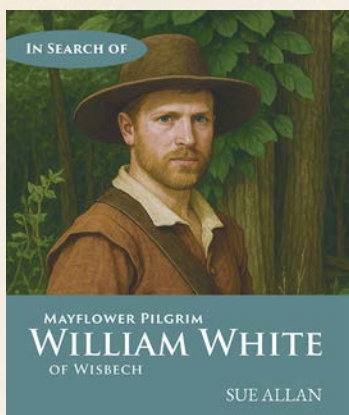
Staff news

We welcome these new hires to our staff: Accountants **AHMED ABOELDAHAB** and **KERRY O'CONNOR**; Researchers **KATE KENYON**, **HOLLY ROBERGE**, and **ANNA RUANE**; and Visitor Experience Associate **BAILEY RICHTER**. The following staff members have been promoted: **SARAH QUIAT** is Assistant Director, Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center. **CHRISTINE BACHMAN-SANDERS** and **ANJELICA OSWALD** are Research Services Special Projects Managers, and **KATE GILBERT** is Senior Researcher.



New Publications

from American Ancestors



In Search of *Mayflower* Pilgrim William White of Wisbech

By Sue Allan

8-1/4 x 9-1/4 paperback, 118 pages, illustrated; \$29.99

In this compelling biography of William White, a foundational ancestor to many Americans, Sue Allan reveals William's father and identifies the school William attended as a boy in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. She also proves that the school was once the ancient Holy Trinity Guild Hall. In her signature style, Allan takes us deep into the history of nearby Ely and the wild landscape of the Fenlands, to the heart of William White's life as a young orphan in the streets of Wisbech. Ann Warren Wilkerson, Governor of the Pilgrim William White Society, calls White's story one of "faith, honor, and courage like no other."

from Newbury Street Press

The Ancestors of John Weed Franklin and Elizabeth Lloyd Gibson, Book I: Ancestry of Elizabeth Lloyd Gibson

By Hallie Kirchner

8-1/4 x 10-1/4 hardcover, 520 pages, illustrated; \$99.95



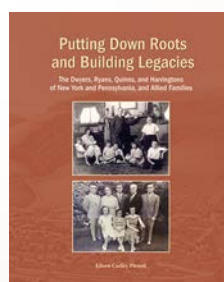
This volume treats the maternal ancestors of Churchill Gibson Franklin, tracing the descendants of his mother Elizabeth's Gibson, Stuart, Lloyd, and Blackford immigrant ancestors. While Elizabeth Gibson's roots are deeply Southern, three of the four first-generation ancestors treated in this work

arrived in Pennsylvania before moving south to Virginia and Maryland. The fourth ancestor was a Scotsman who immigrated to the United States via Rotterdam, Holland, and settled in Richmond, Virginia. The origins of all four families are in the British Isles: The Gibsons were Scottish, the Stuarts were Scots-Irish, the Lloyds were Welsh, and the Blackfords were presumably also Scottish (their connection is not proven). In each family, individuals made their mark on their local communities as merchants, doctors, lawyers, and teachers. A religious tradition was apparent in the Gibson and Lloyd families, which produced several Episcopal bishops.

Putting Down Roots and Building Legacies: The Dwyers, Ryans, Quinns, and Harringtons of New York and Pennsylvania, and Allied Families

By Eileen Pironti

8-1/4 x 10-1/4 hardcover, 200 pages, illustrated; \$69.95



Joseph Litzelswope and his family left the Baden-Württemberg region of Germany, which experienced a financial crisis and poor crop production around the time the family departed in 1817. Destitution and death in Ireland between 1845 and 1852 due to the Great Famine (*An Gorta Mór*)

likely fueled John Ryan's and Patrick Quinn's decisions to emigrate from Ireland to America. Better work and land ownership opportunities in the United States than in Ireland likely prompted the departures of Cornelius Harrington in 1827 and John Dwyer in the 1860s. Members of all these families put down roots in the United States and served their communities as teachers and lawyers—and, in wartime, in both military and civilian positions.



SCAN ME

Order online at
shop.AmericanAncestors.org



PHOTOS AND AI *for Family Historians*

AI has revolutionized genealogical research by delivering deep searches, full-text access, and AI chatbot assistants. AI also offers tools that help family historians with their photo collections, particularly with image dating, facial recognition, and image improvement and generation.

Understanding how AI works and where it can go wrong is important. The three basic AI models are ChatGPT (Open AI), Gemini (Google), and Perplexity. For all three, users specify a prompt (a series of clear instructions providing AI a defined task), a requested result, and details that shouldn't be included.

An incomplete prompt can lead to “hallucinations”—the most common complaint about AI. These errors include fabrications, invention of facts, misattribution of information, falsified sources, and, in the case of image modification/generation, the addition of false details to an existing image. Better prompts mean better results,

but even complete prompts—and instructions not to hallucinate—can still produce hallucinations. All results need double-checking.

Choosing the right tools for your specific task is key. Each AI platform has strengths and weaknesses. Perplexity is a great research tool. On ChatGPT, users can find customized chatbots to tackle tasks or create their own. Gemini's Nano Banana excels with image improvement/generation tools. Researchers who pose the same queries to all three models can benefit from each program's strengths and pool the knowledge.



Maureen Taylor, The Photo Detective™, has a popular podcast, *The Photo Detective*, and is the author of several books on photo history and genealogy. See maureentaylor.com for more information.

Above: The heavily damaged photo in the center was reconstructed using AI. Two different AI models created two different enhancements. The ChatGPT version is shown on the left and the Gemini version is on the right.

Analysis of an unidentified studio portrait from Providence, Rhode Island, using Photo Detective GPT (no prompt necessary)

Photograph format & studio

- This appears to be a cabinet card photograph, a format most popular from the mid-1870s through the 1890s.
- The imprint at the bottom reads “Brown, 243 Westminster St., Providence, R.I.”
- The ornate gold lettering and dark mount are consistent with cabinet cards produced in the late 1870s to mid-1880s.

Estimated date

- Based on the woman’s clothing, hairstyle, and the cabinet card style, the image most likely dates to about 1881–1886.
- The fitted cuirass-style bodice and elongated torso silhouette are especially characteristic of the early-to-mid-1880s.

Fashion analysis

- The woman is wearing a tightly fitted bodice with long sleeves, a high neckline, contrasting dark inset panel at the chest, and decorative button trim extending vertically down the skirt.
- The bodice shape reflects the natural form/early bustle era transition, when dresses emphasized a long, smooth torso.
- The visible drapery and back fullness suggest a restrained bustle or tournure style fashionable in the early 1880s.
- Jewelry and accessories include a long, beaded necklace; drop earrings; and a bracelet or cuff detail.
- These details suggest she was likely middle class or comfortably prosperous.

Hairstyle

- Her hair is drawn upward into a high, structured arrangement with tight curled bangs/fringe across the forehead and braided and looped sections on top.
- This elaborate coiffure is strongly associated with the 1882–1885 period.

Age & social clues

- The sitter appears to be approximately 35–50 years old.
- Her composed posture and formal dress indicate this was likely an intentional studio portrait marking marriage or widowhood, a family milestone, or simply the growing affordability of professional portraits in the 1880s.

Studio background & props

- The painted architectural backdrop and table with books were standard Victorian studio props.
- Books often symbolized education, respectability, and moral character.
- Props were commonly chosen by photographers rather than the sitter.

Genealogical research suggestions

- Search Providence city directories for “Brown” photographers at 243 Westminster Street. (This could tighten the date range.)
- Compare the estimated date against census, marriage, and probate records and family migration timelines.
- If you suspect a specific woman, compare her age in the 1880 census with the apparent age of the person in the photo.

Identification clues to examine

- Check the back carefully for names, photographer stamps, and later family identifications
- Examine clothing construction under magnification, since hand-sewn alterations can indicate reuse or mourning adaptation.
- The dark trim and restrained color contrast could indicate everyday formal wear or subtle mourning attire, though not full mourning dress.

Most likely overall date

Circa 1883–1885 is the strongest estimate based on the combined evidence of hair, bodice cut, cabinet card mount, studio style, and overall silhouette.

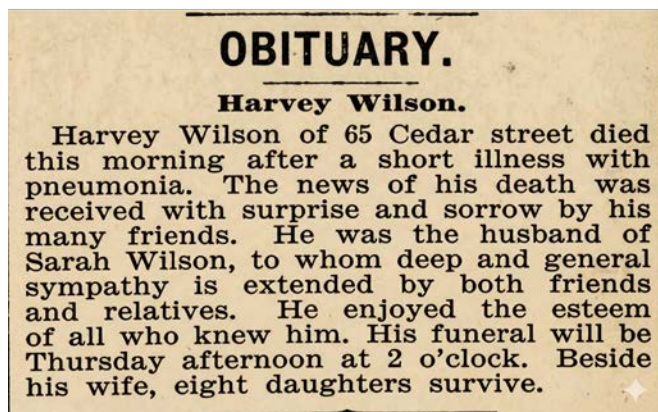
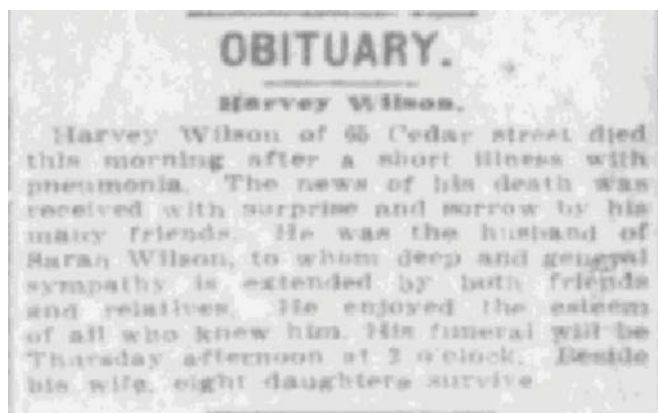
Note that even with all the information and evidence provided for this photo by the Photo Detective GPT, additional research is needed to confirm a date. This woman—like many others—didn’t necessarily follow the latest fashion trends and may have worn an older dress. Nonetheless, an AI time frame analysis can be enlightening. The GPT also provides Genealogical Proof Standard research tips to help you identify next steps.



For the complete analysis of this photo see chatgpt.com/share/6a036e85-8820-83ea-a42a-c75ad18e7676.

Similarly, I suggest using the same image and prompt across multiple platforms to see how the models compare. These tools will work on a variety of photo formats—as well as scans and digital downloads of documents (since they are also image files). In addition to improving photographic images, you can potentially make a census record more readable, analyze the contents, and generate a transcription.

Some photo tools don't rely on prompts to improve and alter images or match faces. Some examples include Apple Photos, [Forever.com](#), [Mylio.com](#), and Vivid-Pix Restore and Memory Station software. Others can be found on popular websites such as [MyHeritage.com](#) and [Ancestry.com](#). Increasingly, genealogy companies are building more specialized AI photo tools on large genealogy websites and in some genealogical software.



In this example, a very blurry digitized microfilm obituary from the December 6, 1910, *Pawtucket Times* (via OldNews.com) is transformed using Nano Banana with a specific prompt: "This is a very unclear newspaper obituary. Can you sharpen the words so it's readable. Do not insert any text that isn't in the document." The last sentence, "Do NOT insert," attempts to prevent hallucinations. However, even this command is not always effective. In all cases, make sure to fact-check and proof your images.

Image dating

AI scrutinizes a number of variables in a photo—such as clothing styles, image format, and studio imprints—and determines a date based on that evidence. One option for analysis is The Photo Detective GPT (chatgpt.com/g/g-TO3vBbh9W-the-photo-detective), my free custom tool. Uploading an image to the tool's chat bar produces a bulleted list of key details that makes the case for a specific date range. (Users can supply additional relevant information.) The tool also recommends next steps for researching and verifying each detail to prove the date hypotheses. [See opposite page for an edited version of the analysis.]

MyHeritage's Scribe AI tool presents key findings, historical background, an estimated date, location, visual clues, and technical details such as photo format. The historical background offers sources for the photographer and commentary on attire, and "estimated date" provides a time frame (including a confidence level for the estimate). The visual clues point to evidence seen in the image, such as a book or a painted backdrop. Family historians can use all of this information for further research and to consider whether any ancestors or relatives might be a good match for the person pictured. This summary provides a good start for a narrative.

