



AGS Ezine

*Newsletter of the Arkansas Genealogical Society
Vol. 20, No. 1, February 2025
Sara White, Editor*

Note from the Editor:

Greetings, fellow genealogists and family historians! Since 1976, February is when we honor and observe Black History Month. Genealogy libraries and societies throughout the state offer presentations for patrons and enthusiasts to learn more about how this history unfolded in Arkansas. There are opportunities both in person and online.

While the Central Arkansas Library System offers the most extensive presentations, there are plenty of events in the rest of the state. There are even some not in Arkansas but are online via Zoom.

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- Using ChatGPT for Genealogy: Part 1
- Arkansas Genealogical Society Kitchen Roundtable Talk

February Events

Wednesday, February 5

2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.: Tracing Enslaved and Formerly Enslaved in Newspapers

Hosted by the J. Erik Jonsson Central Library, Dallas, TX

[Online via Zoom](#)

5:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.: Genealogy Club

Hosted by the Alexander Hamilton Memorial Free Library

[Online via Zoom](#)

6:30 p.m.–7:30 p.m.: Highlighting Little Rock's Historically Black Communities

Hosted by the Fletcher Library

823 North Buchanan St., Little Rock, AR 72205

Thursday, February 6

12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m.: Introduction to Online Genealogy Resources

Hosted by Fayetteville Public Library

401 W. Mountain St., Fayetteville, AR 72701, in the Computer Training Lab

5:00 p.m.–6:30 p.m.: Black Genealogy: Moving Beyond the 1870 Census

Hosted by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library

[Online via Zoom](#)

6:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.: Unearthing Ancestors: Exploring Families Through Genealogy

Hosted by Archaeology in the Community

[Online via Zoom](#)

Saturday, February 8

1:00 p.m.–2:00 p.m.: Using Artificial Intelligence Tools for Genealogy

Hosted by the Glenview Public Library

[Online via Zoom](#)

1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.: Black History Month with the Ark-La-Tex Genealogical Association

Hosted by the Broadmoor Branch Library

1212 Captain Shreve Dr., Shreveport, LA 71105

Monday, February 10

5:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.: Volunteer Genealogy Assistance with D.A.R. Members

Hosted by the Fayetteville Public Library

401 W. Mountain St., Fayetteville, AR 72701, in the Genealogy Library

5:30 p.m.–8:00 p.m.: Cinema I/O's *Daughters of the Dust*

Hosted by the Dee Brown Library

6325 Baseline Rd., Little Rock, AR 72209

6:30 p.m.–8:00 p.m.: Manuscript Collections by Dr. Deborah Abbott, PhD

Hosted by the Heritage Seekers Genealogy Club

[Online via Zoom](#)

Tuesday, February 11

3:30 p.m.–4:30 p.m.: Black Arkansans in Business

Hosted by the Sanders Library
10200 Johnson Dr., Sherwood, AR 72120

6:00 p.m.–7:30 p.m.: African-American Research with Christopher Bryant

Hosted by the George W. Hawkes Downtown Library
[Online via Zoom](#)

Thursday, February 13

7:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.: Discover Your Past: “I Have a Civil War Ancestor...Now What?”

Hosted by the Avon Lake Public Library
[Online via Zoom](#)

Saturday, February 15

10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.: Finding Family Facts: Start Your Genealogy Journey

Hosted by the Roberts Library of Arkansas History & Art
401 President Clinton Ave., Little Rock, AR 72201

Monday, February 17

5:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.: Volunteer Genealogy Assistance with D.A.R. Members

Hosted by the Fayetteville Public Library
401 W. Mountain St., Fayetteville, AR 72701, in the Genealogy Library

Tuesday, February 18

3:30 p.m.–4:30 p.m.: Black Arkansans in Music

Hosted by the Sanders Library
10200 Johnson Dr., Sherwood, AR 72120

Wednesday, February 19

2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.: Intermediate Genealogy: Understanding Court Records & Wills

Hosted by the Fayetteville Public Library
401 W. Mountain St., Fayetteville, AR 72701, in the Ann Henry Board Room

Saturday, February 22

11:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.: Research Day & Brick Wall Challenge at Butler Center

