



AGS Ezine

*Newsletter of the Arkansas Genealogical Society
Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2026
Sara White, Editor*

Note from the Editor:

Happy New Year, genealogists and family historians! It's 2026, and that means in July, we celebrate our nation's Semiquincentennial (That's 250 years!). Does your family date back to the Revolution? Submit your story of how your Revolutionary ancestors moved to Arkansas for the *Arkansas Family Historian*. Details on page 16. We're already gearing up for our annual conference, so be on the lookout for details on that throughout the year.

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Arkansas Genealogical Society

January 2026

Kitchen Roundtable Talk



Wendy Citron: From Rolodex to Records: The Secrets Beneath the Candy Shop

Our Zoom discussion will be presented on **Tuesday, January 20, at 6:30 p.m.**, free of charge.

Please join us for our free Zoom presentation! In this session, Wendy guides attendees through the intricate world of Jewish genealogical research—where languages shift, borders blur, and myths that “all the records were lost” persist. Drawing on her own family’s extraordinary journey—one that began with a simple question and ultimately revealed a family secret tied to Murder, Inc., the infamous Jewish Mafia—she demonstrates how persistence and methodical research can uncover truth in the most unexpected places.

Wendy Citron is a professional genealogist, artist, and educator specializing in Jewish and Eastern European research. She serves as a Research Specialist at the FamilySearch Library and as an administrator with the JewishGen Ukraine Research Division’s Data Acquisition Team. Wendy is also the founder of two professional genealogy communities: the Ukraine Genealogy Alliance, focused on resource sharing, education, and collaborative research efforts, and Geniends, a professional genealogist networking group that supports mentorship and shared expertise. Her research also extends to a one-name study in West Limerick, Ireland, where she integrates genetic genealogy, advanced digital tools, and traditional research to reconstruct interconnected family networks and migration patterns.

[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.

January Events

Wednesday, January 21

2026 Genealogy Conferences & Events: Your Guide to Learning and Connecting in Person

12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m.

Ancestry

[Virtual via Zoom](#)

Thursday, January 22

Personal Archiving

12:00 p.m.–1:30 p.m.

Roberts Library of Arkansas History and Art

[Virtual via Zoom](#)

Sunday, January 25

Tales & Traditions: Story Time for Grown-ups

2:00 p.m.–3:30 p.m.

Fayetteville Public Library, Adult Classroom 408 (4th Floor)

401 W. Mountain Street, Fayetteville, AR

No registration required

Monday, January 26

Volunteer Genealogy Assistance with D.A.R. Members

5:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

Fayetteville Public Library, Genealogy Library

401 W. Mountain Street, Fayetteville, AR

No registration required

Virtual Roundtable: What Have You Learned About Your Family from DNA Results?

6:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

Northwest Arkansas Genealogical Society

[Virtual via Zoom](#)

6:30 p.m.–8:00 p.m.

Climactic Clues: Our Ancestors Weathering Their Lives

Heritage Seekers

[Virtual via Zoom](#)

January Events

Wednesday, January 28

DNA: You Won't Match Everyone You are Related To

12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m.

Ancestry

[Virtual via Zoom](#)

Break Down Genealogy Brick Walls

3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

Fayetteville Public Library, Genealogy Library

401 W. Mountain Street, Fayetteville, AR

No registration required

Armchair Historians Book Club: *The Secrets We Kept* by Lara Prescott

5:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.

William F. Laman Public Library

2801 Orange St, North Little Rock, Genealogy Room 125

No registration required



Photograph Courtesy of Polk County History Center

NAGS Writing Contest

The Northwest Arkansas Genealogical Society has worked for over 50 years to help researchers build their trees and discover the stories of their ancestors. We are excited to host our third annual writing contest with a new prompt to inspire your research.

Prompt: “New Discoveries”

Have you recently uncovered a surprising ancestor, broken through a brick wall, or solved a family mystery? Perhaps you found an old cache of letters or connected with a distant cousin through DNA. We’d love to hear the story and how it reshaped your understanding of your family.