Facial recognition

AI is also changing how photographs are identified and organized. Facial recognition technology detects and analyzes facial features in images, converting them into mathematical patterns. The analysis can read more than twenty points in a face, with ears as unique as fingerprints. This tool is particularly handy for working with large groups of family photographs. Using a digital organizer or a website with facial recognition capabilities can help genealogists identify the same person across decades, spot siblings, separate maternal and paternal images, and more easily date photos by helping to create a visual timeline of a person's life.

But facial recognition is not without flaws. Results can be uncertain if images are damaged or low-resolution, or if facial changes occurred due to age, illness, or injury. Glasses, facial hair, and varied angles can also skew results.

Adobe Bridge, Apple Photos, [Forever.com](#), Lightroom Classic, [Mylio.com](#), and Related Faces (a facial matching site that compares faces) all use facial recognition. Ancestry.com's "search by face" feature aims to facially match users' photos with photos in Ancestry's photo database. Forever.com uses facial clustering, which groups similar images of unnamed people, usually within

a time frame or at an event. This approach puts the user in control of making identifications.

In general, be cautious in using this technology. Rather than blindly accepting that a whole group of images is of the same person, look at the photos individually before assigning the same name to all of them. Remember that people with similar faces aren't necessarily related. For instance, photographer François Brunelle (francoisbrunelle.com/webn/e-project.html) has spent decades making photo studies of people who look alike from around the world. To verify an identity suggested by facial recognition/matching, ask yourself whether the person in your photo was living in the correct place and time, at the right age, to make the identification accurate.

Photo improvement and image generation

Through websites and tools, AI can quickly sharpen soft images, improve contrast, remove minor damage, emphasize obscure details, and perhaps offer family history clues. AI can even colorize black-and-white photos in seconds. These enhancements offer opportunities to see and enjoy your images in new and different ways.

But AI has its limits here, too. In the case of photo alteration, AI hallucinations can invent details, add textures, make skin overly smooth, and misinterpret clothing and backgrounds. Sometimes, AI-driven

colorization—which involves estimating likely colors based on common patterns and data from similar images—can look surreal.

So, while the results can be beautiful, remember that AI enhancement is always an interpretation, not an

Best practices

- Always keep the original scan as a master.
- Document all changes to the original.
- Label all images (using watermarks, metadata, and file names) with AI model and date.
- Embed metadata (dates, names, places, photographer and/or ownership) in the file when possible.
- Use colorization cautiously.
- Maintain historical accuracy.
- Avoid over-restoration (altering clothing, hairstyles, or features beyond what the evidence supports).
- Don't replace or obscure original details.
- Don't share an image without disclosing that AI was used.
- Don't share photos of living people without their permission.



Since the photo on the left was so badly faded, Nano Banana was used to colorize and enhance it. If you look closely, you'll see subtle differences in the faces.

improvement of the actual historical original. To avoid the “overdone” look, your prompt must include the photo format (i.e., tintype) so that it mimics the correct look. If you are trying to fill in missing details (as in the example on page 15), be specific about what you want to add, and request period-appropriate colors. Also, explicitly forbid modern smoothing effects. When you proof your AI-enhanced photos, look to see whether any unwanted elements were introduced and make any necessary edits.

A range of editing and enhancement options are available. One popular image enhancement tool is Vivid-Pix Restore and Memory Station software. Websites such as [Forever.com](https://forever.com) and [Ancestry.com](https://ancestry.com) provide photo editing and enhancement tools. MyHeritage was the first genealogy-related website to offer AI tools. Some of these photo features should be used with care: over-sharpening can distort a face, not everyone is a fan of animating old images, and colorization isn’t historically accurate.

Vivid-Pix Restore and Memory Station software sharpens images, allows the downloading of image files, and lets users add metadata according to the standards of [SaveMetadata.org](https://save-metadata.org). Forever.com, a photo organizing company, offers some editing tools and metadata. Ancestry.com’s Memories area allows users to upload images, add (nonexportable) data, and use limited editing tools to adjust, colorize, sharpen, crop, and rotate. If your goal is to try minor enhancements, see if tools you already have access to, say through an existing subscription, will accomplish the tasks.

Image generation refers to asking AI to create an image from a prompt or description. The term also refers to AI image improvements to existing photos which result in newly created photos, not altered originals. Generative AI models include Google Gemini’s Nano Banana and ChatGPT, but there are others.

Signs of AI-altered images

- Subtle or extreme anomalies due to “hallucinations”
- Mismatched facial features (discrepancies in size and location of features) and eye color changes
- Perfection in faces or skin texture, or colors that look too bright and modern
- Overcorrected, plastic-looking facial contours
- Misspelled, altered, or inserted signage
- Mismatched clothing changes—fabric, style, and accessories don’t match or are added

Both image improvements and image generations should be reviewed to ensure the resulting images are historically accurate.

The use of AI tools for image improvement or generation can be cited in two ways. First, logos and other symbols are built into individual AI platforms, and second, metadata can be added to all image files. [MyHeritage.com](https://myheritage.com) uses a variety of icons that note changes made to images with their tools. For instance, a painter’s palette in the left corner signifies that the image is colorized. For altered images, Nano Banana changes the file name and inserts a logo in the corner. Since these logos and symbols can be edited out, adding metadata will embed information about the AI model and date more permanently in the digital file.

Ethics and transparency

As enhancement tools become more powerful and accessible, the genealogy community is asking questions about trust, evidence, and transparency. The fast growth in AI tools led to the establishment of the Coalition for Responsible AI in Genealogy (craiggen.org). This group of genealogy professionals seeks the ethical use of AI in key areas: accuracy, disclosure, privacy, education, and compliance. Their statement on “Protecting Trust in Historical Images” recommends that all modified or generated images be labeled, cited as a modification/generation, and used as illustration, not evidence. The Content Authenticity Initiative (contentauthenticity.org) was created by Adobe and other business partners in the image field. Their aim is to provide better content transparency.



If there is one constant with AI, it is the quick rate of change. You can keep track of current innovations by following Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence on Facebook (facebook.com/groups/genealogyandai).

AI’s rapid evolution is quickly changing how genealogists analyze, organize, and interact with their historical images. AI tools save time, reveal hidden clues, and provide accessibility to large photo collections.

However, AI is not a replacement for “old school” techniques of examining evidence, verifying historical context, and proving conclusions with careful research. Every answer or image improvement needs to be analyzed for validity. At this point, AI can suggest possible solutions and answers, but it can’t prove identity or relationships.

AI is a tool that supports traditional methods. Use them together—and use AI wisely. ♦



Getting Started Digitizing Your Family Photographs

Do you have boxes of family photographs in your basement or attic? One of the best ways to ensure that these resources survive and are accessible for family members far and wide is to digitize them. Below are some best practices for digitizing your family photographs at home.

Review your collection

Make a plan before digitizing. Consider setting priorities based on historical value, physical condition, and the intended use of the material. Knowing the characteristics of the images you plan to digitize will help you determine your workflow for the project and the equipment and settings you use.

Inventory your collection

An inventory spreadsheet may include title, summary, and physical description fields. This information will help you estimate the size and length of your project and the amount of digital storage space required. Consider the following factors for your images:

- Physical size, which impacts hardware choice and storage space
- Image type, which affects the hardware choice
- Physical condition, which can indicate the need for a conservator

Determine what you want to digitize

Consider your end goal. Not everything needs to be digitized! For example, do you want to focus on photos of a particular member of your family? Do you only want to digitize slides and negatives? Maybe you want to focus on your oldest photo albums.

Choose your hardware

The best options for at-home digitization projects are a flatbed scanner or a camera with a tripod or copy stand.

When digitizing rare, fragile, or valuable photographs, make sure your equipment won't damage your image, or consider hiring a conservator or imaging vendor. Professional vendors have specialized equipment and experience digitizing a wide variety of materials.

Flatbed scanners

Choose a scanner capable of at least 600 ppi (pixels per inch) optical resolution or higher (2000–3000 ppi optical resolution for film). Use scanners to digitize:

- Unbound photographs
- Some bound albums (if the item lies flat without putting strain on the binding)
- Film, including negatives and slides, with the use of a transparency adapter
- Small, flat objects



June Henry is the Digital Archivist at AmericanAncestors.org.

Camera and tripod

Cameras that have at least a 15 megapixel sensor are best for digitization projects. Ideally, you should have a macro lens and be able to control the ISO, shutter speed, white balance, and other image settings. Taking RAW format images is highly recommended.

Cameras can be used to digitize bound photo albums, oversized images, and film, including negatives and slides.

Digitizing film, negatives, and slides will require a light box and tripod or other film holder. If you use a camera, you will need additional equipment, such as a copy stand, tripod, or a camera clamp (attached to a table); adjustable lamps; and possibly small weights and pointers and a book cradle or pillows (for bound volumes).

Scan settings and file types

Recommended scanning settings

See Table 1 for recommended scanning settings.

File types

When scanning an image, choose a file type that matches the intended purpose. To preserve or print an original image, scan in RAW or TIFF format. These high-quality, large, uncompressed files capture all data in front of the sensor. They will be your “image masters.”

Files for access, sharing, or website display can be scanned as JPEGs, PNGs, or PDFs, which are smaller, compressed files.

All of the file types listed are universally compatible and supported between browsers and operating systems.

Imaging guidelines

Although image capture software varies across scanners and cameras, the following guidelines are universal.

General recommendations

- Turn off auto exposure and any automated color correction or image repair.
- Prepare the item before scanning the image so that the archival files are well lit, in focus, and right side up.

- Capture generous borders around the edges of the item.
- Archival files should remain untouched. Create access copies from the preservation files and make edits, such as rotation or color correction, to these copies rather than the preservation file.
- Choose a file naming scheme that helps you to associate a digital image with the original. File names should be consistent, succinct, and make sense to someone unfamiliar with your collection. Use alphanumeric characters, hyphens, and underscores. Do not include spaces, periods (except before the file extension), other punctuation, or special characters. Include names, places, the date, and perhaps a unique identifying number. Write dates in yyyyymmdd format, so the filenames sort chronologically. (An example of a good file name is “Brown_Mary_18940711,” not “Aunt With Our Puppy.”)

Using a flatbed scanner

1. Clean scanner surface.
2. Position document(s) at a right angle to a straight edge.
3. Select image settings (reminder: turn off auto exposure and any automated color correction or image repair).
4. Preview, making sure to include generous borders around the item, and scan.

Scanning negatives and film

1. Clean scanner and film.
2. Put film or slides in film holders and place on scanner and close scanner lid.
3. Select image settings.
4. Turn on the “unsharp mask” setting on the software to prevent the use of filters.
5. Turn off auto exposure and any automated color correction or image repair.
6. Click preview to see the entire image.
7. Select each item of interest, leaving a generous border for each one.
8. Scan individual items.



Table 1: Recommended scanning settings

Document type	Minimum resolution <i>at pixels per inch</i>	Minimum bit depth	Color space
Photographs	600 ppi	24 bit	Adobe RGB Color
Photo albums	600 ppi	16 bit	Adobe RGB Color
Photographic film, e.g., negatives and slides smaller than 4" x 5"	3000 ppi	16 (grayscale) or 24 bit	Adobe RGB Color or Gray Gamma 2.2
Photographic film smaller than 8" x 10"	1500 ppi	16 (grayscale) or 24 bit	Adobe RGB Color or Gray Gamma 2.2
Photographic film larger than 8" x 10"	800 ppi	16 (grayscale) or 24 bit	Adobe RGB Color or Gray Gamma 2.2

Using a camera

These camera settings will capture archival quality images:

- ISO 100-200
- Aperture priority mode
- f8-11
- Highest image quality
- Autofocus
- Adjusted white balance, if necessary



Camera workflow

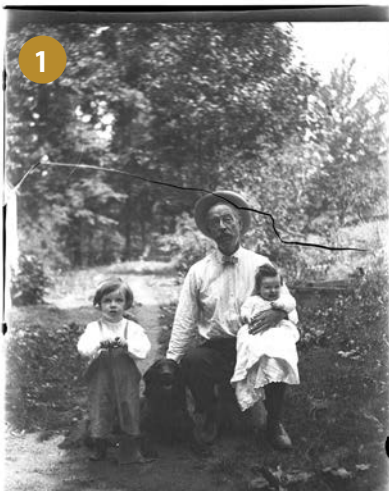
1. Set up an uncluttered background for photographs.
2. Set up and turn on lights, minimizing shadows as much as possible.
3. Set up tripod or stand and attach camera.
4. Adjust camera and tripod so the image and a generous border fills most of the camera viewfinder.
5. Position image at a right angle to a straight edge.
6. Test focus and exposure.
7. Take photographs.

