Colorado Genealogical Society

Newsletter

November 2026 Volume 51 Issue 11

Nancy Dierker, Editor

President's Message

Dear CGS Members,

It is a pleasure to support an organization's efforts to preserve historic documents, especially when the result will be free access for genealogists.

The **Veterans Bounty Land Records Project (VBL)**, spearheaded by the National Genealogical Society (NGS), is raising funds to digitize Bounty Land Warrant Application files held by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

Following the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Indian Wars, and Mexican-American War, the U.S. government compensated military veterans with land rather than money. Those who served before 1850, including Native American and Black soldiers, as well as their widows and children, were eligible for 160 acres. Documents created to process these claims became known as bounty land applications and warrants.

These applications contain valuable genealogical information, including names, birth, marriage, and death data, and documents such as family Bible pages, handwritten testimonies, affidavits, and regimental histories.

NGS launched its fundraising campaign in 2023 and has raised over $1 million toward its $2.5 million goal. The Daughters of the American Revolution and FamilySearch are lead partners in this effort.

CGS is pleased to contribute $500 to support this important project.

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When completed, the project will have preserved, indexed, and digitized the VBL records, providing genealogists and historians free access to the images through NARA's website.

To learn more, visit the Veterans Bounty Land Records Project.

We are happy to support this worthy endeavor and look forward to the day when these valuable records are available to all.

Bobbi King

Members Update

We are grateful to have you all as members of the Colorado Genealogical Society

New Members

Tammy Denhard
Russ Hamilton
Roger Rowland
Donna Smith

Renewing Members

Bonnie Emmert
Nancy Wehner
Linda Wyman

Society Support Staff

Communications & Publications
- Nancy Dierker, Editor, CGS News
- Kelly Glenn, Nominations Committee Chair
- Nancy Ratay, Editor, *The Colorado Genealogist*
- Karin Conway, Assistant editor
- Leslie Karnauskas, Proofreader
- Lucia Mears, Facebook & Publicity
- Edna Hetchler, Constant Contact

Education
- Carol Darrow, Introduction to Ancestry & WriteNOW!
- Bobbi King, Program Coordinator
- Doug Short, Program Asst
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Membership
- Available, Chair

Society Delegates and Liaisons
- Pattie Apple, NGS & CCGS delegate
- Bonnie Emmert, FamilySearch Liaison
- Sylvia Tracy-Doolos, DPL liaison

Technical Support
- Carol Darrow, Zoom manager
- Becky Clark, Video editing
- Gary & Denise Williams, Mailing
- Libby Dollar, Google Manager & Web Support
- Martha Van Driel, Web assistant
- Marilyn Alvord, Web assistant
- Doug Stenzel, Web assistant

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Let's Do Lunch

There are typically 2 opportunities to have lunch with fellow genealogists each month. This month there will be no in-person Lunch Bunch due to Thanksgiving.

Zoom Lunch Bunch

Hosted by Carol Darrow
November 19, 2026 at 11:30 am
Register at The Colorado Genealogical Society
This is a virtual event so make your lunch and settle in for great discussion.

Discovering Native American Veterans: Finding Their Stories in Your Family Tree

by Doug Short

November is a wonderful time to explore the connections between military service and family history. Native American Heritage Month and Veterans Day provide an opportunity to recognize Indigenous men and women who served in the United States armed forces. Their experiences are an important part of American history, yet many of their stories remain unknown outside their families and tribal communities. For genealogists, researching Native American veterans offers an opportunity to uncover remarkable personal histories, preserve family memories, and recognize ancestors whose service may have gone unrecorded in familiar family narratives.

Native Americans have served in American military conflicts from the Revolutionary War (both for the British and Americans), the Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Middle Eastern conflicts. The Navajo, Choctaw, and Comanche Code Talkers are among the best-known examples of Native American contributions to military history. Their use of Indigenous languages to transmit military communications demonstrated extraordinary skill and helped protect vital information during wartime. Native American men and women also distinguished themselves through many individual acts of heroism including Medal of Honor recipients. Their accomplishments represent only a small portion of the many acts of courage performed by Indigenous service members. Countless others served with distinction without receiving national recognition, leaving behind stories that families and communities continue to preserve.