Deadline: March 31, 2026

Judging Criteria

Submissions will be evaluated in four categories, each scored on a scale from 1 to 5:
1 = Does not meet the standard
5 = Exceeds expectations

Evaluation Criteria

- **Relevance to Prompt** – Clearly connects to the “New Discoveries” theme, showing a meaningful breakthrough or insight.
- **Quality of Writing** – Well-written, engaging, and organized; the narrative flows smoothly and holds the reader’s interest.
- **Quality of Research** – Demonstrates strong research skills with accurate details, historical context, and (where applicable) sources or citations.
- **Creativity** – Uses originality and thoughtful storytelling to bring genealogical research to life in a compelling way.

Email your submission to backtracker@nwagenealogicalsociety.org with “2026 NAGS Writing Contest” written in the subject line.

NAGS Writing Contest

Rules

Eligibility: Open to all genealogists and family historians, regardless of experience. No entry fee or membership required. NAGS board members and judges are not eligible.

Length: Stories should be no longer than 2,000 words in length. Source citations, family group sheets/pedigree charts, and photos (with captions) are encouraged but not required. Citations, charts, and photo descriptions will not be included in the word count.

Format

- Submit your entry as a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx)
- Optional: Attach photos, charts, or graphics separately as high-resolution JPEG files
- All submissions must be original work. Please avoid content involving living individuals.

Legal

By submitting, you grant the Northwest Arkansas Genealogical Society one-time print and digital rights. Submissions may be edited for grammar or clarity. Copyright remains with the author. Entries must be unpublished at the time of submission.

Identification

In your email, include: Your full name, story title, mailing address, phone number, and approximate word count (Your contact information is only used to identify and notify winners.)

Awards

1st prize: 6 month U.S. Ancestry membership and 1 year membership to NAGS

2nd prize: Ancestry DNA test + 1 year membership to NAGS

3rd prize: 1 year membership to NAGS

Winning entries will be published in future issues of The Backtracker

Winners will be announced at our April 2026 meeting. We will also publish the winners on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/groups/nwags and our website www.nwagenealogicalsociety.org.

Genealogy Resources

Shannon Graham

Polk County History Center (Bartow, FL)

Point 1: Organize Your Research and Document Where You've Been

With the rapid pace of digitization and usage of AI in the genealogy field, resources are being published constantly. Because of this, it's vital that you document what research you have done to ensure that you aren't wasting time looking at the same source.

One of the ways records are being digitized is through the FamilySearch Full-Text Search. This technology uses AI and handwriting recognition to make records available to view. For more information regarding FamilySearch Full-Text Search, visit the [FamilySearch Blog Post](#).

Some template types to keep in mind when organizing:

- Ancestral Chart
- Family Unit Chart
- Research Calendar
- Research Summary

Point 2: Contextualize Everything

To fully understand the life of your ancestor, you must understand the world surrounding them. By viewing their story within the context of their surroundings, you can gain a more complete understanding of their life.

Think of genealogy research like building a house:

- The frame of the house represents your the basic facts: census, marriage, death, etc.
- The walls and roof represent public records: military records, immigration records, newspaper articles, etc.
- The decor in the house represents personal details: oral histories, journals, photographs, etc.
- The landscape around the house represents the historical context.

You can't put a roof on a house without a frame or decorate without walls. I.E. you build record sets on top of one another to gather a complete story about your ancestor—leaving one type of record out could lead to an incomplete understanding of their life.

Genealogy Resources

Point 3: Consult Your Local Library or Historical Society

The locals in your area (or the area where your ancestor lived) are the experts! That should be one of the first places you look to find information on your ancestor. Check city, county, and state records for information. Again, contextualizing is so important because it can give you a better understanding of where records are historically kept!

Public libraries can also be a great resource because if they don't have the material, they could likely tell you where to find it.

Don't be afraid to reach out to the librarians and ask if you are having trouble finding something (either a physical material or digital) or if you aren't sure where to go in your research.

99% percent of the time, having a second pair of eyes on the material leads to new questions and new approaches to research—you can do the same with your local historical society.



Photograph Courtesy of Polk County History Center

Genealogy Resources

Your Favorite Resources

Thanks to everyone who participated and shared some great resources they use for researching!

