

Category METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH STRATEGY

Building a Genealogical Proof Argument: Turning Evidence into Conclusions

A genealogical proof argument is how researchers turn scattered records into a clear and defensible conclusion when no single document provides the answer. This presentation explains how genealogists assemble evidence from multiple sources, evaluate conflicting information, and correlate records such as census schedules, land deeds, probate files, and tax lists to support a well-reasoned conclusion. Using practical examples from real research problems, attendees will learn how indirect evidence can be organized into a logical narrative that meets genealogical standards and clearly demonstrates how the conclusion was reached.

Using Indirect Evidence to Prove a Relationship – Several Short Case Studies

Many genealogical relationships cannot be proven with a single record stating the connection directly. This presentation demonstrates how indirect evidence—clues found across multiple sources—can be analyzed and correlated to establish family relationships. Through several brief case studies, attendees will see how records such as census schedules, land deeds, estate papers, and tax lists can be combined to reveal patterns and connections that support a well-reasoned conclusion when direct evidence does not exist.

Breaking Through Brick Walls: A Methodical Approach to Solving Difficult Genealogical Problems

Every genealogist eventually encounters a research problem where the obvious records have been exhausted and the answer still remains out of reach. This presentation focuses on a structured approach to solving those “brick wall” problems by re-examining known evidence, expanding research into overlooked record groups, and applying methods such as cluster research and indirect evidence analysis. Through practical examples, attendees will learn how careful reasoning and a disciplined research strategy can often uncover solutions where traditional searches have failed.

When Things Don’t Make Sense – Sorting Through Mysterious and Misleading Information

Sooner or later every genealogist encounters records that simply do not add up—conflicting ages, impossible timelines, or individuals who appear and disappear without explanation. This presentation explores how to approach those puzzling situations by carefully evaluating the reliability of sources, separating fact from assumption, and analyzing evidence within its proper historical and legal context. Through practical examples, attendees will learn how disciplined analysis can turn confusing or misleading information into useful clues that move research forward.

Solving a Brick Wall with DNA – A Case Study

What can be done when traditional records fail to identify an ancestor's parents? This case study demonstrates how DNA evidence can be combined with careful documentary research to solve a difficult genealogical problem. Using both mitochondrial and autosomal DNA results alongside historical records, the presentation shows how genetic matches can guide researchers toward previously unknown family connections and help construct a well-supported conclusion when no direct paper trail exists.

Tracing the Past: Overcoming Genealogical Roadblocks for African American and White Families

Genealogical research often encounters obstacles created by incomplete records, shifting identities, and individuals with the same or similar names. This presentation examines common research challenges affecting both African American and white family histories and demonstrates strategies for overcoming them through careful record analysis, expanded research methods, and thoughtful use of DNA evidence. Attendees will learn how to work through misleading or fragmented documentation and apply practical techniques to move past difficult research barriers.

The Thoughtful Genealogist: Using AI Tools Like ChatGPT to Improve Research

Artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT are becoming part of the modern genealogist's research toolbox—but only when used thoughtfully and with proper methodological care. This presentation explores practical ways AI can assist researchers with tasks such as analyzing documents, developing research questions, summarizing records, organizing evidence, and improving written conclusions. Just as importantly, the session examines the limitations of these tools, including errors and “hallucinations,” and demonstrates how genealogists must verify results using sound research practices. When used responsibly, AI can become a valuable assistant that improves efficiency while still maintaining the careful analysis and standards required for reliable genealogical research.

Records & Research Sources***Unlocking Family History – Researching Courthouse Records for Genealogical Discoveries***

Courthouse records are among the richest—and most overlooked—sources available to genealogists. This presentation explores how documents such as deeds, estate files, guardianships, court minutes, and legal disputes can reveal family relationships, migration patterns, occupations, and community ties that rarely appear in census or vital records. By understanding how courts functioned and what records they produced, researchers can uncover valuable clues that help confirm identities and extend family lines.

The Tax Man Cometh

As Daniel Defoe famously observed, nothing is certain except death and taxes—and for genealogists, tax records are often among the most revealing sources available. Long before consistent census or vital records existed, governments maintained tax lists that documented property ownership, economic status, and sometimes even household composition. This

presentation explores how tax records can be used to track individuals over time, identify neighbors and potential relatives, and provide valuable clues between census years.

Reaping a Harvest with Land Records

Land records are among the most valuable yet underused sources in genealogical research. Deeds, grants, plats, and conveyance records often reveal family relationships, economic standing, and connections within a community that may not appear in other records. This presentation explores how land transactions can document gifts to children, estate divisions, boundary disputes, and migration patterns. By learning how to locate and analyze these records, researchers can uncover valuable clues that help extend family lines and better understand the lives of their ancestors.