A good starting point for researching a Native American military ancestor is to gather what the family already knows. Interview older relatives, examine family Bibles, review old photographs, and look for discharge papers, medals, letters, or newspaper clippings. Even a partial name, approximate birth year, or military branch can provide a useful lead. Photographs may reveal uniform details, insignia, or decorations that help identify a service member's unit or period of service. Be sure to record the source of each piece of information and distinguish family stories from facts verified in historical records.

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The National Archives and Records Administration is an important resource for military genealogy. Depending on the period, its holdings may include enlistment records, draft registration cards, service records, pension files, and other documents. World War I and World War II draft registration cards can provide useful details about an ancestor's residence, occupation, birth date, and next of kin. Military burial records, veterans' cemetery databases, and historical newspaper collections can provide additional clues. Researchers should remember that draft registration does not necessarily mean a person served in the military, so additional records are needed to establish actual service.

For researchers exploring Indigenous ancestry, tribal and federal records may provide valuable context. Historical Indian Census Rolls, Bureau of Indian Affairs records, tribal enrollment documents, and agency correspondence may help identify relatives, community connections, and important life events. However, these records vary considerably in coverage and purpose. Not every Native American individual appears in the same record collections, and inclusion on a historical census or agency list does not automatically establish present-day tribal citizenship.

Because each tribal nation maintains its own citizenship requirements and historical resources, contacting the relevant tribal archives or cultural preservation office may be an important next step. Another rewarding approach is to investigate the military history of the ancestor's community.

Local newspapers may report enlistments, homecomings, promotions, awards, and memorial services. Tribal newspapers, community histories, veterans' organizations, and oral-history projects can offer perspectives missing from official military files. The National Museum of the American Indian and institutions specializing in Indigenous history may also provide useful educational resources. Researchers should approach oral histories with respect, follow community guidance concerning culturally sensitive information, and seek permission before sharing private family or tribal stories publicly.

Once the evidence has been gathered, genealogists can turn their discoveries into a lasting tribute. Create a written biography, assemble a digital scrapbook, label photographs, or record an interview with a veteran or descendant. Include the service member's full name, military branch, dates of service when verified, units, significant events, and citations for the records used. If a family story cannot be confirmed, preserve it as an oral tradition rather than presenting it as an established fact. These small steps can ensure that future generations understand not only what an ancestor did, but also the historical circumstances and personal experiences that shaped the individual's life.

As November brings families together to celebrate Thanksgiving and communities gather to honor veterans, consider making Native American military genealogy part of your research plans. You might discover a relative who served overseas, a family connection to a Code Talker, or a veteran whose story has been overlooked for decades. Even if you find no Indigenous ancestry in your own family, learning about Native American veterans can deepen your understanding of the people and communities that shaped our nation's history. The goal of genealogy is not simply to collect names and dates; it is to recover the lives behind them.

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This November, let us honor Native American veterans by researching their experiences, preserving their stories, and ensuring that their contributions are remembered by generations to come.

Genealogy Software User Group Reports

Ancestry.com User Group

By Kimberly Weed
Next Meeting: **November 14 from 2:00–4:00pm**

Ancestry.com User Group Meeting Recap

Last Meeting: Saturday, October 10

Our latest Ancestry.com User Group meeting explored the many features of the Ancestor Profile Page and Ancestry's latest DNA update.

We began with members' questions about printing family trees, recording divorces, Legacy Contacts, and finding other Ancestry users.

Next, we took an in-depth tour of the Ancestor Profile Page, exploring shortcuts for editing profiles, adding relatives, managing tree tags, identifying errors, and comparing trees. We also reviewed tools for documenting an ancestor's life, including timelines, sources, relationships, photographs, and historical documents. Other features included organizing galleries, creating stories, transcribing documents, and exploring historical context.

One particularly interesting feature was **"Ideas," an AI-powered beta tool** that suggests research tasks, recommends tree tags, and identifies potential next steps. These suggestions can provide useful leads but still require verification.

Big news for DNA researchers! Ancestry has expanded its ancestral origin regions from 146 to 302, with many additions in Africa and the Indigenous Americas. We explored how to compare updated ethnicity estimates with previous results, view regions on an interactive map, and investigate which regions may have come from specific parents or grandparents. Remember, your DNA hasn't changed—Ancestry's estimates evolve as its reference panel grows and improves.

We also reviewed new DNA match filtering options, including filtering by region and combining filters to narrow results.