Hosted by the Heritage Seekers Genealogy Club
401 President Clinton Ave., Little Rock, AR 72201

Monday, February 24

5:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.: Volunteer Genealogy Assistance with D.A.R. Members

Hosted by the Fayetteville Public Library
401 W. Mountain St., Fayetteville, AR 72701, in the Genealogy Library

6:30 p.m.–8:00 p.m.: Everything You Never Wanted to Know about the Nuts and Bolts of Genealogy Blogging

Hosted by the Heritage Seekers Genealogy Club
[Online via Zoom](#)

Upcoming Events



Irish Genealogy Day with the Ulster Historical Foundation

March 14, 2025

Bentonville Public Library

405 S. Main St., Bentonville, AR 72712

Join the **Northwest Genealogical Society** and the **Ulster Historical Foundation** for an all-day workshop on researching your Irish ancestry!

Research Consultations from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Workshop from 12:30 p.m.–4:30 p.m. (Doors open at 11:30 a.m.)

Registration Cost:

\$25 (until March 1)

\$30 (March 2–13)

www.nwagenealogicalsociety.org

Welcome to our “Meet the Publication Team” series! Each month, we’ll introduce you to a member of our talented team dedicated to bringing you the latest news, research, and resources from our genealogical society. This month, we’re excited to introduce Sara White, our editor.



Meet the Publication Team: Sara White, Editor

What inspired your interest in genealogy and historical research?

My paternal grandmother inspired me to study our roots. Before she died, she gave me the family bible, some records, and my great-grandmother Sarah Elizabeth’s wedding china. Given the genealogical work my father’s side has done, I’m interested in diving into my mother’s side more, as that side has largely been neglected.

What is your role on the team, and what excites you most about it?

I am the editor of the Arkansas Genealogy Society’s Ezine and the design editor for the *Arkansas Family Historian*. I’m excited to create a fresh, new look for the Ezine and to learn more about Arkansas genealogy as a whole.

Do you have a favorite genealogical discovery or a story from your own research?

My favorite discovery was that my maternal grandmother’s maiden name is not Irish, as we thought, but Scottish. This interested me because I have a great deal of Scotch-Irish on my father’s side. However, I doubt they are related because the tartans are so different!

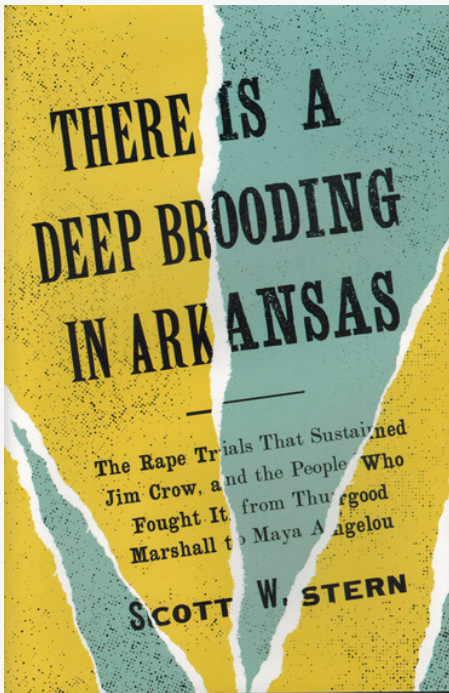
What is one genealogical resource or tip you think every researcher should know about?

Publish your work! I have a distant cousin who published my paternal ancestry, including birth, marriage, and death records and photos gathered from all branches of the family tree. I often take this book out when my friends and I discuss our heritages. It’s fun to see the old photos and your name in a book.

Outside of genealogy, what hobbies or interests do you enjoy?

I like to write and blog. Writing relaxes me and allows me to organize my thoughts. I find it helps me discover who I am as a person. I also want to travel more. I hope to visit Sweden and the UK to see where my ancestors came from and take in the beautiful sights.

Stay tuned next month to meet another member of our publication team! If you have any questions or suggestions for our publications, feel free to reach out. We love hearing from our readers and members.