Examples from our archives

Although the following examples describe the digitization process for three different types of images, the main principles of digital stewardship apply to all of them. In each case, corrections to exposure, brightness, contrast, and image orientation were made to duplicates, while the original digital files remained untouched. After digitization, we created a separate spreadsheet for each image describing the subject, creator, and technical specifications used to create the archival file.

1. Film

This image of an unidentified man and two children comes from a collection of transparent film negatives donated to American Ancestors. The Special Collections team flagged this group as a digitization priority because the items included many flexible nitrate-based film negatives, which are highly flammable, especially when the negatives display signs of deterioration. While these images showed no signs of deterioration (yellowing, acidic odor, or welding), the Special Collections team made the curatorial decision to digitize these negatives and separate them from the rest of the collection.



The image was captured at 2400 ppi in 16-bit grayscale with a flatbed scanner, a film holder, and the transparency adapter removed. No filters or digital corrections were used. The image was saved as a TIFF file.

2. Daguerreotype in hinged case

This daguerreotype of Nathaniel French Davis and his Grandmother Maxfield is set beneath protective glass in a wood and leather case. Daguerreotypes are a challenge to capture because they are reflective and, during photography, can change from a positive to a negative image depending on the lighting and the angle of the camera lens. The glass cover can also cause unwanted reflections back to the camera's sensor.

Another complication is that the leather hinge on the daguerreotype case is deteriorating, and the metal clasp is vulnerable. While we could capture a good image on a flatbed scanner, turning the open case over could further damage the hinge and the metal clasp could scratch the glass scanner bed. Due to these factors, using an overhead camera mounted on a tripod is preferable.



Left: Wilson Family Photograph Negatives, Accession #2001-056. Right: Nathaniel French Davis and his Grandmother Maxfield, Nathaniel Davis Papers, Accession #2012-127. Both images from R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, American Ancestors.

Four images should be captured for this object: 1. front of the case closed, 2. inside of the case lying open and flat (both sides in one capture), 3. fragments of paper inside the case (captured separately), and 4. back of the case closed.

Before scanning the daguerreotype, we placed it on a neutral background and arranged the lamps to reduce shadows and glare. The images were captured at 600 ppi in 24-bit color, with no filters or digital corrections, and were saved as TIFF files.

3. Scrapbook page

This image shows a page from a scrapbook in the Lothrop Family Collection, which was removed from its original binding at some point. The binding or the covers were likely in poor condition (from use, mold, or leather rot). Since the page was no longer in an album, it was easy to scan on a flatbed scanner.

Due to eroding adhesive, photos are often found loose in scrapbooks and photo albums. It is important to keep track of the photographs' original placement and replicate that order during digitization. Similarly, the entire



A page from a photo album in the Lothrop Family Collection, Mss 1199, R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, American Ancestors.

page should be scanned, rather than each individual photograph. Copies of the original archival file may be cropped after digitization to highlight a particular image.

The entire page was captured at 600 ppi in 24-bit color on a flatbed scanner and saved as a TIFF file. No filters or digital corrections were used.

Organizing and preserving your digital files

Organization

A good first step is to make copies of your digitized files and store them in separate folders. The folder directory should be consistent and make sense to someone not familiar with your collection.

The original scans or digital photographs are your “image masters.” Do not make any changes to them! If you have an unedited set of masters, you can always go back to the originals if you make a mistake while editing an image. The copies are your “working files”—for editing and distribution.

Digital preservation

Once you’ve scanned or photographed your family images, consider how you will preserve the digital files. These files are fragile, too, and require ongoing management to ensure that they stay readable. Digital media degrades over time, so it is important to make multiple copies of your digital files and create a preservation plan.

The “3-2-1 rule” is a standard digital preservation recommendation:

- Make a minimum of 3 copies of your digital images.
- Store them in at least 2 different types of storage systems. Common digital media storage systems are hard drives, flash drives, and cloud storage.
- Store 1 copy in a different physical location.

Plan to check on your digital media at least once a year to ensure that sure you can still open the files. Copy your files to new media every five years.

Digital media have a physical dimension: they are electrons stored in a physical space (whether it is a remote server you have never seen or on your desktop computer). Operating systems change, files degrade, and if you don’t regularly check on your files, you may risk data loss due to obsolete programs or inadequate equipment.

Family historians can—and should—adopt professional digitization and digital stewardship practices. Your collections benefit from higher digital standards. This

rigorous approach is critical for preserving and accessing your family’s stories, images, and memories far into the future. ♦

Preserving Your Family Photographs

Many of us have photographs of people, places, or moments in time that we want to protect and preserve. Unlike digital photographs stored on a personal device or in the cloud, physical photographs can vary widely in size, type, and date of production. These images can range from cased daguerreotypes produced as early as the 1840s to Polaroid prints from the late twentieth century. While these images can seem quite different from each other, following one set of practical guidelines will help protect all your physical photographic treasures for future generations to enjoy.

Environment

One of the most important considerations for preserving your photographs is the storage environment, particularly the temperature and relative humidity (RH). Different types of photographs deteriorate at different rates, but they all benefit from being stored at lower temperature and humidity and, especially, a stable environment. Storage temperatures for photographic materials should be no higher than 70°F with a relative humidity between 30% and 50%, with fluctuations of less than 5% RH during a 24-hour period. Heat increases the rate of

deterioration because it speeds up chemical reactions while higher relative humidity levels provide moisture for chemical reactions and can lead to mold growth. For this reason, storage in basements or attics is not recommended. Photographs should also be stored at least six inches above the floor to prevent water damage. Storing materials directly on the floor can expose your photos to water with even minimal spills or leaks.

Storage

Light can fade or damage photographs, so it is best to store them in a space without windows and with limited exposure to artificial light, such as a closet. Housing photographs in folders and boxes can also limit the amount of light exposure no matter where they are stored, but make sure that the materials aren't potentially damaging. If using paper-based folders and boxes, make sure that they have passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT)—a test performed on housing materials to make sure that they won't react with or cause harm to photographs. If you prefer to store your photographs in a clear material, be sure to choose an inert plastic made of polyester film, polyethylene, or polypropylene. These plastics are chemically stable and should not react with photographic materials. Make sure to avoid vinyl (often listed as polyvinyl chloride or PVC), which is neither safe nor stable and can cause permanent damage to photographs over time. Also avoid so-called “magnetic”

storage albums that have lines of pressure-sensitive adhesive on pages to hold photographs in place. The adhesive will darken as it ages and can stain photographs.



Far left: Daguerreotype of Ward Jackson Parks (1830–1910), likely taken in Boston. Thaxter Parks Spencer Collection, Mss 1126. *Left:* Tintype of Kate Camden of California and an unknown man, ca. 1865–1870. African American Tintypes Collection, Mss 1177. Both images from R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, American Ancestors.



**Todd Pattison is
the Conservator at
American Ancestors.**



A Polaroid from the Lorraine Burlingame Claxton Papers, Mss 1313.
R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, American Ancestors.

Labeling

Label your photographs with locations, dates, and names for the benefit of future generations. Choose your writing implement carefully. Selecting the wrong one can cause permanent damage to old photographs and lay the groundwork for future damage in more modern photos. Don't ever use highlighters, permanent markers, or other ink-based pens. These are often water soluble and can bleed, smear, and transfer onto photos or even sink into the image layer over time—even from the back of the photo. Instead, working on a hard surface to make sure that you don't indent or mark the photo, write with a soft #2 pencil on the back of older paper-based photographic prints using light pressure. For newer resin-coated or plastic types of photo paper found in more contemporary family photos, use a softer 4B or 6B graphite pencil, a Berol Prismacolor pencil, or a PITT Faber-Castell Graphite Pure 2900B pencil. If possible, write on the folders, boxes, or sleeves that contain the photographs rather than on the photos themselves. (To avoid leaving an impression on a photo be sure to label the folder or sleeve before inserting the image.)

Handling

Minimizing handling is one of the best ways to protect your photographs. Creating digital copies, or even photocopies, can help limit contact but if you do need to handle original materials a few basic rules will help you to do so safely. Dirt and oils from your fingers can leave a residue on photographs that can cause damage over time so be sure to wash your hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly before touching photos. If

Photo preservation dos and don'ts

DON'T store photographic materials in basements or attics.

DO store photographs in living areas, where you will notice any changes in the temperature and humidity.

DON'T display photos on exterior walls or in direct sunlight

DO keep photos at least six inches off the floor to protect from water.

DON'T store photos in PVC sleeves or "magnetic" photo albums that use sticky adhesives.

DO store photographs in folders, boxes, and sleeves that have passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT).

DON'T write on photographs with pens or markers.

DO write names, places and dates on the back of photographs near the edges in a soft, graphite pencil.

DO make copies of photos at as high a resolution as possible (at least 600 ppi). [See pages 20–23.]

DO consult a conservator if you have questions about damaged photographs.

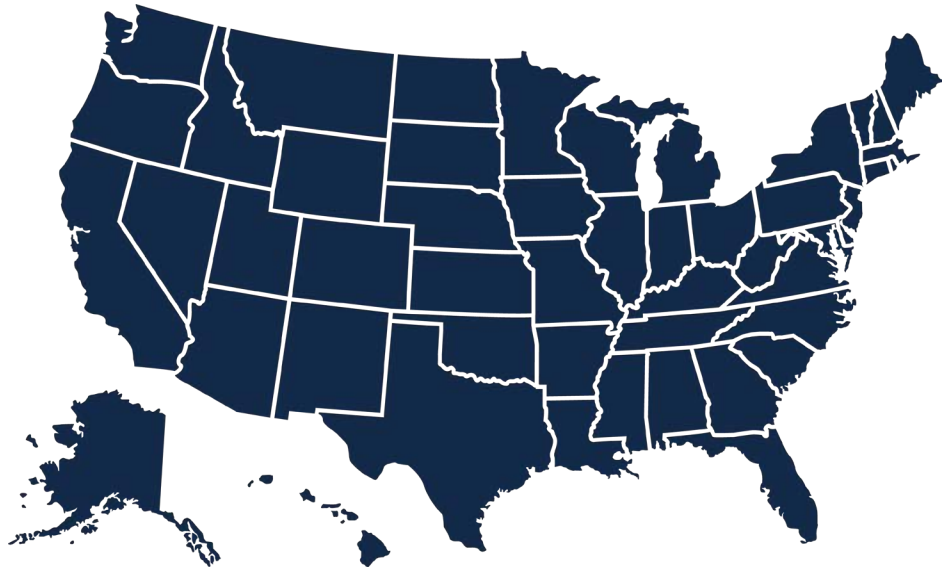
possible, try to hold photos carefully by the edges, rather than touching the image area. Gloves can be worn when handling photos, but cotton gloves are not recommended because they reduce the user's tactile sensitivity, potentially increasing the chances of physical damage. Cotton gloves also have small fibers that can catch on brittle edges or abrade the image areas of photographs. Instead, you should use latex or nitrile gloves when working with photographic collections.

Conservation

If you have damaged photos that you would like to have treated, you should reach out to a professional conservator. Treatments can vary widely depending on the chemical process and specific materials used to make the photograph. The American Institute for Conservation (AIC) is the national membership organization of conservation professionals and a good place to start a search for a conservator who specializes in the treatment of photographs. You should also consider reaching out to a trained professional if you have photographs with active mold growth, staining from pressure sensitive tape, deteriorating negatives, photographs that are stuck to each other or to glass, and extensive damage that makes it difficult to handle the photograph. ♦

STATE SPOTLIGHT

Digitally Accessing Photographs State by State



Digital photography collections are a wonderful resource for family historians who wish to put a face to a name or to see the building in which an ancestor lived, learned, worshipped, or worked. Images of people, places, and objects can provide context, insight, and clues for further research. Illustrating genealogical compilations with photographs offers visual interest and documentation for current and future generations.