It was a busy meeting filled with new tools, helpful shortcuts, and opportunities to make our family trees more informative. We encourage members to explore these features and bring their questions and discoveries to our next meeting!

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Family Tree Maker (FTM) User Group

By Doug Short

Next Meeting: Wednesday, November 11 th at 7pm

October Meeting Presentation and Highlights

I provided a demonstration of scanning and photo editing within Family Tree Maker. Taking an example of a family photo that was overexposed and was attached to broken picture frame glass, I demonstrated the various fixes offered by FTM Photo Darkroom, which included cropping, scratch removal and how to fix the overexposure to a more normal look. The look of the finished picture was OK but not very good.

One attendee, David Miller of Minnesota, suggested using AI to correct the photo. He indicated that ChatGPT will dramatically fix all of these issues within a few seconds and create a very vivid color photo. He was very correct and spot on! See attached before and after photos.





This generated many questions about the process from the 14 attendees. The discussion morphed into the many, many pros and cons about AI, examples of AI off the rails but also its power to create and generate many helpful things for genealogists.

I mentioned the National Genealogical Society's efforts to begin supporting AI classes with regional and local genealogical societies to begin classes on AI early next year, including CGS.

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It is an exciting but scary time we live in!

News and Next Meeting

The November workshop has been moved to one week earlier and will have a discussion on storytelling from the FTM software. This is an area where AI can be used to assist genealogists telling their family stories.

MacFamilyTree User Group

Hosted by Chip Morris
Last Meeting: Thursday, October 15
Next Meeting: January 21, 2027

At our latest MacFamilyTree (MFT) meeting, we tackled one of genealogy's most rewarding milestones: turning years of dates, names, and source records into finished keepsakes your family will read and treasure. Using the outline from our session—*Publishing in MacFamilyTree: From Family Tree to Print*—we explored how MFT bridges the gap between raw research and beautifully compiled narratives.

The core discussion centered on the **Four Ways to Tell Your Story**: focusing on a single individual (**Person**), tracing an ancestral line or branch (**Family**), documenting a specific era or migration (**Time-Based**), or compiling an exhaustive, multi-generation volume (**Complete**). We looked at matching the right format to your target audience and purpose—from organizing chapters and choosing which events to include, to integrating high-resolution photos and cleanly formatted source footnotes straight from your tree. We also shared practical real-world results and discussed print-ready export settings.



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MFT gives users a template with suggested information to include in your book (see left), but it also allows users to easily delete or add information depending on what you want to include.

Our MFT Group is a relaxed, supportive space where we share hands-on tips, problem-solve software quirks, and show real projects in progress. Whether you are actively working on a printed family volume, looking for fresh ways to share visual heirlooms, or simply exploring what

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MacFamilyTree can do beyond standard data entry, we would love to have you join us at our next Zoom session!



Researching in the style of Pablo Picasso by Doug Short and AI.

Record of the Month: When Was Your Ancestor Really Born?

Many Records, Many Possibilities

By Nancy Dierker

Have you ever followed an ancestor through several census records only to discover that the person seems to have aged twelve years between one census and the next? Birth dates are among the most familiar facts in our family trees, but they can also be among the most inconsistent.

For individuals born in the 1800s and early 1900s, a birth certificate may not exist. Birth registration developed at different times throughout the United States, and even where registration was required, compliance was often inconsistent. Some communities maintained

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early birth records, while others did not establish reliable systems until well into the twentieth century.

Consequently, genealogists often rely on census records to estimate an ancestor's birth year. But how reliable are those ages?

Census enumerators generally recorded a person's age, not a birth date. The information might have come from the individual, another household member, or someone who simply made a reasonable guess. Ages could be misremembered, rounded, or recorded incorrectly. Even the 1900 census, which requested the month and year of birth, is not immune to errors.

I thought my ancestor was born in 1820. But according to four records I discovered, she was born in 1817, 1819, 1823 and last Tuesday.

Other records may introduce additional discrepancies. Marriage records, military registrations, death certificates, obituaries, and gravestones can all provide birth information. But who supplied that information, and how would that person have known? A death certificate might contain an exact birth date provided by a relative who never knew the deceased's actual birthday.

When dates conflict, resist the temptation to choose the one appearing most frequently. Instead, consider when each record was created, who provided the information, and how closely that person was connected to the event.

Look for additional evidence in church registers, family Bibles, school records, and other documents created closer to the time of birth.