New Release:

*There is a Deep Brooding in Arkansas:
The Rape Trials That Sustained Jim
Crow and the People Who Fought It,
from Thurgood Marshall to
Maya Angelou*
by **Scott W. Stern**

There Is a Deep Brooding in Arkansas is a sweeping study of sexual assault trials in the Jim Crow South, detailing the racial and economic inequities of rape law and the resistance of ordinary women.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Mississippi County, Arkansas, was a brutal and profitable place. Home to starving, landless farmers, the county produced almost two percent of the entire world's cotton. It was also the site of two rape trials that made national headlines: an accusation that sent two Black men, almost certainly innocent, to death row; and the case of two white men, almost certainly guilty, who were likewise sentenced to death but who would ultimately face a very different fate.

Braiding together these stories, Scott W. Stern examines how the Jim Crow legal system relied on selectively prosecuting rape to uphold the racial, gender, and economic hierarchies of the segregated, unequal South. But as much as rape law was a site of oppression, it was also, Stern shows, an arena of fierce resistance.

Based on deep archival research, this kaleidoscopic narrative includes new information about the early career of Thurgood Marshall, who called one of the Mississippi County trials “worse than any we have had as yet,” and the anti-rape activism of Maya Angelou, who came of age in Arkansas and whose decision to write about her own sexual assault helped shape a burgeoning movement.

In the acknowledgments, Stern credits AGS's own **Thea Baker**, stating that the genealogical portraits in *Deep Brooding* would “not be nearly as rich without [her] astonishingly generous and dogged work.”

[You can buy the book from Amazon.](#)

Using ChatGPT For Genealogy Part 1: *Learn How to Write an Ancestor's Biography with ChatGPT*

ChatGPT



By Josephine Hardy

In this four-part series, we will unpack some of the more valuable ways ChatGPT can assist genealogists in researching and writing their family history. Let's get started with the basics.

What Is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence (AI) created to have human-like conversations. You interact with ChatGPT by typing in questions, statements, or any other text, as you would converse with a friend in a text message or a Facebook chat. Think of it like having a conversation with a very knowledgeable person who has read every single page on the Internet and nearly every book ever written. By processing and learning from all of these sources, it has a very good understanding of human language and is knowledgeable on a wide range of topics. Interaction with ChatGPT uses this knowledge to understand what you're saying and generate appropriate responses.

Important things to remember before we get started:

- ChatGPT is not always accurate.
- It is not always grammatically correct.
- Always fact-check and proofread everything you read on ChatGPT.

How to Access ChatGPT

You will need to sign up for a free account to use ChatGPT. You can use it on your computer browser (chat.openai.com) or on your phone. Download it on the Apple app store or Google Play app store.

With a premium account, you can show images to ChatGPT to start a chat, ask it to create an image, or chat with your voice. To keep things simple, this series will focus on using ChatGPT with text, so there is no need to sign up for a paid account unless you want to.

How to Craft Effective Prompts

1. Talk to AI like you would to a person

As already mentioned, ChatGPT is designed to engage in human-like conversations. For best results, write as if you are speaking to someone knowledgeable about your topic of interest.

2. Use a prompt framework

A prompt format is a method for writing your prompt. Rather than just asking what you want the AI to do, you can follow a framework to improve the quality and relevance of the AI's responses. There are several frameworks you can use. This series will focus on **RTF (Role, Task, Format)**.

Role

Define the role or perspective you want the model to take. This sets the context and helps the model generate responses from a specific viewpoint. Begin by typing "Act as a **[role]**..."

Possible roles you might want it to assume:

- Biographer
- Historian
- Genealogist
- Journalist
- Marketer
- Therapist

Task

Clearly outline the task or request you want the model to perform. This provides explicit instructions and helps narrow down the focus of the generated content. Type "Create a **[task]**..."

Possible tasks you might ask it to perform:

- Article
- Biography
- Book outline
- Family tree
- Social media post
- Translation

Format

Specify the format or structure you want the response to take. This could include asking for a list, a paragraph, a poem, or any specific format that suits your needs. Type "Show as a **[format]**..."

Possible formats you might want to see:

- Diagram
- Essay
- Graph
- List
- PDF
- Spreadsheet

How to Craft Effective Prompts

It's time for an example! Here is a prompt I gave ChatGPT:

Act as a genealogist. Write a biography for John Murray Smith using only the information listed below. Do not exceed 100 words.