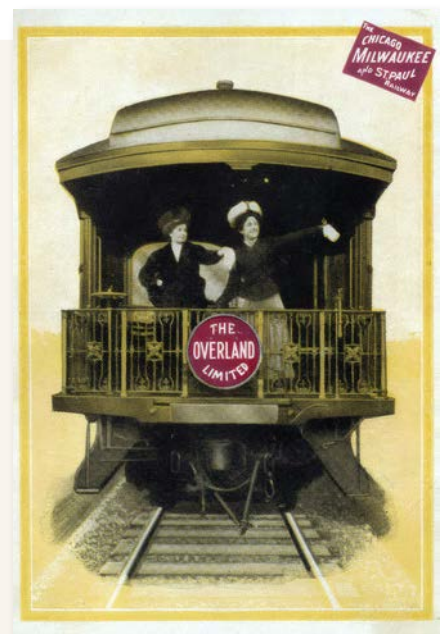
To identify freely accessible photograph collections online, staff members from across American Ancestors contributed to the list below. With the ever-increasing availability of digital images, our compilation is not meant to be all-inclusive but rather intended to highlight collections that we have used while researching and presenting family histories.



Wikimedia Commons is a versatile image collection site with dozens of different image categories. Each state has multiple categories and subcategories, making it likely that you'll find a photograph to fit your needs. When conducting a broad search of an American topic, use "Gallery pages of the United States" for its numerous subcategories and pages. Although "Gallery pages of the United States by state or territory" provides a limited number of images for each state, in total, Wikimedia Commons has over 142 million images as of May 2026. Therefore, Wikimedia Commons can be used as a starting point for a more in-depth investigation, especially since the search bar at the top on the webpage acts like any other search engine and allows you to expand your search horizons.

Matt Macy, Production Coordinator & Vita Brevis Editor

Postcard of the Overland Limited, jointly operated by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway and Southern Pacific, ca. 1905. Wikimedia Commons.



Kyle Hurst is a Senior Genealogist of the Newbury Street Press at American Ancestors. She and her publications colleagues periodically present a "Writing and Publishing Your Family History" course that features a session on photos and illustrations.

Freely accessible digital photograph archives

General United States

Digital Public Library of America

DPLA

dp.la

Flickr Commons

Flickr Foundation

[Flickr.com/commons](https://www.flickr.com/commons)

Library of Congress: Free to Use and Reuse

Library of Congress

[LOC.gov/free-to-use](https://www.loc.gov/free-to-use)

Smithsonian Open Access

Smithsonian Institution

[SI.edu/OpenAccess](https://si.edu/OpenAccess)

Wikimedia Commons

Wikimedia

[Commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images)

Digital Library & Archives

American Ancestors

[Digital.AmericanAncestors.org/digital](https://digital.americanancestors.org/digital)

Use advanced search for "photograph" within
Format or Description fields.

Digital Transgender Archive

DTA

DigitalTransgenderArchive.net

Lesbian Herstory Archives Photo Collection

Lesbian Herstory Archives

[LesbianHerstoryArchives.org/collections/
photo-collection/](https://lesbianherstoryarchives.org/collections/photo-collection/)

Alabama

Alabama Photographs and Pictures Collection

Alabama Department of Archives & History

[Digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/
collection/photo](https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/photo)

Alaska

Alaska's Digital Archives

Alaska State Library

[Vilda.alaska.edu](https://vilda.alaska.edu)

Arizona

Arizona Historical Society

Digital Collections

Arizona Historical Society Library & Archives

AZHSArchives.contentdm.oclc.org

Arizona Memory Project

Arizona State Library

AZMemory.azlibrary.gov

Arkansas

Arkansas Digital Archives

Arkansas State Archives

[AR-digital.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/
collection/images](https://AR-digital.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/images)

Bobby L. Roberts Library of

Arkansas History & Art

Central Arkansas Library System

arstudies.com

California

Calisphere

University of California

Calisphere.org

Colorado

Photographs and Moving

Images Collection

History Colorado

[HistoryColorado.org/
photographs-and-moving-images](https://HistoryColorado.org/photographs-and-moving-images)

Connecticut

Connecticut Digital Archive

University of Connecticut Library

CTDigitalArchive.org

Delaware

Digital Archives

Delaware Public Archives

Archives.Delaware.gov/digital-archives/#photo

Florida

Florida Memory: Photographs

State Library and Archives of Florida

FloridaMemory.com/discover/photographs

Brewery Gulch in Bisbee, 1890. Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records. History and Archives Division, via the Arizona Memory Project.



You cannot truly get a sense of life in Arizona around the time of its statehood in 1912 without seeing it. The **Arizona Historical Society Digital Collections** has organized their free digital photograph collection into easy-to-browse categories, including postcards. The **Arizona Memory Project** has a substantially larger collection of searchable images, making it the premier statewide digital collection. This site encompasses a broad range of years, including dates prior to statehood. Since the two sites offer unique options, using them together helped me locate images of the law firm buildings, residential neighborhood, and home of Cleon T. Knapp, a former Minnesotan who represented the Calumet and Arizona Mining County in Bisbee.

Meaghan E. H. Siekman, Senior Genealogist of the Newbury Street Press

Georgia

Vanishing Georgia

Georgia Archives: Virtual Vault

Vault.GeorgiaArchives.org/digital/collection/vg2

Hawaii

Photograph Collection

Hawai'i State Archives

DigitalArchives.Hawaii.gov/browse/parent/ark:70111/0gvR

Idaho

Digital Library of Idaho

University of Idaho

DigitalLibraryofIdaho.org

Illinois

Illinois Digital Archives

Illinois State Library

IDAIllinois.org

Indiana

Indiana Memory

Indiana State Library

Digital.library.in.gov

Iowa

Digital collections on Flickr

State Historical Society of Iowa

flickr.com/photos/shsi-library/albums

Collections are browsable but not searchable

Kansas

Kansas Memory

Kansas Historical Society

KansasMemory.gov

Kentucky

Faces and Places: Northern

Kentucky Photographic Archives

Kenton County Public Library

FacesandPlaces.KentonLibrary.org

Louisiana

Louisiana Digital Library

Louisiana Digital Consortium

LouisianaDigitalLibrary.org

Maine

Early Maine Photographs,

Maine Memory Network

Maine Historical Society

EarlyMainePhotos.MaineMemory.net

Maryland

Digital Maryland

Enoch Pratt Free Library/Maryland State Library

Resource Center

DigitalMaryland.org

Massachusetts

Digital Commonwealth

Boston Public Library

DigitalCommonwealth.org

Michigan

Michigan Memories

Michigan Service Hub

MichMemories.org

Minnesota

Collections Online, Gale Family Library

Minnesota Historical Society

MNHS.org/search/collections

Minnesota Digital Library

University of Minnesota

MNDigital.org

Mississippi

Mississippi Digital Library

MSDigLib.org

Missouri

Missouri Digital Heritage

Missouri Secretary of State

SOS.mo.gov/mdh

Montana

Montana History Portal

Montana State Library

MTMemory.org

Nebraska

Nebraska Memories

Nebraska Library Commission

NebraskaMemories.org/cdm

Nevada

Online Collections Database

Nevada Historical Society

NevadaHistory.PastPerfectOnline.com/photo

Search or browse photos

New Hampshire

Collections Catalog

New Hampshire Historical Society

NHHistory.org/research/collections-catalog

Search or browse photos

New Jersey

Digital Jerseyana Collection

New Jersey State Library

hdl.handle.net/10929/113279



Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, ca. 1920. University of Arkansas at Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture.

ARKANSAS

The Arkansas Digital Archives and the Central Arkansas Library System provide access to a wide variety of historic Arkansas photographs. Both can be browsed in a variety of manners (i.e., by subject, year, location) or searched by keyword. While researching a family from Hot Springs, where several generations worked in local hotels, I used both collections to find contemporary images of the hotels, as well as downtown street scenes. Together, these collections helped illustrate the family's story in a meaningful way.

Hallie Kirchner, Senior Genealogist

New Mexico

New Mexico's Digital Collections

University of New Mexico University
Libraries
EContent.unm.edu

New York

Digital Collections

New York Public Library
DigitalCollections.nypl.org

New York Heritage Digital Collections

Empire State Library Network
NYHeritage.org

North Carolina

North Carolina Digital Collections

State Archives of North Carolina and
Library of North Carolina
Digital.ncdcr.gov

North Dakota

Digital Horizons

DigitalHorizonsOnline.org

Ohio

Ohio Memory

Ohio History Connection and
State Library of Ohio
OhioMemory.org

Digital Cincinnati Library

Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library
Digital.CincinnatiLibrary.org

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Digital Prairie: Images of Oklahoma

Oklahoma Department of Libraries
DigitalPrairieOK.net/images

Pennsylvania

POWER Library: PA Photos and Documents

State Library of Pennsylvania
PowerLibrary.org/collections

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Photograph Collection

Digital Collections at Providence Public Library
ProvLibDigital.org/collection/002-03-06

South Carolina

Digital Collections

University of South Carolina Libraries
Digital.library.sc.edu/collections

PENNSYLVANIA

The **POWER Library** (PowerLibrary.org/collections) offers a statewide database of photos and documents from unique collections in libraries across Pennsylvania.

The archive allowed me to locate photos of the Gateway Clipper Fleet, Fallingwater, Horseshoe Curve, and Johnstown's Inclined Plane, and to browse for photos in local newspapers such as the *Sewickley Herald* and books such as *The Bridges of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*. These images brought my childhood in Western Pennsylvania to life.

Ellen (Teasley) Maxwell, Production Design Director



This photo, "The Melon Eaters," available on the POWER library website, was taken in the early 1920s in Elk Lick Twp., Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Reprinted with permission of The Springs Museum, Springs, Pennsylvania.

South Dakota

South Dakota Digital Archives

South Dakota State Historical Society
HistSD.access.preservica.com

Tennessee

Tennessee Virtual Archives

Tennessee State Library & Archives
Teva.contentdm.oclc.org

Texas

Texas Digital Archive: Prints and Photographs Collection

Texas State Library and Archives Commission
TSL.access.preservica.com

Utah

Digital Collections

Utah State Historical Society
History.Utah.gov/digital-collections

Vermont

Digital Vermont

Vermont Historical Society
DigitalVermont.org

Virginia

Library of Virginia Digital Collections

Library of Virginia
LVA.Virginia.gov/collections/digital-collections

Washington

Digital Collections

University of Washington Libraries
Content.lib.washington.edu

West Virginia

Digital Collections & Exhibits

West Virginia & Regional History Center,
West Virginia University
[WVRHC.lib.wvu.edu/collections/
digital-collections](http://WVRHC.lib.wvu.edu/collections/digital-collections)

Wisconsin

Recollection Wisconsin

WiLS (formerly Wisconsin Library Services)
RecollectionWisconsin.org/formats/photographs

Wyoming

Historic Photograph Collection

Wyoming State Archives
SPCRPhotoCollection.wyo.gov

Puerto Rico

Historic Photograph Collection

University of Puerto Rico (UPR) collection
Digital Library of the Caribbean
DLoC.com/collections/iupr
Search or browse photos

Family Photographs at the R. Stanton Avery Special Collections

Photographs are more than simple images on paper; they are compelling reminders of the past. Within a family history collection, photographs capture faces, places, and moments that words alone often cannot convey. Through them, we glimpse daily life, relationships, and traditions across generations, preserving details that might otherwise fade with time.

Family photographs are especially significant because they provide both historical and emotional insights. These images document milestones such as births and weddings, while also revealing quieter, everyday moments that define lived experiences. Photographs, through clothing, expressions, and settings, give context to the stories handed down through generations, helping us better understand who our ancestors were and how they lived.

Photographs at the R. Stanton Avery Special Collections span the mid-1840s, when photography was in its infancy, through the twentieth century. Photographs are integrated into our broader manuscript collections, rather than housed as one single standalone photograph archive. Photos typically can be found in family and personal papers, genealogical research collections, and other mediums, such as scrapbooks. The bulk of our photographs are 19th- and 20th-century studio portraits and 20th-century informal snapshots; some are housed within multi-generational family albums.