Sometimes the evidence simply won't establish an exact date. Recording a birth as "about 1855" may be more accurate than assigning a precise date that cannot be supported.

Remember, our goal isn't to make the records agree. It's to understand what the records are telling us.

Genealogy. Because rocket science isn’t challenging enough.

AI Query of the Month:

Ask AI: How Old Was Your Ancestor, Really?

By ChatGPT with oversight by Nancy Dierker

Your ancestor was 32 years old in the 1870 census, 39 in 1880, and 54 in 1900. Which age should you believe?

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Conflicting ages and birth dates are common in genealogical research, particularly for individuals born before reliable birth registration. Artificial intelligence can help us sort through the discrepancies and determine where to look next.

Rather than asking AI to select the correct birth date, ask it to **evaluate the evidence and identify what remains uncertain.**

Try this prompt:

I'm researching an ancestor whose age or birth date varies across historical records. Help me analyze the conflicting information using genealogical research principles.

I'll provide the record type, date, reported age or birth date, and, when known, the person who supplied the information.

Please:

1. *Create a table showing each record, its reported age or birth date, and the possible birth-year range. Account for census reference dates and whether the individual's birthday had occurred.*
2. *Identify discrepancies and possible explanations for them.*
3. *Evaluate the likely reliability of each record, considering when it was created, who supplied the information, and whether that person had firsthand knowledge.*
4. *Identify which conclusions are supported by the available evidence and which remain uncertain. Do not simply select the most frequently reported date.*
5. *Suggest additional records that might help establish a more reliable birth date.*

Do not invent missing information. If the evidence is insufficient, explain why and suggest an appropriate approximate birth date.

Why this works: AI can quickly compare dates, calculate possible birth years, and organize conflicting evidence into a manageable format. It may also identify questions we haven't considered.

But AI cannot determine the accuracy of a record simply because it contains a precise date. That requires careful examination of the original source and an understanding of how the information was collected.

Remember: AI is a research assistant, not a substitute for genealogical judgment. Its greatest value may be helping us recognize what we still need to prove.

My ancestor changed his surname. Apparently, he didn’t like genealogists.

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"Beginning Genealogy" Is Now "Introduction to Ancestry"

CGS has offered Beginning Genealogy to the public for years. After careful consideration, that class has been renamed Introduction to Ancestry. The course is **not** a How To for Ancestry.com. Rather, this course will introduce attendees to the process of tracing one's ancestry. Same great content with a new shine and polish to keep up with the rapidly changing challenge of hunting ancestors.

Upcoming Genealogy Activities

Invalids, Imbeciles, Insane, and Incarcerated: Finding Your Institutionalized Ancestors

presented by Kimberly Weed

Saturday, November 21, 10:00-11:30am

What happened to the ancestor who suddenly disappeared from the family story? Why does a census show a relative living somewhere unexpected—or why does a death certificate reveal an unfamiliar institution?

Sometimes the clues to our ancestors' lives are hidden behind the walls of an asylum, state hospital, special school, or (gasp) jail/prison. In this presentation, we'll step behind those doors and explore institutionalization.

We'll examine why people were placed in institutions, what types of institutions existed, and—most importantly—how to recognize the clues in census records, vital records, newspapers, directories, and other genealogical sources. We'll also tackle the challenges that can make these ancestors particularly difficult to find, including changing privacy laws and retention and destruction schedules.

If you have an ancestor who seems to have vanished from the family tree, this may be the presentation that helps you discover where they went—and uncover a chapter of their story that has been waiting to be found.

Street Name Puzzle Fun

by Nancy Ratay

While searching newspapers for articles about street name changes or related items for use in the quarterly, I came across this fun activity that exactly goes with that.

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On 1 May 1932 The Rocky Mountain News (page 7) sponsored a puzzle contest. The contest involved guessing the names of streets in Denver from hand-drawn pictures. It cost nothing to enter and was open to anyone. It was necessary to obtain a copy of every Rocky Mountain News from beginning of the contest to the end though. Readers were reminded periodically that there were "free" extra copies of the newspaper available in case you missed one. The very first introductory page gave a listing of ALL of the streets in Denver that could possibly be included. There were at least 300 names on the list! Some were same-named with st. or ct. or ave. appended (back then those designations were not capitalized). You did not have to put the street designation on the entry. You did however have to collect all of the pictures with the entry blank that was printed with them, fill out all the entry blanks and turn them all in at once when the newspaper said the contest was closed (they had no more pictures). Neatness was counted if there was a tie!