Name: John Murray Smith

Birthdate: 7 January 1924

Father: Chad Michael Smith

Mother: Rosa May Fisher

Wife: Anna Smith (died in 2011)

Children: Andrew, John, Thomas (all living)

Grandchildren: 6

Occupation: Journalist from 1950 until 1990. His most notable position was as a feature writer for the Chicago Tribune (1965-1990)

Award: Pulitzer Prize for his exposé on Chicago's long history of failed building and fire-safety code enforcement.

This is how ChatGPT responded to my prompt:

“John Murray Smith, born January 7, 1924, to Chad Michael Smith and Rosa May Fisher, was a distinguished journalist. His illustrious career spanned from 1950 to 1990, with a significant tenure as a feature writer for the Chicago Tribune (1965-1990). In 2011, he faced the loss of his wife, Anna. A devoted father to Andrew, John, and Thomas, he leaves behind a legacy that includes six cherished grandchildren. Smith's impactful exposé on Chicago's building and fire-safety code enforcement earned him the esteemed Pulitzer Prize, solidifying his place in journalistic history.”

Not bad, right? Note that it embellished some of my facts. Was he a devoted father? Does he cherish his grandchildren? Possibly, but I never provided ChatGPT with this information. It is vital to fact-check and proofread everything before you use it!

3. Limitations

It is often helpful to stipulate limitations so that the results are closer to what you want. You can include them in the original prompt or see the results first and then continue the conversation with what you want it to change.

I wanted John Murray Smith's biography to be short. So here is the limitation I gave to ChatGPT in my original prompt:

“Please do not exceed 100 words.”

The resulting biography was 90 words.

How to Craft Effective Prompts

4. Refine

Sometimes, the results we get are not what we want, or we realize, after the fact, that we want to change or add something. That's okay! We can ask ChatGPT to refine it. Once you have started a conversation with ChatGPT, it will remember everything you have said to it as long as you stay within the same chat window. Therefore, we do not need to reiterate our original prompt for John Murray Smith's biography to refine it.

I wanted to get some ideas before tweaking it, so I asked ChatGPT to help me.

Here was my next prompt:

"List ways we can refine John Murray Smith's biography."

ChatGPT's response:

- **Add Personal Touch:** Include anecdotes or personal experiences that showcase John's character and personality.
- **Highlight Career Achievements:** Elaborate on specific accomplishments during his journalism career, aside from the Pulitzer Prize, to provide a more comprehensive view.
- **Detail Family Life:** Provide more insight into his relationships with his wife, Anna, and children, Andrew, John, and Thomas. Share any notable family milestones.
- **Specify Journalism Contributions:** Detail specific stories or articles that made an impact during his time at the Chicago Tribune, showcasing his influence in the field.
- **Discuss Legacy:** Explore how John Murray Smith's work and values influenced future generations or had a lasting impact on journalism.
- **Incorporate Quotes:** If available, include quotes from John or those who worked with him to capture his voice and perspective.
- **Chronological Structure:** Consider organizing the biography chronologically to create a clear timeline of his life and career.
- **Provide Additional Context:** Offer background information on the historical context of Chicago's building and fire-safety code enforcement issues to enhance understanding.

Exercise

It's your turn! Copy and paste John Murray Smith's biography into ChatGPT and ask the AI to refine it using one of the above ideas. This biography is not based on a real person, so you can invent any details about his life if additional context is needed.

How to Craft Effective Prompts

Here is the next prompt I gave ChatGPT:

Include additional information about John Murray Smith and his family:

- He and Anna started dating in 8th grade while attending St. Benedict Preparatory School.
- He proposed to Anna in front of both of their families at Christmas in 1945.
- They were married on 1 January 1946 at St. Benedict Church.
- John Murray Smith fought in WW2. He never spoke about his experience, but we know that he was a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Force and served in the 415th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group.

This is how ChatGPT responded to my prompt:

Born on January 7, 1924, he embarked on a lifelong journey with Anna, his sweetheart since 8th grade at St. Benedict Preparatory School. Their love blossomed, culminating in a heartwarming Christmas proposal in 1945, witnessed by both families. The new year, January 1, 1946, marked the beginning of their marital bliss as they exchanged vows in the St. Benedict church.