Our collection brings together images that reflect not only individual lives, but the broader narrative of a family's journey. Each photograph holds a story—sometimes remembered, sometimes rediscovered—inviting viewers to explore connections, ask questions, and preserve these memories for the future. In this way, photographs become a bridge across time, ensuring that personal histories remain vivid, accessible, and meaningful for generations to come.

The following photographs are just a small sample of over 2,000 images in our collection.



1. Portrait of a young girl, seated (African American Tintypes Collection, Mss 1177)

2. Workers at Frank D. Martin's box factory in North Springfield, Vermont (Bertrand A. Chapman Family Papers, Mss H 20)

3. A wedding party in Lithuania (Wilkas and Manfredi Family Collection, Mss 1132). This photo was sent to Joseph and Sophie (Styro) Wilkas, immigrants to Boston.



**Judith Lucey is the
Special Collections
Manager at American
Ancestors.**



3



4

B & Q Base Ball Club

5



At Watertown Apr. 23, 1911



6



7

4. Five children in the street (Albree Family Collection, Mss 674). [The Albree family lived in Swampscott, Concord, and Winchester, Mass.]

5. B & Q Baseball Club members in Watertown, Massachusetts, April 23, 1911 (Cynthia Cook Winterhalter Collection, Mss 1289)

6. Women digging for clams at Saquish Beach, Plymouth, Massachusetts, ca. 1900. (Frederick W. Hill Family Photograph Collection, Mss 1109)

7. Horse and carriage crossing river on a ferry (Adams, Cate, and Witherle Family Collection, Mss 1155). [The families were of Castine, Maine.]

PRE-20TH-CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS

Photography serves as a vital tool that helps us explore the lives of our ancestors. Offering a glimpse into their lives through preserved mannerisms, hairstyles, and dress, these scenes frozen in time provide a visual record of those who walked the path before us. These images offer tangible evidence of ancestors and relatives we know through oral traditions and genealogical records.

For nineteenth-century African American families, choosing to sit for a portrait was a revolutionary act. Prior to the age of photography, African Americans were often relegated to caricatures and portrayed as objects of ridicule. Many of the earliest photographs of African Americans, including the Zealy daguerreotypes of enslaved people now housed at the International African American Museum (IAAM) in Charleston, South Carolina, represent a dark history. These images were taken against their subjects' will and without their consent, produced through force or coercion that stripped them of the very dignity that self-directed portraiture would later reclaim.

When African Americans could choose whether to be photographed or not, they established the agency to represent themselves with dignity, on their own terms, and to preserve their legacy for future generations.

Safeguarding this legacy today is the Center for Family History at the International African American Museum of Charleston, South Carolina, which offers a publicly accessible digital collection that explores the photography of the African American community. Our archive of pre-twentieth-century photographs, sourced from private donations, depict African American ancestors, home life, Black neighborhoods, and businesses. (View the digital archive at iaamuseum.org/center-for-family-history/digital-archives.)

Each photograph is linked to descriptive metadata that provides the name of the photograph, the names of the individuals pictured, creation date, location, description,



image type and format, rightsholder information, and the name of the donor. When we look closely at this data—and the images themselves—powerful themes begin to emerge, perhaps none more striking than the visual documentation of Black professionalism.

Professionalism

A powerful spirit of self-determination emerged among African Americans in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Many shared a mindset focused on becoming economically independent, pursuing higher education and skilled labor, and obtaining social autonomy. Such advancements were instrumental in reshaping the African American professional landscape, facilitating a transition from labor-intensive roles toward professional and skilled roles. This movement also tried to combat the way African Americans were depicted in general American society. Many pre-twentieth-century images of African Americans showed them as enslaved, working in menial positions, or in other stereotypical portrayals denoting servitude, entertainment, scorn, or derision.

IAAM's online archival collection contains photos that were part of the effort to correct and rehabilitate the face of Black America for the general public. An 1890s photo



Darius Brown is the Research Assistant at the International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina. His email address is dbrown@iaamuseum.org.



of Leonard Wilson Roane of Newport News, Virginia, shows a young man who was a shipbuilding engineer in that city. A photo of his brother Bacchus Roane taken about the same time depicts a well-dressed man who served as a special policeman and justice of the peace in Newport News.

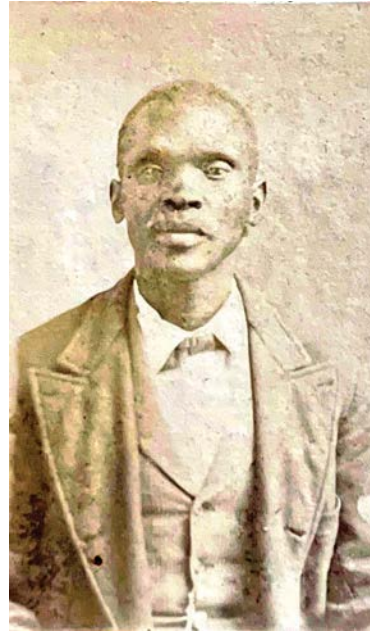
Women and family legacies

While the collection shows men highlighted for their white-collar and public service professions, women are honored for their resilience and presence. The images offer a glimpse into the lives of women who shaped their families' trajectories. The portrait of Mary Goins Marsh (1840–1905) and her granddaughter Mary Manitou captures the vital role of women as keepers of generational memory. Two women born in different eras share a space, creating a visual bridge that links the struggles of the past with the promise of the future and proving that the family line remained unbroken.

The 1898 portrait of the grandchildren of Captain Robert Smalls reflects a rich legacy of generational achievement. In 1862, Captain Smalls orchestrated an escape to freedom for his family and fellow crew members on board the *Planter*, achieving fame across the country. Smalls would later serve in Congress. His daughter Elizabeth Smalls Bampfield was only four when she escaped enslavement with her family. As an adult, Elizabeth served as her father's secretary, and she was even appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt as postmaster of Beaufort. This photograph of her children is more than a family portrait; it is a visual testament to a family who quickly moved from the status of property to civil leaders and pillars of the community.

Enslavement to autonomy

Several photos in this collection document individuals who were born enslaved and attained freedom after the Civil War. These portraits portray post-Civil War Black



Opposite page: Mary Goins Marsh and her granddaughter, Mary Manitou, Benzie County, Michigan, ca. 1895.

Left: The children of Elizabeth Smalls Bampfield (the grandchildren of Captain Robert Smalls), Beaufort, South Carolina, 1898.

Right: Samson Pringle of Georgetown, South Carolina, ca. 1891–1902.

Americans establishing themselves as individuals with honor, dignity, integrity—and a distinctive personal style.

Samson Pringle was one of these individuals. Born around 1843, he was enslaved by William Bull Pringle on the Beneventum Plantation in Georgetown County, South Carolina. He fought for his own freedom as a soldier in the 135th United States Colored Troops (USCT). Remarkably, his portrait was not found in a traditional family album but was preserved within his military pension file at the National Archives in Washington, DC. Taken between his Civil War pension application in 1891 and his death in September 1902, the photograph shows Pringle framed by an elegant, embossed matte. He is dressed in a tailored suit, facing the viewer with his head held high. His appearance stands in stark contrast to his beginnings on the Beneventum Plantation.



Ultimately, the pre-twentieth-century images of African Americans preserved by IAAM and other organizations prove that while a single picture may be worth a thousand words, archival collectives are priceless. Those captured in the frames chose to redefine their individual and collective narratives—and not let their stories or the stories of their people be controlled by others. By stepping in front of the camera lens, these African Americans claimed their place in the American story. By displaying these images, the Center for Family History at the International African American Museum does more than display faces from the past; it restores the names, stories, and context that time and injustice attempted to erase. ♦

WYNER FAMILY JEWISH HERITAGE CENTER SPOTLIGHT

The M. Winer Shop: From Sour Cream to Sweet Success

In 1895, Morris Winer (1871–1955) opened a small store specializing in fresh dairy products on Salem Street in the heart of Boston's North End. The photograph on the right, from the Elm Farm Foods Records (I-552) at the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center, shows Morris Winer (left) outside his storefront, likely with his brother Samuel.

Only the year before, Morris Winer had arrived in the United States from Russia. At 23 years old, he was young and ambitious. According to family lore, he was also fresh off a scandal with a Lithuanian rabbi's daughter. While in town as a traveling klezmer fiddler, he had eloped with the daughter—but then her father strong-armed an annulment.¹ Like many immigrants, the young man was looking for a fresh start. In Boston, he found one with the help of a not-so-fresh ingredient.

With a keen entrepreneurial eye, Winer noticed that the large dairy companies in the area were discarding sour cream as an unwanted byproduct. Decades later, his granddaughter Mary Ann Snider recalled it was “not a product of interest to the Yankees, but he knew it was a staple in the kitchens of Jewish and Polish families.” Few places sold the product, which was considered nothing more than waste. Morris Winer knew better and saw potential. He hatched the idea for a shop focused on *milchig*, a Yiddish word for kosher dairy products: sour cream, milk, cheese, yogurt, and butter.

His first shop was “crude,” Winer acknowledged in the 1927 silver jubilee edition of *The Jewish Advocate*.² The store had a modest footprint just large enough for daily operations. But it was well situated. At the time, Boston's North End was becoming a bustling hub for Irish,



Morris Winer, likely with his brother Samuel, at his first Boston store, ca. 1895.

Italian, and Jewish immigrants. The M. Winer Company was squeezed in next to tenement housing, street vendors, and other specialty retailers, carving out space for Jewish patrons to shop for familiar and kosher-certified ingredients.

In the months after the store opened, Winer found a more suitable romantic match in Mary Hootstein (1874–1930), a fellow immigrant who had arrived from Poland with her parents six years prior. They were married on August 9, 1896, and Boston Orthodox Head Rabbi Moses Margolies signed their marriage license. The Boston marriage register lists Morris' occupation as “Milk Store,” and Mary's as shopkeeper, indicating that perhaps the young couple worked together keeping the fledgling business afloat.³

The ambitious Winer soon added more products catering to Jewish consumers, his main constituency. Herring in cream sauce, sauerkraut, and cream cheese joined the lineup. He candled his own eggs, shining light through the shells to inspect for blood marks that would render them *treif* (non-kosher). His daughter Frances Winer Kane remembered that when she was young her father “never slept nights, always thinking of things he could make for his Jewish customers.”⁴

Winer continued to set his sights higher. He grew his business slowly at first, adding a store at a time. By 1920, he had nineteen grocery stores throughout the Boston



Madeline DeDe-Panken, PhD, is the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center Historian in Residence.

area. A 1922 advertisement boasts “Stores Everywhere,” along with butter churned fresh daily, cream cheese manufactured with full butter fat, and eggs received direct from farms and “individually warranted.”⁵

At some point in the 1920s, Winer purchased a dairy farm in Billerica, Massachusetts, twenty miles north of Boston. While he was enthusiastic about the idea, the operation proved to be too much. Winer couldn’t manage caring for dairy cows as well as a growing family. And the family was indeed growing. Daughter Sara Winer was born in 1897, followed by eldest son Hyman in 1898, Frances in 1902, and Samuel in 1903. Luckily, business success provided sufficient means to support the family. The 1910 census lists the brood at 24 Boylston Street in Malden, Massachusetts—in a single-family home owned by the Winers in an up-and-coming suburb north of Boston.

Over the next decades, the business further expanded. By 1927, more than sixty stores dotted New England from Worcester to Lynn and south to New Bedford and Providence, Rhode Island. The company

remained connected to its roots, positioning itself as “the largest chain grocery system in the United States catering exclusively to Jewish Trade,” and it operated in heavily concentrated Jewish neighborhoods. Ads regularly appeared in Yiddish newspapers like *The Jewish Journal*, as well as in secular publications.

Winer used his success to give back to the Jewish community. He was a member of several congregations, a charter member of Boston’s Beth Israel Hospital, and a generous philanthropist. He was well-known and well-liked as a gregarious personality, discerning businessman, and avid fiddle player, as he had been in his youth.