- [Civil War Records](#)
- [Daughters of the American Revolution](#)
- [Family Search Full Text](#) (you have to log in first)
- [Fold 3](#)
- [Gopher Records](#)
- [History Hub](#)
- [History Hub – Communities](#)
- [Military Records for Genealogy Research: Getting Started](#)
- [National Archives](#)
- [National Archives – Innovation Hub](#)
- [National Park Service – Soldiers Database](#)
- [An Overview of Records at the National Archives Relating to Military Service](#)
- [The Twelve Key](#)

About Shannon Graham

Shannon Graham is a Research and Genealogy Historian who brings stories of the past to life. At the Polk County History Center (Bartow, Florida), she helps patrons uncover family histories, manages genealogical collections, and leads digital preservation projects that safeguard the county's heritage. She also develops programs that celebrate historic resources, connecting communities to the history that shapes them.

With a background in archives, museum work, and public history, Shannon specializes in turning research into engaging, accessible experiences. She has curated exhibits, authored publications, prepared preservation reports, and collaborated with organizations to support historic designation efforts. Her work blends precision with curiosity, creating meaningful connections between people and the stories they seek. Known for her adaptability and collaborative spirit, she thrives in projects that require both attention to detail and a big-picture perspective.

Outside of work, Shannon enjoys spending time outdoors, traveling, and exploring new cultures and histories, and values time spent with family and friends. She holds a Master of Historic Preservation and a Bachelor of History with a Minor in Music and a Certificate in Museum Studies from the University of Georgia. Shannon is completing a Master of Science in Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Shannon is an Arkansas native.

Hidden in Plain Text: The Full-Text Feature of FamilySearch

By Cecelia McFadden

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has contributed to and will continue to drive the power of AI to expand the capabilities of user full-text searching. The FamilySearch full-text feature is transforming genealogy by making unprecedented volumes of historical records instantly searchable, breaking through old research barriers—especially for African American family historians.

Full-Text Feature Definition

Launched in beta after RootsTech 2024, FamilySearch’s Full-Text Search leverages artificial intelligence and machine learning to produce searchable transcriptions of digitized record images—even for collections traditionally excluded from standard indexes, like handwritten land deeds, probate files, plantation records, and more. Unlike traditional indexing, which only catalogs select individuals or fields, Full-Text Search examines every word in a document, expanding the research horizon by letting users search for any names, places, dates, or keywords found anywhere in the records. According to the landing page, “With handwriting recognition and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, we can convert an image of text into a machine-readable text format, giving you the ability to search the full text of these records before they are even indexed.”

Feature History

FamilySearch has long led in digitizing historic records, but until recently, most records beyond core censuses and vital records were “browse only”—imaged but unsearchable unless indexed, a process requiring millions of volunteer hours. Groundbreaking advances in AI and handwriting recognition now make it possible to search over 100 million previously inaccessible documents almost instantly. First released as an experimental feature in 2024 with core U.S. land and probate records, the system continues to expand to additional collections, with ongoing improvements in accuracy and functionality. Below are some genealogy features and benefits.

Hidden in Plain Text: The Full-Text Feature of FamilySearch

- **Expanded Access.** Researchers can now search names, events, places, or unique terms across complete, unindexed documents—finding references to witnesses, enslaved individuals, neighbors, or other “hidden” people not in record indexes.
- **Flexible Searching.** Creative combinations of keywords, wildcards, and filters allow for nuanced searching even when names are misspelled or only partially legible, which is crucial for African American research with name changes and limited documentation.
- **Direct Document Viewing.** Results show both AI-generated transcriptions and original images side-by-side, with tools to highlight terms, quickly scan long documents, and attach findings to a FamilySearch tree or source list.
- **Fact View.** Results show people, places, and years that are included in the user’s target search.
- **Citations.** Citations are available for downloading for every search result and have minimal editing investments.
- **Image Download.** Images can be downloaded as a pdf or jpeg, with or without a citation, giving the user a range of flexibility when conducting short-term or long-range search exercises.