Oddly enough there was no "correct" list to start with. "No one will know in advance the CORRECT solution to these puzzles," the paper explained, "Three judges will be selected at the close of the contest and given each of the puzzles and a list of the Official Street Names. They will select the street which in their opinion is the correct answer to each puzzle." There were 80 pictures in all, so not all names were used. Some days there were two pictures given.

The Olympics were being held that year in Los Angeles, California. So the three Grand Prizes were "De Luxe Trips to the World Olympic Games With All Expenses Paid." There were also cash prizes of $100 for 4th, $25 for 5th, and $5 each for 6th to 10th place. The contest was open to all ages. If a minor won a trip, "they would be properly chaperoned." Other rules were listed on the introductory page 7.

What an interesting way to get newspaper customers to buy more papers and learn more about Denver street names! You can find this contest yourself by going to Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Rocky Mountain News, 1 May 1932, page 7. It's free!

We are including 2 puzzles with this article so you can join in the fun too. The "correct" name(s) as selected by the newspaper's judges will be given in the next newsletter. You can also find Picture 8 in the November quarterly which will be coming soon.

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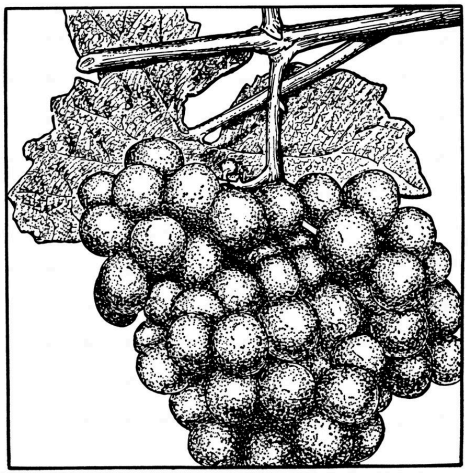
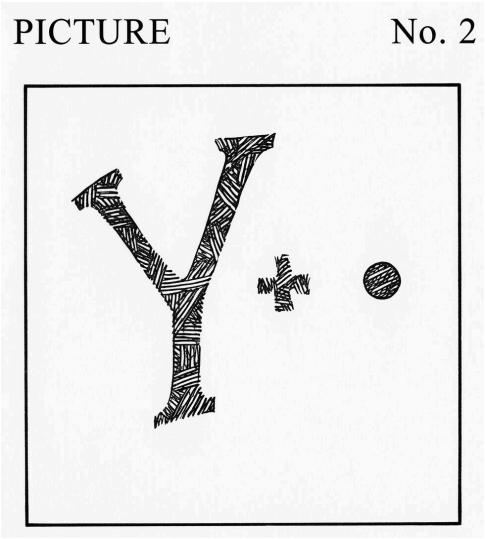
PICTURE No. 1



PICTURE No. 2



More puzzles will be included in future newsletters.

JUST FOR FUN: Unique Genealogical Celebrations in November

By Doug Short

November 10 — Forget Me Not Day

Forget Me Not Day is the perfect occasion for genealogists to remember the people who came before us—and to identify those mysterious faces staring back at us from old family photographs! Take some time to label those pictures with names, dates, and locations before the last person who recognizes Great-Aunt Mildred is no longer available to ask. After all, "I think he was somebody's cousin" may be an honest family recollection, but it is not exactly a solid genealogical source. While you're at it, organize those old letters, documents, and treasured keepsakes that tell the stories of your ancestors. Remember, preserving family history today means that future generations won't have to play detective with a shoebox full of unidentified photographs. This November 10, let's make sure our ancestors are remembered—and that nobody gets accidentally identified as Uncle Harry when he's really Great-Grandpa George!

November 15 — I Love to Write Day

I Love to Write Day is a wonderful opportunity for genealogists to turn their research discoveries into stories that future generations will actually want to read. You may have spent hours tracking down census records, deciphering old handwriting, and proving that your great-grandmother really was born in 1872, but those facts become much more meaningful when you tell the story of her life. Write about an ancestor's occupation, immigration journey, favorite pastime, or the family recipe that somehow required seventeen ingredients and three days to prepare. Don't worry about being the next great American novelist; your descendants are unlikely to complain about the lack of a literary agent. Even a few paragraphs can preserve details that might otherwise disappear with time. So grab your

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keyboard, notebook, or favorite fountain pen and start writing—because if you don't tell your family's story, someone may eventually assume your great-grandfather invented the internet!