Starting in the 1920s, self-service supermarkets began replacing clerked corner grocery stores, making brand recognition, clarity, and merchandising more important than ever. M. Winer Co. adapted and rebranded as Elm Farm Foods, officially changing its name in 1938. With son Hyman now at the helm and a new suite of ready-made products, the company won the prestigious All-American Package Award, which recognized outstanding product design and consumer convenience.

In 1941, the first Elm Farm Foods Supermarket opened in the bustling Coolidge Corner neighborhood of Brookline, Massachusetts. Dozens more followed. Elm Farm Foods became one of the largest supermarket chains in New England, known for its Jewish provisions, its high-quality store-brand products, and its pioneering stamp card loyalty program, before closing its stores for a final pivot to wholesale distribution in the late 1960s.

From a modest grocery run by a perceptive young immigrant, Morris Winer’s vision became a family-run business that sustained several generations and supplied the burgeoning Jewish community across New England. ♦



Morris and Mary Winer with their first child, Sarah, in Boston, ca. 1898. Stanley and Mary Ann Snider Papers, Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center.

Notes

- ¹ Mary Ann Snider Recollections, Stanley and Mary Ann Snider Papers, Box 1, Folder 24. Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center [JHC].
- ² “M. Winer and Co,” *Silver Jubilee Edition of The Jewish Advocate*, 1927, p. 104.
- ³ Entry for Morris Winer and Merry [sic] Hootstein, 9 Aug 1896, “Massachusetts, State Vital Records, 1638–1927,” FamilySearch.
- ⁴ Frances Winer Recollections, Stanley and Mary Ann Snider Papers, Box 1, Folder 24. JHC.
- ⁵ M. Winer & Co. advertisement, 1922. Via eBay.

IDENTIFYING ANTIQUE STORE PHOTOGRAPHS

Whenever I go to an antique store, thrift store, or an estate sale, I look for old photographs. Then, I always flip over each one, searching for those with names. One of my hobbies is identifying the people pictured and posting the photos on websites like [FindaGrave.com](https://findagrave.com), [Ancestry.com](https://ancestry.com), [Wikitree](https://wikitree.com), or my blog, *Identifying Thrift Store Photographs*.¹ I have been able to reunite many photos with family members, who are often excited to see the faces of their ancestors and relatives.

Identifying people requires finding out who, where, and when.

WHO: I research photos with names written on them. Complete names are usually necessary, but I have been able to identify people with only a first name. Uncommon names are much easier to track down than a “John Smith.”

WHERE: Most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs were taken in studios. Most of these images include a printed studio name and a geographic location. A location is important for placing individuals, especially for people with more common names.

WHEN: Researchers who know the name of the photography studio can often determine a photo’s time frame. Books and websites on historic photographers exist for some states and these resources provide the dates of operations for individual studios. The *Directory of Early Michigan Photographers*, available online, is an excellent example.² In addition, studio dates can also

be found by searching digitized newspapers online and looking for the first and last mention of the business. Researchers can also use AI prompts to retrieve key information about historic photographers.

Below are research case studies of two antique store photos, both purchased in Tucson, Arizona.

1. A family in Chanute, Kansas

The studio name is “J. C. Wertz, South of M. Bailey & Co’s Bank. Chanute, Kan.” Written on the back in pencil is this identification: “Frank and Mary[,] Melville, and Della”—but no surname was given.

Chanute is in Neosho County, Kansas, where J. C. Wertz’s studio operated from at least 1879 through 1904.³



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ANTIQUES

I searched the 1900 Neosho County census for a Melville with a father named Frank and a mother named Mary. Nothing turned up. I next tried using Melv* (which broadens the name search) with the same parents. Nothing. I then searched Melv* with just a father named Frank. Widening the search paid off, since in the census Mary was listed as Mollie and Melville's name was misspelled. This time, I found the family.

- French, Frank, head, b. Nov 1860 in Indiana, barber
- French, Mollie L., wife, b. Dec. 1858 in Indiana
- French, Melven, son, b. Mar 1887 in Kansas
- French, Della B., daughter, b. Aug 1889 in Kansas⁴

I discovered a user-submitted tree on Ancestry.com with additional information on this family. Full names and dates were given for Franklin Owen "Frank" French (1861–1901), Mary Louise (Potteroff) French (1854–1948), Melville Samuel French (1888–1938), and Delberta "Della" B. French (1889–1971).⁵ I sent a scan of the photo to the tree creator, who was very excited to receive it.

2. A couple in Eagle Grove, Iowa

In 2022, I purchased eight photographs of the interrelated Hansen and Jorgensen families, Danish immigrants who mostly lived in Eagle Grove, Wright County, Iowa. One of the photos, of a couple, had writing on the back: "Peter Jorgenson and wife[.] Our fathers half brother[.] This is Grandfather John Jorgensen's half brother. Ora Jorgensen."



Based on names on other photos in the collection, I was able to identify the pair as Peter Nelsen Jorgensen (1871–1955) and his wife, Sarah Marentine (Hansen) Jorgensen (1872–1952).⁶ I then posted the photos on my blog.⁷

Fast forward to 2024. At the same antique store, I found three more photos of the family. Coincidentally, the next day I received an email from Lynne Jorgensen of Clear Lake, Iowa. She had Googled her husband's great-grandfather Peter Jorgensen and found the photograph I posted. I offered to send her the collection. She wrote, "These photos are such an amazing find (I'm sure you get that all the time)! I will take all the photos. I'll recruit my mother-in-law, who still lives in Eagle Grove, to help distribute to any remaining Hansen family members. Small town, everybody knows everyone here." That was a great resolution.



To date, I have identified people on over 100 images. I often contact family historians with trees on Ancestry.com to alert them that I have found their family photos. So far, I have reunited four sets of photos with family members. In one case, I was able to send an elderly woman photographs of herself as a child and pictures from her mother's wedding.

Photo research is a relatively inexpensive hobby and very rewarding. Next time you are at an antique store, I encourage you to turn over some photographs and see if you can solve some genealogical mysteries, too. ♦

Notes

- ¹ See thriftstorephotographs.blogspot.com.
- ² David V. Tinder, *Directory of Early Michigan Photographers* (William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2013), clements.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/files/tinder_directory.pdf.
- ³ "Note about Studio," *Chanute Blade* (Chanute, Kans.), October 30, 1879, p. 3; "J. C. Wertz Dead," *Chanute Daily Tribune* (Chanute, Kans.), July 26, 1904, p. 2.
- ⁴ Frank French household, 1900 U.S. Census, Chanute, Neosho County, Kansas. Ancestry.com.
- ⁵ "Eaton/Brolliar Family Tree" by nrkraemer, Public Member Trees, Ancestry.com.
- ⁶ Peter Jorgenson household, 1910 U.S. Census, Dayton, Wright County, Iowa; Peter Nelsen Jorgensen and Sarah Marentine Hansen Jorgensen, FindaGrave memorial #123510932, Rose Hill Cemetery, Eagle Grove, Wright County, Iowa.
- ⁷ See thriftstorephotographs.blogspot.com/2022/02/six-photographs-from-extended-family.html.

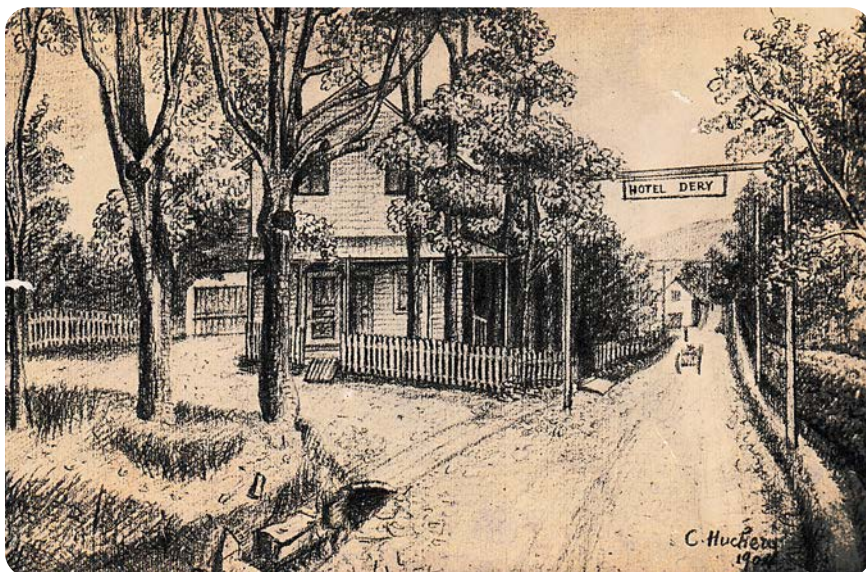
The Stories Hidden in 3 Family Photographs

Photographs are among the most valuable sources in family history research, preserving not only faces and places, but also the stories and experiences of earlier generations. Photographs often contain details that traditional records cannot provide. These images can serve as historical evidence that can reveal family connections, uncover forgotten tales, and strengthen emotional ties between the past and the present. Here we present three stories that demonstrate the power and reach of historic photographs.



Sarah J. Dery is the Director of Research & Library Services at American Ancestors. Kimberly Mannisto is a Senior Researcher at American Ancestors.

This postcard of Hotel Dery in Mont-Saint-Hilaire, Québec, led to new discoveries.



1 Rediscovering Hôtel Déry by Sarah J. Dery

In 2021, while sorting through old papers, my father found a postcard tucked away inside a desk drawer. Written on the back in faded handwriting were the words “Mount St. Hilaire, Canada.” On the front was a structure labeled “Hotel Dery.” None of us had ever heard of it before.

The postcard immediately sparked questions. How was the hotel connected to our family? Who owned it? Those questions launched me into a research journey through genealogical records, land deeds, and local archives in Québec.

I learned that Mont-Saint-Hilaire is a historic community along the Richelieu River about twenty miles east of Montréal. During the nineteenth century, the village grew into an important rural center known for its orchards, farmland, and scenic mountain views. The region included farms owned by French-speaking families that contained long, narrow strips of land stretching inland from the riverbanks—a settlement pattern dating back to the colonial era.

By the late 1800s, rail travel connected communities like Mont-Saint-Hilaire more closely to Montréal, bringing travelers who were seeking fresh air and countryside retreats. Hotels, inns, and boarding houses sprang up throughout the Richelieu Valley to accommodate these visitors. Among them was Hôtel Déry.

Through genealogical research, I uncovered the connection: my great-great-great-grandfather Alexis Louis Déry (1789–1858) originally of Chambly, Québec, owned the land and the house that would become the hotel. When Alexis died in 1858, the property passed to his children. During this period of economic and social change, rural families often balanced farming traditions with commercial ventures. In 1880, Alexis’s daughter, Emilie Déry, and her husband, Francois-Xavier Lahaise, obtained a license for a “hotel” and began housing local mill workers.

Although no one in my family knew anything about this land, building, or business, my research in census records, land transfers, and local histories slowly transformed the mysterious postcard into tangible evidence of a thriving family enterprise.

One of my most rewarding finds occurred when I contacted the Société d'histoire de Mont-Saint-Hilaire. The society generously shared additional information about the hotel as well as the first photographs we'd ever seen of some Dery family members, including Francois Déry (1815–1897), Alexis's son, my great-great-great-grandfather.

I was astonished to learn that the building still stands today. So much family history disappears over time, but somehow, the former Hôtel Déry survived. The structure remains a physical link between past and present, connecting modern descendants to long-ago ancestors. I have not yet visited 490 Chemin des Moulins in Mont-Saint-Hilaire, but knowing that it exists has added to our family history in a way that we could not have imagined.

One forgotten postcard eventually revealed a story of a family enterprise, inheritance, community, and survival in nineteenth-century French Canada. This case serves as a reminder that history often waits quietly in unexpected places until someone finally starts asking questions.

2 Making the Most of a Military Photograph by Kimberly Mannisto

Photographs can reveal important historical details—ones that might help solve longstanding genealogical mysteries. A recent research services case concerned Thomas Mason, a member's grandfather. The member knew almost nothing about Thomas, only that he was probably born in Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire, England. A blurry surviving photograph suggested that Thomas served in the military.