Step-by-Step Instructions for Feature Access

1. Sign in at FamilySearch and navigate to the Full-Text Search site by accessing the Search banner and the full-text feature option.
2. Enter search terms, such as names, keywords (“freedman,” “estate,” etc.), places, date ranges, or image collection numbers.
3. Use filters for document type, year, or locale to narrow results.
4. Review highlighted results, consult both the transcription and original image, and save/attach discoveries to your research and research logs.

Conclusion

As FamilySearch continues to add collections and refine AI models, the Full-Text Search feature promises to accelerate discoveries, bring hidden stories to light and empower African American genealogists to connect with ancestors in new and meaningful ways. For those facing the toughest research challenges, this tool is already transformational—illuminating lives and legacies that have too often remained hidden in the historical record.

Originally printed in African-American Genealogical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, Volume 35, Issue 3 (3rd Quarter 2025). Used with permission.

City Directories:

No Town Too Small, No Clue Too Little

By Thomas MacEntee of Genealogy Bargains

Prior to the invention of the telephone and the telephone book, most cities and even small towns had a directory listing information on their inhabitants. Even after the telephone became popular, and up through the 1920s and 1930s, many towns continued to publish these directories. City and business directories are filled with clues to help you break down brick walls and better understand your ancestors.

The City Directory: More Than Meets The Eye

When we say “directory,” we mean much more than an alphabetical list of residents and their addresses. Here’s the basic type of information you can often find in directories related to an ancestor:

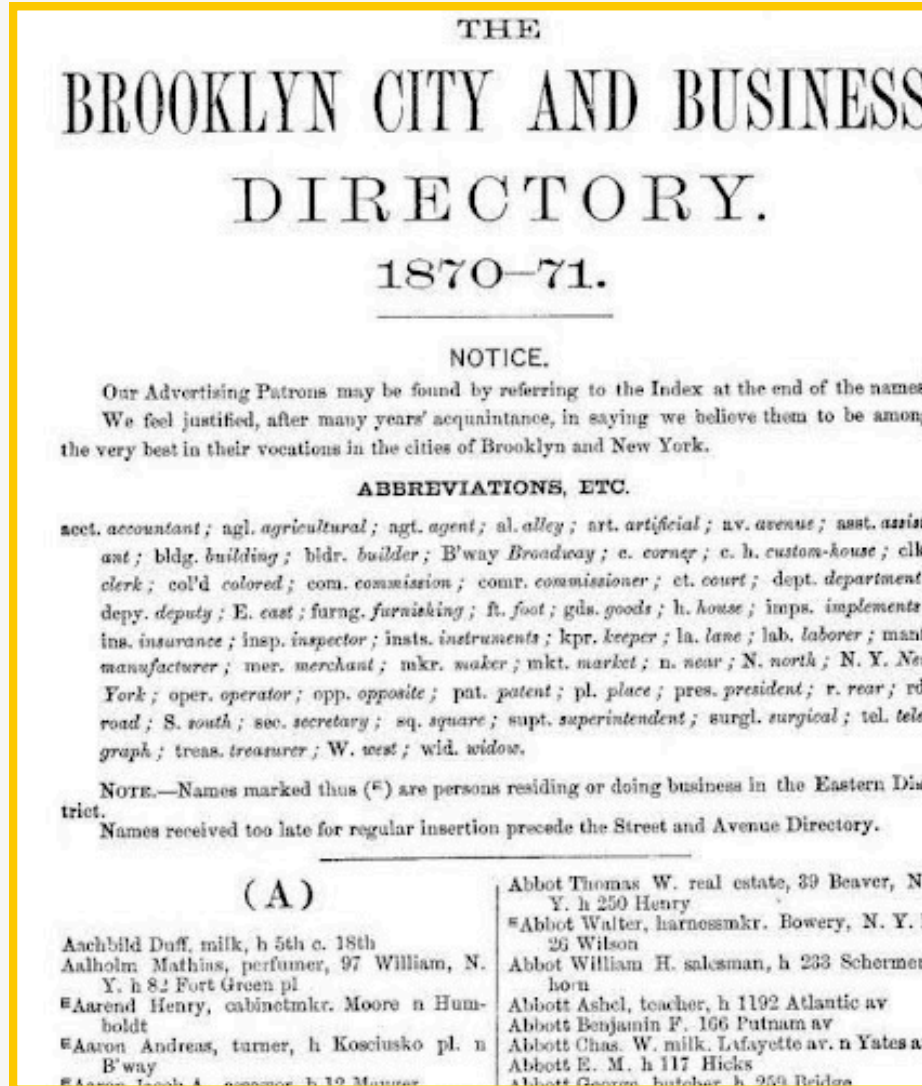
- Name
- Spouse/Marital Status
- Occupation
- Address
- Employer