Probing Probate Records for More Than Just a Will

Wills are only one part of the probate story—and often not the most revealing. This presentation explores the broader range of records created during the probate process, including estate inventories, bonds, receipts, distributions, and court petitions. These documents frequently identify heirs, married daughters, guardianships, and extended family relationships that may not appear anywhere else. By examining the entire probate file rather than focusing solely on the will, genealogists can uncover valuable evidence that helps reconstruct families and clarify relationships.

Dissecting a U.S. Military Pension Packet

Military pension files are among the richest genealogical resources available, often containing far more than proof of military service. This presentation examines the structure and contents of pension packets from conflicts such as the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and the Civil War, highlighting the types of documents researchers may find inside. Affidavits, depositions, marriage proofs, and personal statements frequently reveal family relationships, migration patterns, and details of an ancestor's life long after the war ended. By understanding how these records were created and what information they contain, genealogists can uncover valuable evidence that extends well beyond military history.

This, That, and the Other – Researching Beyond the Standard Documents

Genealogy is far more than census records and vital statistics. Many valuable clues about our ancestors are found in lesser-used records that researchers often overlook. This presentation explores a variety of uncommon sources—including voter registration lists, Oaths of Allegiance, Southern Claims Commission files, company ledgers, and loose papers in special collections—that can reveal relationships, community connections, and personal circumstances. By expanding the range of records examined, genealogists can uncover details that add depth to family histories and sometimes provide the key to solving difficult research problems.

Case Studies

Dead People Might Talk – How Estates Can Solve Brick Walls

When the paper trail goes cold, estate records may hold the clues needed to move research forward. Probate files often contain far more than a simple will, including inventories, receipts, petitions, and court proceedings that document heirs, guardians, property divisions, and financial relationships. This presentation demonstrates how carefully examining the full range of estate records can reveal family connections, identify married daughters, and uncover relationships that are not recorded elsewhere. By looking beyond the will and analyzing the entire probate process, genealogists may find that the dead still have something important to say.

The Scoundrel in the Family – How Pension Files Can Reveal Family Secrets

Family traditions often portray our ancestors as honorable figures, but the records sometimes tell a more complicated story. This presentation follows the trail of a Civil War veteran whose pension file reveals far more than his military service. Through depositions, affidavits, and correspondence found within the pension records, researchers can uncover personal conflicts, legal disputes, and family circumstances that were carefully hidden over time. By examining how these records were created and what they contain, attendees will see how a single pension file can expose unexpected details and reshape a family narrative.

Will the Real James Thomas Please Stand Up

Genealogists frequently encounter multiple individuals with the same name living in the same place and time, creating one of the most common challenges in family history research. This presentation examines a real case involving several men named James Thomas living in the same region, where determining which one belonged to the correct family required careful analysis of age, location, records, and timelines. By systematically eliminating the incorrect candidates and correlating available evidence, researchers can isolate the right individual and construct a well-supported conclusion.

Women & Under-Documented Ancestors

The Records That Reveal Her – Dower, Taxes, Land & Law

Identifying women in early American research can be one of genealogy's most persistent challenges because they often appear only indirectly in the records created by the men around them. This presentation explores how legal and financial documents—including dower rights, tax lists, land transactions, wills, and estate settlements—can reveal a woman's identity, relationships, and place within a family and community. By understanding how these records were created and how they functioned within the legal system of the time, genealogists can uncover evidence that helps reconstruct the lives of women who might otherwise remain hidden in the historical record.

Georgia & Regional Research

Unlocking Georgia Genealogy: Understanding Land, Law, and Lost Records

Georgia genealogical research is shaped by a unique mix of colonial governance, land distribution systems, and record loss that can complicate even experienced researchers. This presentation provides the historical framework needed to understand how Georgia's early governments, land lotteries, and changing court systems influenced the records created across the state. Attendees will learn how these factors affect the survival and location of land, tax, probate, and court records, and how understanding Georgia's legal and historical landscape can help researchers locate evidence even when traditional records are missing.

Two Colonial Georgias – Understanding History Helps Find Records

Georgia's colonial history is divided into two very different governing periods—the Trusteeship (1732–1752) and the Royal Colony (1752–1776)—each creating its own types of records and legal structures. Understanding the transition between these two systems is essential for locating and interpreting early Georgia documents. This presentation explores how land grants, petitions, legal disputes, and other records were created during each period and how recognizing these differences can help researchers find and properly interpret colonial-era sources.

Georgia at 250: Uncovering the Lives of Patriots, Refugees, and Frontier Families

As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, genealogists have a unique opportunity to rediscover the men and women who experienced the conflict firsthand. This presentation explores the complex roles played by patriots, loyalist refugees, militia soldiers, and frontier families during the Revolutionary War era. By examining military records, pension files, tax lists, land grants, and other contemporary documents, researchers can uncover how the war affected families both on and beyond the battlefield. **[While the examples focus on Georgia, this presentation can be adapted to highlight Revolutionary War research in any of the original thirteen colonies.]**

Historical Context & Storytelling

Tying History to Your Research – Understanding Ancestors Through Historical Context

Genealogy does not occur in isolation; our ancestors lived within the political, economic, and social events of their time. Understanding those events can help explain why families migrated, changed occupations, acquired land, or disappeared from certain records. This presentation demonstrates how placing genealogical research within its historical context can provide valuable insight into the lives and decisions of past generations. By aligning family timelines with local and national history, researchers can better interpret records and gain a deeper understanding of their ancestors' experiences.