The initial thought was that Thomas had served in the British Army, perhaps with the Corps of Royal Engineers. But, after enhancing the photograph—a process that can be accomplished using photo-editing applications such as Fotor or Picsart—we determined from details on his uniform that Thomas Mason had served in the Royal Regiment of Artillery, commonly known as the Royal Artillery.¹

A key clue was Thomas's cap badge. In low-resolution images, the Royal Artillery cap badge can collapse into a triangular mass. However, once the image of Thomas was magnified, the badge was more visible. Further research revealed its close resemblance to the Royal Artillery King's Crown Gilding cap badge.² Thomas's collar badges consisted of a round ball with something protruding above it and an exaggerated "V" shape below it. For centuries, the Royal Artillery consistently wore a military insignia consisting of a cannonball with seven flames protruding from the top, rather than the nine flames associated with the Royal Engineers.³

Prior to this breakthrough, we had been unable to isolate the correct Thomas Mason in British military records due to his common name and the limited facts known about him. A general search of First World War records for Thomas Mason returned over 500 results, while an advanced search for a man of that name born in Middlesbrough yielded none. The knowledge gained from the enhanced photograph allowed us to narrow the search to men named Thomas Mason who had served in the Royal Artillery and were likely born in Middlesbrough.

A search in the *Royal Artillery Attestations 1883–1942* database on Findmypast.co.uk uncovered several details regarding Thomas's military service. He enlisted in the British Army on May 31, 1926, at age 20 for an initial term of four years. Thomas ultimately served for ten years before transferring to the reserves on May 28, 1936. The attestation record also included his service number, enabling the client to submit a request for Thomas's service record to the National Archives at Kew.

Even the smallest clues preserved in an old image can lead us down paths of discovery. In this case, a single photograph revealed the details of Thomas Mason's service to his country and increased a grandson's knowledge of his once-forgotten ancestor.



Thomas Mason's photo revealed key clues about his military service. Above right: Royal Artillery cap (top) and collar badges. Collection of Auckland Museum Tamaki Paenga Hira via Wikimedia Commons.

3 Reuniting with a 120-Year-Old Family Photograph by Sarah J. Dery

In 2023, an unexpected message led to a photograph of my grandfather Leo Napoleon Dery (1901–1992) that was new to us. The story began with a voicemail left on my father's cellphone. The caller explained that they had a photograph of his father and wanted to return it to the family. Like many people confronted with an unusual and unsolicited message, my father assumed it was a scam and ignored it.

Months passed before the mystery resurfaced. This time, a message came to me through Facebook. A stranger reached out, explaining that they had found a photograph of a baby identified as “Leo Dery” and were trying to locate surviving relatives. Attached was the image itself. The moment I saw it, I knew it was not a scam.

An early twentieth-century studio portrait from Central Falls, Rhode Island, showed my infant grandfather seated in a chair. Our family has a photograph of Leo wearing the same outfit and posing with his mother (my great-grandmother), Bernadette (Bachand) Dery. Somehow, one image had remained with our branch of the family while the other had traveled over a thousand miles before eventually resurfacing over 120 years after the photo was taken.

I learned the photograph was found at an estate sale in Kansas. Like countless old family pictures, it could easily have been discarded or separated permanently from the people connected to it. Instead, someone purchased it and shared it in a Facebook group called Forgotten Faces, Forgotten Places, which is dedicated to reuniting lost photographs with descendants.

I should add that the Dery family has roots stretching back to the earliest French settlers of Québec, with ancestors who were King's Daughters (*Filles du Roi*). Our Derys immigrated to Rhode Island in the 1890s and stayed in New England. How this photograph landed in the Midwest is a mystery to us.

Online communities like Forgotten Faces, Forgotten Places serve as modern-day historical societies. Members collaborate to identify unnamed individuals using genealogy websites, census records, obituaries, and memorial pages. Volunteers donate hours of research simply to help restore pieces of family history to descendants and relatives.

In this case, members of the group worked together to trace the identity of baby Leo Dery. Their research eventually led them to my grandfather's memorial page on Find a Grave. From there, they located my father, Leo Dery (who shares his father's name), and, eventually, me.



This photo of Leo Napoleon Dery was recently returned to his descendants.

What makes the story remarkable is not simply the return of the photograph, but the chain of coincidences and human kindness that made it possible. This photograph survived decades of moves, inheritance, and estate dispersals. A stranger recognized its importance, and an online community devoted time to identifying an unknown child. And through genealogy records and memorial pages, the image eventually found its way back to the right family.

This story reminds me that sometimes family history discoveries occur because someone was willing to help. While some stories are uncovered through research and historical records, others appear through remarkable acts of coincidence and kindness.



Family photographs are far more than keepsakes—they are pieces of historical evidence that preserve identity, memory, and connection across generations. These three stories demonstrate how photographs can unlock information that written records alone may never reveal. ♦

Notes

- ¹ Findmypast.co.uk., *Royal Artillery Attestations 1883–1942*, Thomas Mason, 1926, service no. 770551.
- ² National Army Museum, Online Collection, “Cap Badge of the Royal Artillery, 1903 (c),” collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1960-07-118-1.
- ³ Ibid.

10 Million Names aims to recover the names and restore information to families of the estimated 10 million people of African descent who were enslaved in America before 1865.

10MillionNames.org

A major milestone

The 10 Million Names Project has reached a major milestone: as of May 2026, more than 2.5 million names have been recovered, restored, and made searchable for descendants, researchers, and communities seeking to reconnect with family histories interrupted by slavery. This achievement represents years of collaboration among genealogists, historians, archives, libraries, volunteers, and descendant communities working together to recover the identities and stories of enslaved African Americans who were too often omitted from the historical record.

Several major databases helped propel the project past the two million-name mark. Among them was the *Data Mining and Mapping Antebellum Georgia (DMMAG)* database, a groundbreaking collaboration between scholars at Troy University and Georgia State University. DMMAG explores how archival records, land records, estate papers, and maps can be linked together to identify enslaved people, their families, and the places where they lived in antebellum Georgia.

The *Louisiana: Slave Manifests of Coastwise Vessels Filed at New Orleans* database added more than 114,000 names to the project. These records document the domestic slave trade in the years after international slave trade was outlawed in 1808, preserving the names of enslaved people transported between American ports.

Another important contribution came through records from Historic Sotterley, a National Historic Landmark and UNESCO Site of Memory. The Historic Sotterley materials help document generations of enslaved families connected to this Maryland plantation.

10 Million Names expanded significantly with the addition of three major Freedmen's Bureau and Freedman's Bank databases. Together, these collections contributed more than 1.6 million names from records that documented labor contracts, apprenticeships, banking records, marriages, military service, and family relationships in the years immediately following emancipation. These records are among the richest surviving sources for African American family reconstruction after the Civil War.

Other databases helped deepen and broaden the project's reach, including the *United States: Indenture*

and *Manumission Records* database, which documents apprenticeships, indentures, and acts of emancipation across multiple states. The New Jersey and Pennsylvania Slave Birth Records database preserves the names of children born into slavery after gradual abolition laws were enacted in those states.

Reaching 2.5 million names is not simply a numerical milestone. Each recovered name represents a person whose existence, family connections, and humanity mattered. These records help descendants reclaim histories that slavery attempted to erase.



Scan Me

View and search the 10 Million Names Project databases:
AmericanAncestors.org/search-research-project

10 Million Names in New Orleans

Approximately forty-five guests gathered at the Stella Jones Gallery in New Orleans on April 20 for an evening hosted by American Ancestors in support of the 10 Million Names initiative. The program highlighted the life and legacy of artist Ed Clark through a conversation featuring his daughter Melanca Clark, 10 Million Names Chief Historian Kendra Taira Field, and 10 Million Names Advisory Board Member Paula Williams Madison. We presented Melanca Clark with her family genealogy, which contained research conducted by our experts.



Paula Williams Madison, Melanca Clark, and Kendra Field.

STEFAN HENRY (PROSPER JONES)

Glenn Close and Dr. Jane Kamensky honored at our American Stories, American Lives Gala

On the evening of April 23, more than 180 guests gathered at the Boston Harbor Hotel for our American Stories, American Lives Gala commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. During the cocktail hour, guests had the opportunity to engage with reenactors from the Boston Tea Party Museum. President & CEO Ryan J. Woods then welcomed guests

to the ballroom for dinner and introduced our Lifetime Achievement Award honorees, Glenn Close and Dr. Jane Kamensky. He presented both honorees with genealogies compiled by our experts. Kamensky spoke with Woods about her work as a historical scholar. Film critic Ty Burr interviewed Glenn Close about her illustrious career and her connections with the characters she portrays.



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1. Glenn Close (center) with 10 Million Names Genealogists' Council Member Thom Reed and Lisa Shepperson, sixth-great-granddaughter of Elizabeth Freeman.
2. Gala Patrons Jessica and Brady Brim-DeForest of Balvaire and Blairlogie.
3. Dr. Jane Kamensky and Ryan J. Woods discuss Kamensky's genealogy and career.

ON THE ROAD AND AT HOME

with American Ancestors

See page 8 for upcoming programs and tours.

American Ancestors spring open house

On April 21, American Ancestors welcomed the public to our Boston headquarters for a free day of research, activities, and consultations with our experts. Our Family Heritage Experience was also free to the public, and visitors enjoyed the exhibits. Our greeters in historic costume invited passersby to come inside. Special family activities included family tree coloring, cross-stitch, and button-making. Consultations with our experts were especially popular. Visitors received advice on researching ancestors from locations across the globe, including Puerto Rico, Eastern Europe, and Egypt. Since our open house was held the day after the Boston Marathon, many people exploring Boston after the big event stopped in to learn about our offerings. Missed this event? On August 4, American Ancestors will again be open to the public as part of the Highland Street Foundation's August Adventures.



Midwest Genealogy Center research tour

Participants joined American Ancestors staff in Independence, Missouri, from April 2 through 4 for a research tour at the Midwest Genealogy Center. Senior Genealogist Melanie McComb presented lectures and provided research support and one-on-one consultations. The Midwest Genealogy Center staff led an orientation for the group and offered assistance throughout our visit. Many great family history discoveries were made, and one participant even found an archival collection with papers and photos relating to her parents and other relatives. We are grateful to the Midwest Genealogy Center for hosting American Ancestors for this fun and productive trip!



Digitization workshop: Family papers and photographs

On April 18, participants joined Digital Archivist June Henry for a hands-on workshop. Following a presentation on digitizing family papers and photographs, June led a behind-the-scenes tour of our digitization equipment and gave a scanning demonstration. Participants brought family papers, nineteenth-century photographs, and tintypes to scan. This program was offered as part of our Hands-on History series, which invites family historians to visit our Boston headquarters for interactive educational experiences.

American Ancestors welcomes new Trustees and Councilors

The following Trustees and Councilors were elected at our annual meeting on April 24, 2026. The support of these individuals is invaluable to our organization, and we are grateful for their leadership.

OFFICERS

SECOND VICE CHAIR John E. Corcoran of Essex, Massachusetts, is founder and president of the Trinity Life Sciences advisory firm. John received an AB from Harvard College, an MA from Northeastern University, and an MCRP from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He joined American Ancestors in 1995. John is an Individual Member and a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving.

TREASURER Gerard A. Halpin III, of Boston, Massachusetts, is the retired president and chief executive officer of Siemens Capital Company LLC. He has a BA from the College of the Holy Cross, an MBA from the University of Virginia, and certificates in genealogical research from Boston University. He joined American Ancestors in 2013. Gerard is a Life Benefactor and a member of the Charles Ewer Society of Lifetime Giving and the Cornerstone Society for Giving.

SECRETARY Eric N. Ward of Lincoln, Massachusetts, is executive vice president and global general counsel of Natixis Investment Managers. He has a BA in history and French from DePauw University and a JD from Indiana University School of Law. He joined American Ancestors in 2009. Eric is a Life Member and a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving and the Henry Bond Society. He serves on our Executive and Investment Committees.

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY Mark Kimball Nichols of Cummaquid, Massachusetts, is managing director, founder, and principal of Global Capital Advisors LLC. He has a BA from Dickinson College and an MA and MALD from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He joined American Ancestors in 2008. Mark is a Life Member and a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving. He serves on our Executive, Investment, and Nominating Committees.