Keep in mind that a directory for a large city such as Buffalo, New York or Chicago, Illinois will offer more information than a small-town directory. However, I have seen some small town directories that even list when residents died in the previous year, and the ailment or cause of death!

The Basic Elements of a City Directory

It may take some time for you to understand how information is presented in a city directory. Each directory and directory publisher uses a different format. Here is an example from the Brooklyn City and Business Directory, 1870-71, published by Lain & Company.

City Directories: No Town Too Small, No Clue Too Little



For the first entry, it reads “Duff Aachbild, employed in the milk business, home address on 5th Avenue, corner of 18th Street.”

So how did I figure that out? First, above the listing is the table of abbreviations for this particular directory, and I see that “h” means “house” and “c” means “corner.”

And how did I know that it was 5th Avenue and 18th Street, and not 5th Street and 18th Avenue? I consulted the Street and Avenue Directory at the end of the general directory.

Abbreviations in City Directories

The clue to solving many family history mysteries can be found in the abbreviations within a city directory listing. For most directories, there will be a table of abbreviations listed in the first few pages. The most common abbreviations are:

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- **Ab.** – above (meaning the person could live above a store or business)
- **Bd. or Bds.** – boards (meaning the person is a lodger or boarder at the address)
- **Emp.** – employee
- **Opp.** – location “across” or “opposite” from an address
- **Prop.** – proprietor
- **W. or wd.** – widow or widower

Watch for Abbreviations of Street Names, Neighborhoods, Neighboring Towns, and Given Names!

You may encounter more than the common abbreviations listed above. Especially for large city directories where an attempt was made to save space and reduce printing costs, you may see a table of abbreviations for a variety of text. Some may not make sense unless you consult the table. Example: Hy for “Henry” and not “highway.”

GenealogyInTime Magazine has an **extensive** list of abbreviations [on its website](#).

Advertisements and Why They Matter

Many town or city directories were free or could be purchased at a nominal price. So how did the publisher make money? With advertisements, of course! Often, you will need to page through ads just to get to the listings. And then you may find ads at the top and bottom of each page.

In most directories, a list of advertisers will appear at the front or the end of the directory. If your ancestor ran a business, check to see if it is listed.

Advertisements can also help us understand how our ancestors lived. What were the prices for basic goods? What were the fashions of the time period? What items were in demand?

Creating Timelines and Using the F.A.N. Club Concept

Very often, information found in a city directory will be “direct” in that it will state a name, occupation, address, etc. But you need to be a sleuth and start using the “indirect” information to harvest those genealogy clues.

City Directories: No Town Too Small, No Clue Too Little

Example: City directories are perfect for pinpointing a location for an ancestor in between census years. So, for the missing 1890 US Federal Census, a city directory from 1890 or 1891 can solve many issues. If you have access to several successive years of a city directory, verify the address for the same ancestor. Did they move within the city? Did they move out of the city? Then consider plotting the information along a timeline, including residence, occupation, and place of employment.

In addition, if your ancestor owned a home and then moved to a new address, who owned the home previously OR who purchased the home from your ancestor? Remember that using the F.A.N. Club concept (“**F**riends, **A**ssociates and **N**eighbors”), property was often purchased by relatives, not strangers.