Telling Their Stories

Genealogy is more than collecting names, dates, and places—it is about understanding the lives our ancestors lived. This presentation explores how researchers can move beyond basic facts to uncover the experiences, challenges, and accomplishments that shaped their families' histories. By drawing from records such as newspapers, court files, land transactions, tax lists, and local histories, genealogists can place their ancestors within the communities and events that defined

their lives. The result is a richer and more meaningful narrative that transforms genealogical research into stories worth preserving and sharing.

Beginning & General Audience Presentations

Beginning Genealogy

Whether someone is just getting started or needs a fresh approach to organizing their research, this presentation provides a practical introduction to the fundamentals of genealogy. Attendees will learn how to begin with what they already know, properly record information using pedigree charts and family group sheets, and identify reliable sources for building a family history. The session also discusses how to evaluate evidence, avoid common research mistakes, and document conclusions so that others can follow the work. This presentation can be offered as either a one-hour introduction or expanded into a two-hour program with additional examples and guided discussion.

How Not to Do Genealogy – Common Research Mistakes

Even experienced genealogists occasionally fall into traps that can send research down the wrong path. This presentation examines some of the most common mistakes researchers make, including relying on unsourced online trees, confusing individuals with the same name, ignoring conflicting evidence, and accepting family traditions without verification. Through practical examples and a touch of humor, attendees will learn how to recognize these pitfalls, evaluate sources more carefully, and apply sound research practices that lead to more accurate and reliable family history conclusions.

Not Another Organization Presentation

Many genealogists have attended presentations promising the “perfect” system for organizing research—usually involving color-coded binders, elaborate numbering systems, or spreadsheets that require a manual to understand. This session takes a more practical approach. Instead of complex systems, it focuses on simple, flexible methods for organizing both paper and digital materials so that records can be located quickly and research progress can be maintained. Attendees will learn practical strategies for naming files, storing documents, and keeping track of sources without turning organization itself into a full-time project.

Cemetery & Community Research

Dissecting a Cemetery to See What’s Underneath

A headstone often reveals only part of the story. By looking beyond individual markers and examining the broader structure of a cemetery, genealogists can uncover clues about family relationships, community connections, and historical burial practices. This presentation explores how cemetery layouts, burial patterns, and surrounding records can help identify family groupings and reveal connections that may not appear in traditional documents. Attendees will also learn how tools such as mapping and simple spreadsheets can assist in analyzing larger burial grounds and uncovering patterns that lead to new discoveries.

Organizational Leadership

Running a Successful Genealogical Society Board – Tips from a Retired Army Officer

Genealogical societies depend on dedicated volunteers, but effective leadership is essential for keeping any organization focused and productive. Drawing on leadership experience developed during a military career and years of service within genealogical organizations, this presentation explores practical strategies for building a strong board, managing responsibilities, and maintaining a healthy organizational culture. Attendees will learn how clear expectations, good communication, and a shared sense of purpose can help societies avoid common leadership pitfalls and remain active, engaged, and sustainable.

Short Presentations (10–20 Minutes)

Using Indirect Evidence to Prove a Relationship – Writing a Concise Proof Argument

When direct evidence does not exist, genealogists must rely on indirect evidence drawn from multiple records to demonstrate a relationship. This short presentation introduces the concept of a proof argument and explains how scattered clues from sources such as census schedules, estate records, and land transactions can be organized into a clear and logical conclusion. Designed for lineage societies and short programs, this session demonstrates how a concise proof argument can show how the evidence supports the relationship being claimed.

Tips and Tricks of Using FamilySearch Plus Their New AI Tool

FamilySearch.org is one of the most powerful free resources available to genealogists, yet many of its most useful features remain hidden in plain sight. This short presentation demonstrates practical techniques for locating overlooked collections, navigating unindexed records, and using the catalog more effectively to reach original documents. The session also introduces FamilySearch's new AI tools that assist researchers in reading handwritten records and identifying names and places within documents, helping genealogists work more efficiently and uncover new clues.

DNA Basics for Genealogists – What Every Researcher Should Know

DNA testing has become one of the most powerful tools available to genealogists, but many researchers are unsure where to begin or how the results actually help solve family history questions. This short introduction explains the basic types of DNA tests used in genealogy and how they can support traditional documentary research. Attendees will learn how DNA can confirm relationships, suggest new research directions, and help break through brick walls when

records are missing. Designed as a brief overview, this session provides a practical foundation for understanding how genetic evidence fits into modern genealogical research.