TRUSTEES

Marc E. Chardon of Bellevue, Washington, is a strategic advisor in software at Genstar Capital LLC, a private equity firm. He is former president and CEO of Blackbaud, Inc. He holds a BA in economics from Harvard University. He joined American Ancestors in 2018. Marc is a Life Member and member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving.

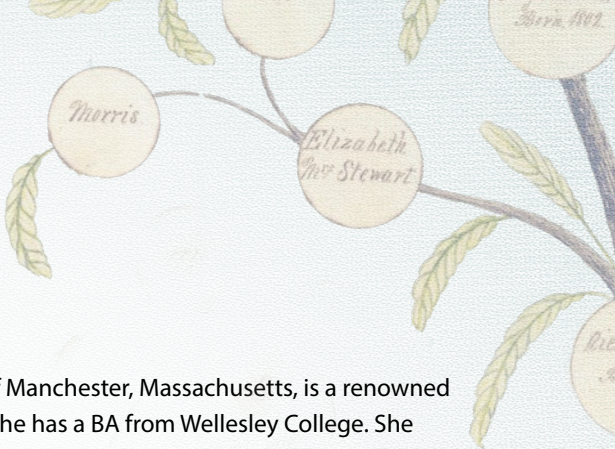
Mark T. Cox IV, of Richmond, Virginia, is president of Chalk Bluffs Foundation for Historic Preservation and Conservation. He has a BA in European history and an MBA in finance and banking from Columbia University. He also pursued Hispanic studies at the University of Madrid. He joined American Ancestors in 2000. Mark is an Associate Member and is a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving and the Cornerstone Society for Giving.

Dr. Jennifer London of McLean, Virginia, is an author and host of the radio program and podcast *E Pluribus Unum*. She is president of the National American History & Founders Month Organization. She holds a PhD in psychology from Ohio State University and pursued postdoctoral education in marketing from the University of Pittsburgh. Jennifer is a member of the Founders' Society for Lifetime Giving and Cornerstone Society for Giving.

Bonnie A. Reilly of Indianapolis, Indiana, is a member of the Collections Council at the Eiteljorg Museum, the National Society of Colonial Dames, and several lineage societies. She has an AB from Radcliffe College. She joined American Ancestors in 1977. Bonnie is a Life Member and a member of the Henry Bond Society and the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving. She served as both a member and as Chair of the Development and Nominating Committees.

Gwill E. York of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is cofounder of Lighthouse Capital Partners. She is an entrepreneur, funding early-stage technology and healthcare companies. Gwill has an AB from Harvard University and an MBA from the Harvard Business School. She joined American Ancestors in 2018. Gwill is an Individual Member and a member of the Founder's Society for Lifetime Giving and Cornerstone Society for Giving. She serves as Chair of the Advisory Board for 10 Million Names.





COUNCILORS

John C. Booker of Harrods Creek, Kentucky, is a real estate developer. He is treasurer of the American Patrons of St. George's and Descendants of the Knights of the Garter, Windsor Castle. He has a BA from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. John joined American Ancestors in 2022 and is an Associate Member.

Donald Dana of Tiburon, California, is a retired executive vice president with Wells Fargo Bank. He was a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Army Medical Service Corps. He has a JD from Hastings College of the Law and a BS from the University of San Francisco. Donald joined American Ancestors in 2024 and is a Life Member.

Jeffrey Griffith of Anaheim, California, is a financial analyst and FinTech operator. He has a BA/BS from Chapman University; an MA from California State University, Fullerton; and a PhD from Claremont Graduate University. He joined American Ancestors in 2019. Jeffrey is a Life Benefactor and a member of the Benjamin Franklin Society.

Keli D. Levine of Mystic, Connecticut, is a former broker, importer, and distributor in the gourmet food and wine industry. Her memberships include the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. She attended Briarcliff College. She joined American Ancestors in 2011. Keli is a Life Member and a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving. She served as a Trustee.

Ailsie Baker McEnteggart of Chico, California, is a professor emerita of Biological Sciences at California State University, Chico. She has a BA from the University of Tennessee and a PhD from the University of Texas at Austin. She joined American Ancestors in 1985. Ailsie is a Life Member and a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving.

Dorien Nunez of New Orleans, Louisiana, is cofounder of OMNIREsearch Group and OMNI Wall Street Advantage. He has a BA from Harvard College and an MBA from Harvard Business School. Dorien served on two Presidential Commissions on Small and Minority Business and has advised the Federal Reserve and Comptroller of the Currency.

Olivia Parker of Manchester, Massachusetts, is a renowned photographer. She has a BA from Wellesley College. She joined American Ancestors in 2008. Olivia is a Life Member and is a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving. She served as a Trustee and is a member of the Nominating Committee.

William P. Perry, Jr. of Washington, DC, is the group CEO and founding principal of Spark Hudson +. He is a member of the Society of the Cincinnati (VA). He has a BA from Stetson University, an MA from Rollins College, and an MBA from Georgia College. William joined American Ancestors in 2023.

Erich G. Rhynhart of Boston, Massachusetts, is chief intellectual property counsel at CVS Health. He is vice president of the Algonquin Club Foundation and a member of the Society of Colonial Wars, Massachusetts. Erich received a BA from Lake Forest College and a JD from Vanderbilt University.

Craig A. Standish of Belmont, Massachusetts, is partner and co-head of the Strategic Advisory group and head of the Boston office at Brown Advisory. He has a BS from Northeastern University, a JD from Syracuse University College of Law, and an LLM from Boston University School of Law. Craig joined American Ancestors in 2016 and is an Associate Member.

R. Newcomb "Newk" Stillwell of Dedham, Massachusetts, was co-managing partner of the Boston office of Ropes & Gray LLP. He is a member of Society of Colonial Wars Massachusetts and a trustee of Massachusetts Historical Society. He has an AB from Princeton University and a JD from Harvard Law School. Newk joined American Ancestors in 2004 and is an Individual Member.

Elizabeth B. Vitton of Greenwich, Connecticut, is former director of the International Conference Division at Dow Jones & Company. She is a member of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants. She has a BA from Wheaton College. She joined American Ancestors in 2001. Elizabeth is a Life Member and a member of the Charles Ewer Society for Lifetime Giving. She served as a Trustee.



Ann Smith Lainhart, 1951–2026

Ann Smith Lainhart of Fort Wayne, Indiana, died April 5, 2026, aged 75. Ann was born in Seattle, Washington, on January 6, 1951, to William Smith and Catherine “Kay” Bryant (Stephens) Lainhart. Ann was raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, and attended Anderson High School.

She studied at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, before earning a degree from Sarah Lawrence College in 1973. She then attended the Culinary Institute of America in New York.

Ann found her calling in genealogy, a field that combined her love of history and research. Beginning in the 1970s, she was part of a core group of serious genealogists who frequented the New England Historic Genealogical Society (now American Ancestors) library. She worked for our Research Service, served as a Reference Librarian, and lectured across the country for our organization. Ann also worked for the General Society of Mayflower Descendants in Plymouth. Later, she was a professional researcher. Her work contributed significantly to genealogical knowledge, particularly for eastern Massachusetts.

Ann was a noted author. She edited and wrote a number of books, from record transcriptions to popular guides. American Ancestors published many of her titles, among them *Digging for Genealogical Treasure in New England Town Records* (1996), *Deaths in Boston, 1700 to 1799* (co-authored with Robert J. Dunkle, 1999), and *A Researcher's Guide to Boston* (2003). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, she transcribed and published the 1855 and 1865 state censuses for all towns in Massachusetts. Ann also wrote numerous articles for the major genealogical journals, including the *Register* and *The American Genealogist*.

As a teenager, Ann was intrigued by a family collection of Civil War-era letters written by her great-grandparents Winston and Octavia (Bryant) Stephens, a Confederate Army captain and his wife. Ann's later research on the couple became the foundation for *Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letters of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida* (1998), which she coauthored with Arch Fredric Blakey.

Ann was also an accomplished seamstress and quilter, with a particular interest in bargello needlepoint.

Ann is survived by her brother, Stephen P. Lainhart.



Meriwether Lewis (Cowgill) Schmid, 1927–2026

Meriwether Lewis (Cowgill) Schmid of Stamford, Connecticut, died February 20, 2026, aged 98. Meriwether was born in New York City on July 16, 1927, to William Warwick and Darthea (Crocker) Cowgill.

Meriwether attended Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, completing her studies in 1945. After graduating from New York University, she worked at *LIFE Magazine* as a copywriter and menswear retail specialist.

In 1957, Meriwether married George F. Schmid Jr. of Montclair, New Jersey. The couple moved to Riverside, Connecticut, and maintained a summer residence in Bridgehampton, New York. They had two children, Sarah Briggs Schmid and Warwick Lawrence Schmid.

Meriwether was a fellow of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society and an honorary trustee of the Greenwich (Connecticut) Historical Society. She collected and contributed photographs to the Bridgehampton (New York) Historical Society, of which she was an active member for many years. She was a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists.

Meriwether joined the New England Historic Genealogical Society (now American Ancestors) in 1982. She became a Life Member in 2007. She was a longtime Board Member and Trustee. She was named Honorary Trustee in 2020. She was also a member of the John Quincy Adams Society for Lifetime Giving. Meriwether was a frequent participant on our educational tours and especially enjoyed research trips to Salt Lake City.

Meriwether is survived by her children, Sarah Briggs Schmid and Warwick Lawrence Schmid, and two grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband, George F. Schmid Jr.



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GENEALOGIES

The Violette Family: Primary Source Record Collection, Peter Violette (Violette Family Association, 2026). Softcover \$25.99. 259 pp. Illustrations, table of figures, appendices. This volume gathers rare original birth, marriage, and death records for François Violette (1744–1824), who settled in Van Buren, Maine, and his ancestors. Transcriptions and translations from foreign archives, church registries, and civil offices are included. Available from Amazon.

Elijah Williams & His Descendants: An American Family Diaspora, Ross J. Williams (Epigraph Publishing, 2026). Hardcover \$150 + shipping. x + 481 pp. Indexes, documents, pictures, relationship charts. Elijah Williams (1730–1777) married Ruth Nye in 1759; they settled in Greenwich, Massachusetts, around 1770. Follow six generations of this family line to thirty-six states, beginning with their pre-Revolutionary War heritage in Massachusetts and New York, through the Civil War, and into the twentieth century. Available from RossWilliams@frontiernet.net.

DNA STUDIES

The **Herrick Family Association** (HFA) is partnering with Leicester Cathedral (St. Martin's) in Leicester, England (the ancestral home of Henry Hericke). We are studying DNA of families associated with the 1,287 skeletons dating from 1100 CE that were discovered during an excavation. The HFA will provide DNA for origin studies and Herrick history for future films/documentaries. Contact HFA President Dale Yoe at yoeda@comcast.net.

I am seeking descendants of **Dexter Rice** (1811–1885) and **Mary Ann Adams** (1827–1893) for a DNA study. Thanks in advance for any assistance! Contact David Putnam at dputnam925@msn.com.

Submit your book notice: Members may submit details of their relevant books published within the last year at AmericanAncestors.org/Book-Notices.

Submit your genealogies in progress, family associations, and DNA studies: Members may submit notices of 75 words or less at AmericanAncestors.org/Notices.

The American Ancestors cartoon



“Make sure you get my good side.”

Caption submitted by Kelly McGrath. Drawing by Jean Powers.

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ONLINE COURSE



September 1

Class 1: Finding Elusive Maiden Names, Melanie McComb

September 8

Class 2: Legal Rights of Women in America, Rhonda R. McClure

September 15

Class 3: Researching Women in the Archives, Judy Lucey

September 22

Class 4: Women and Naturalization, Rhonda R. McClure

September 29

Class 5: Using mtDNA to Trace Female Ancestors, Melanie McComb

Tracing Women in Your Family Tree

Tuesdays, September 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, 6 –7:30 p.m. (ET)

Presented by Judy Lucey, Rhonda R. McClure, and Melanie McComb

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June—Nova Scotia Research Tour, Halifax, NS

August—Come Home to New England, Boston, MA

September—FamilySearch Library, Salt Lake City, UT



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