Amidst his journalism career, John Murray Smith carried the weight of wartime service. A silent hero, he never spoke about his experiences in World War II. Records reveal he served as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Force, contributing to the 415th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group. This unspoken chapter adds depth to John's resilient character and the rich tapestry of the Smith family history.

There are a few issues with the refined version above:

1. The word limitation has resulted in it cutting out key information from his biography, including the details about his children and his work at the Chicago Tribune.

2. The flowery language it uses embellishes the facts. I don't particularly like this sentence: "This unspoken chapter adds depth to John's resilient character and the rich tapestry of the Smith family history."

Let's try to fix it.

How to Craft Effective Prompts

Here is the final prompt I gave ChatGPT:

Increase the word limit to 150 words and include the information about his children, grandchildren, and his work at the Chicago Tribune. Use less flowery language to describe his relationships and life.

This is how ChatGPT responded to my prompt:

John Murray Smith, born on January 7, 1924, shared a lifelong bond with Anna, his sweetheart since 8th grade at St. Benedict Preparatory School. They married on January 1, 1946, after John proposed at a Christmas gathering in 1945. In addition to his distinguished journalism career, spanning 1950 to 1990 with a notable stint as a feature writer at the Chicago Tribune from 1965 to 1990, John was a devoted father to Andrew, John, and Thomas. His legacy extends through six grandchildren. During World War II, John served as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Force, displaying silent heroism in the 415th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group. His impact as a journalist and commitment to family resonate as enduring aspects of his rich life.

We can see there is still room for improvement, but the point is that we can continue refining the biography with ChatGPT's help until we are satisfied with the result. We can also take what ChatGPT has given us and edit it on our own until it is what we want.

Part 2: Extracting Data from Narratives

In the next segment, we will cover how to extract information like names, dates, and relationships from narratives using ChatGPT. Our example will be an obituary, and the format will ask AI to create a table with the extracted information. Be on the look out for Part 2 in the next AGS Ezine!

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Arkansas Genealogical Society

February 2025

Kitchen Roundtable Talk



The Five Primary Platforms for Arkansas Genealogical Research

Our Zoom discussion will be presented on **Tuesday, February 18, at 6:30 p.m.** It is free of charge.

Russell Baker will be addressing the five primary platforms for Arkansas Genealogical Research. For those within the Arkansas genealogical community, Russell is a familiar figure. Affectionately known as “The Octogenarian Historian,” and with a remarkable 50 years of service on the AGS board and a background as the retired archival supervisor and former acting director of the Arkansas State Archives in Little Rock, his expertise is unparalleled.

Russell is the author of two of AGS’s most popular publications, the **Arkansas Township Atlas** and **Arkansas Post Offices: From Memdag to Norsk, A Historical Directory 1832–1900**. Over the years, he has frequently lectured nationally on genealogical research and theory. He is continually working on new publications and is continuing to make meaningful contributions as an esteemed board member. Drawing on his extensive experience, this event is a must-attend!

[Join us online via Zoom.](#)

Our monthly **Kitchen Roundtable Talks** cover diverse genealogical topics and methodologies, sparking lively online discussions among our engaged participants. This platform is a unique opportunity to establish meaningful connections with fellow genealogy enthusiasts, cultivate new friendships within the community, and link up with kindred spirits who share our passion for research.

We enthusiastically welcome suggestions from all participants for topics of interest and encourage volunteers to step forward as discussion leaders for subjects close to their hearts. As this initiative evolves, we anticipate refining it based on our collective experiences. Your active participation and invaluable feedback remain pivotal in shaping the future of our endeavors. For more information on our discussion topics, go to **argensoc.org/kitchen**.

So, You Have Arkansas Roots?

*This year, we will resume printing our quarterly publication **Arkansas Family Historian**. This resource is available to our members and is invaluable in Arkansas genealogical and family research.*

Do you have Arkansas family history? Want to share your findings? Send an email to AFH@ArGenSoc.org.

AGS Ezine Administrative Staff

Contributions: If you have news for the Ezine, send it to ezine@argensoc.org.

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