Tips and Tricks for Clue Gathering with City Directories

- **Search last name only.** The formatting for city directories is different than most records, and using the “first name last name” search will prove frustrating.
- **Browse images by surname.** Make sure you review the entire list of people with the same surname as your ancestor. Check the names against your family tree, and you may be able to fill in some gaps.
- **What is the date of the directory?** Keep in mind that the information listed in a directory was often collected up to one year PRIOR to the date listed on the cover of the directory. A 1908 directory could show where your ancestor lived in 1907. Check the front/back pages of the directory to see how information was collected.
- **Don’t ignore the Table of Contents!** You will be surprised at what is actually contained in a directory by consulting the “TOC.” Often, there will be a list of street names, lists of churches, fraternal and charitable organizations, and more.
- **Search by address.** Once you’ve located an ancestor at a specific address, use that address to search other directories in the same town or city.
- **Beware address changes!** Many cities “reconfigured” their address schema or street grid at some point. This usually occurred as cities grew. The address listed in a directory in 1908 may not correspond to the current address.
- **Understand the abbreviations.** While most abbreviations were standardized across directories (“w” or “wd” for widow, “bd” for “boarder”), check the front or back of the directory for a list of abbreviations.
- **Can’t find a directory for your small town?** Locate the nearest larger town or city and check that directory. Often you will find that smaller villages and hamlets are included in the directories of larger cities.
- **Use Google Maps Street View.** Once you’ve determined an address, check out the current view on Google Maps Street View and see if the building still exists.

City Directories: No Town Too Small, No Clue Too Little

Resources

- [Ancestry – City and Area Directories](#)
- [Ancestry – US City Directories 1822-1995](#)
- [City Directory Abbreviations – GenealogyInTime Magazine](#)
- [Don's List](#)
- [Fold3 – City Directories, 1778-1926](#)
- [Digital Public Library of America – Directories](#)
- [FindMyPast – Directories and Social History](#)
- [Google Books](#)
- [Google Maps Street View](#)
- [Hathi Trust](#)
- [Internet Archive – Directories](#)
- [Library of Congress – City Directories Online](#)
- [Library of Congress – City Directories on Microfilm](#)
- [MyHeritage City Directories](#)
- [Online Historical Directories](#)
- [The Newberry Library – City Directories](#)
- [Trulia – Real Estate Listings](#)
- [United States Directories – FamilySearch Wiki](#)
- [Zillow – Real Estate Listings](#)

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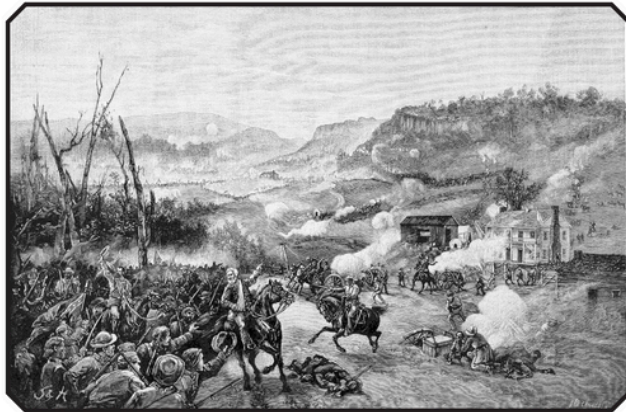
Celebrating 250 Years

It's 2026, and on July 4th, the United States will celebrate its 250th birthday. AGS is now accepting submissions for our Summer edition of the *Arkansas Family Historian*, specifically surrounding families who lived in early colonial America during the Revolutionary War and whose descendants migrated to Arkansas.

Share your genealogical research with us today! We are looking for family records and research that crosses multiple generations.

Submit your family story to afh@argsoc.org by April 1st, 2026.

THE ARKANSAS FAMILY HISTORIAN



Volume 63, No. 4

Winter 2025

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Genealogical-Society-inc](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Arkansas-Genealogical-Society-inc)



[ArGenSoc.org](https://www.ArGenSoc.org)

So, You Have Arkansas Roots?

*At our annual AGS member meeting, we voted to increase membership dues to **\$35 per year in January 2026.***

Members receive access to our quarterly publication, The Arkansas Family Historian, as well as many other benefits!

Sign up at [argensoc.org/join-us!](https://argensoc.org/join-us)

AGS Ezine Administrative Staff

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

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