November 21 — World Hello Day

World Hello Day reminds us that sometimes the best genealogical discoveries begin with two simple words: "Hello, cousin!" This is an ideal day to contact a distant relative, reconnect with an old family-history friend, or introduce yourself to someone researching the same ancestral surname. That brief conversation might uncover an unidentified photograph, a forgotten family legend, or a box of letters nobody knew existed. You might even discover that your newly contacted cousin has been researching the same family line for twenty years—and has the documents you've been hunting for since last Tuesday. If you're feeling adventurous, reach out to a relative you've never met and explain your connection; just be prepared for the possibility that your family tree has a few more branches than you thought. After all, genealogy is built on connections, and a friendly hello could lead to a remarkable discovery. So on November 21, spread a little goodwill, make a new family connection, and remember that even the most complicated family tree began with people who met, talked, and occasionally forgot to write anything down!

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Reminders

Newsletter Submissions

Have something you'd like to share in the newsletter? Submissions must be received by the **20th of the month** to be considered for the next issue. While publication isn't guaranteed, all submissions will receive a response from the newsletter team. Send submissions to: newsletter@cogensoc.us.

See What You Might Have Missed

Members of CGS have access to Video Links of Programs and Classes. These recorded programs will be available, at least for a limited time (usually around 30 days), in the Members Only section of the CGS website.

Questions??

Do you have questions for or about the Colorado Genealogical Society? Did you know you can email us at **cgscontact@cogensoc.us**?

If you have questions about any of the excellent archives around the state, we recommend you contact them directly. They will have the latest information on their catalog and how to access the information you are looking for.

Generally, Our Offerings Are FREE

Unless otherwise noted, all Colorado Genealogical Society meetings are free and open to the public. Please remember to register in advance for all Zoom activities, as attendance is limited to 100 connections. If you're unable to attend, kindly cancel by clicking the "cancel" link in your registration email.

Don't forget to register for events at http://www.cogensoc.us/

Membership

There are great benefits to being a member of the Colorado Genealogical Society. If you know someone who would love to get this newsletter or access to our quarterly journal, *The Colorado Genealogist*, please encourage them to join CGS! They can sign up on the CGS website for as little as $25 a year.

With the exception of the AI Query of the Month, the articles in this newsletter have been written by the people in the know. The articles may have been edited by ChatGPT to add clarity and consistency.

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90 Days of Genealogy with CGS - Mark Your Calendars

To register for any of this month's events, go to www.cogensoc.us. To join the In Person Lunch Bunch, email lunchbunch@cogensoc.us. Future months are subject to change.

November

Native American Heritage Month

8 - 1:30pm
WriteNOW!

9 - 6:00pm
CGS Board Meeting

11 - Veterans Day

11 - 7:00pm
Family Tree Maker Users

12 - 10:00am
Master Genealogist Users

14 - 10:00am
Introduction to Ancestry

14 - 2:00pm
Ancestry.com User Group

19 - 11:30am
Zoom Lunch Bunch

21 - 10:00am
Invalids, Imbeciles, Insane, and Incarcerated: Finding Your Institutionalized Ancestors by Kimberly Weed

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December

12 - 10:00am
Introduction to Ancestry

12 - 2:00pm
Ancestry.com User Group

13 - 1:30pm
WriteNOW!

23 - **National Roots Day**

24 - Christmas Eve

25 - Christmas Day

31 - New Year's Eve

Wishing you very happy holidays filled with joy.

January 2027

1 - New Year's Day

9 - 10:00am
Introduction to Ancestry

9 - 2:00pm
Ancestry.com User Group

10 - 1:30pm
WriteNOW!

11 - 7:00pm
CGS Board Meeting

14 - 11:30am
Zoom Lunch Bunch

16 - 10:00am
Family Tree Feuds: Building Consensus with Confidence by Sylvia Tracy Doolos

18 - Martin Luther King Jr

21 - 11:30am
In-Person Lunch Bunch

21 - 7:00pm
MacFamilyTree User Group

30 - 11:00am
Introduction to Genetic Genealogy by Anna Phillips

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