



# AGS Ezine

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## Arkansas Calendar Of Events

### Sat, 9 May

*Finding Your Early Arkansas and American Ancestors* (FREE, IN-PERSON) 10:00am, 2-1 Hwy 195, Washington, AR  
[southwest.archives@arkansas.gov](mailto:southwest.archives@arkansas.gov)

### Mon, 11 May

*There's More to Immigration than Ellis Island* with Diana Crisman-Smith. (FREE, VIRTUAL) 6:30pm  
[HeritageSeekersAR.com/subscribe](http://HeritageSeekersAR.com/subscribe)

### Thu, 14 May

*Fear No Pharaoh: American Jews, the Civil War, and the Fight to End Slavery* by Richard Kreitner, (FREE, IN-PERSON) CALS Butler Center  
[events.cals.org/event/15598752](http://events.cals.org/event/15598752)

### Tue, 19 May

*Beyond the Census: Discovering Ancestor Stories* by Regan Richardson. (FREE, VIRTUAL) 6:30pm. AGS Kitchen Roundtable Talks. [ArGenSoc.org/kitchen](http://ArGenSoc.org/kitchen)

### Thu, 21 May

*Using DNA In Family Research* By Scott E. Lee, (FREE, IN-PERSON) 5:30 pm, Pope County Library, 116 E Third St, Russellville, AR 72801. (479) 968-4369  
[GenealogyTechTalks.com/topics](http://GenealogyTechTalks.com/topics)

*Beyond 1870: Finding Our African American Ancestors.* (FREE, VIRTUAL) 6:30pm  
[acpl.libnet.info/event/16229812](http://acpl.libnet.info/event/16229812)

### Wed, 27 May

*National Genealogical Society Family History Conference* (PAID, HYBRID) Wed-Sat, 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, Fort Wayne, IN  
[conference.ngsgenealogy.org](http://conference.ngsgenealogy.org)

### Thu, 28 May

*Personal Archiving* (FREE, VIRTUAL) 12:00 noon CALS  
[events.cals.org/event/16270038](http://events.cals.org/event/16270038)

### Sat, 6 Jun

*North Arkansas Ancestor Fair* (FREE, IN-PERSON) 9am to 3pm, Veteran's Memorial Hall, 108 Noah Horton Memorial Dr., Marshall, AR 72650. Also, presentations and a dinner on Friday. [rafter@ozarkisp.net](mailto:rafter@ozarkisp.net)

# Beyond the Census: Discovering Ancestor Stories

By Regan Richardson

AGS Kitchen Roundtable Talk

Tuesday, May 19, 2026, 6:30 PM CT

Census records provide valuable snapshots, but they rarely tell the full story of an ancestor's life. In this workshop, participants will learn how to move beyond census data to find the stories that census records can't tell. Using alternative sources such as historical encyclopedias, newspapers, city and business directories and more, we will work to shape your ancestors' stories. Through practical examples, attendees will discover how these records can add context, personality, and depth to ancestor profiles, transforming names and dates into meaningful life stories.

To register for this free webinar, please use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/76UKvQFDtcS5tndfeyiLA>

Regan Richardson is a professional genealogist, managing editor of *The Arkansas Family Historian*, and second vice president of the Arkansas Genealogical Society. With a deep commitment to uncovering the human stories behind historical records, Regan specializes in transforming traditional research—such as census data—into rich, contextual family narratives. She works with researchers and writers to strengthen historical storytelling while maintaining rigorous documentation standards. Through her editorial leadership, training sessions, and public presentations, Regan encourages genealogists to look beyond the records and discover the lived experiences that bring ancestors fully to life.

The Arkansas Genealogical Society hosts our Kitchen Roundtable Talks on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 PM Central Time. These are free Zoom Meetings, and all are welcome. Please visit our webpage at <https://argensoc.org/kitchen/> for future topics and information.

## Save the Date for the AGS Fall Conference

Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup>

We have booked two special speakers for the conference, J. Mark Lowe and Dr. Deborah Abbott. Below are their bios. Stay tuned for more information about our *AGS Fall Conference*.

**J. Mark Lowe** has been researching families for more than 55 years. He grew up in Tennessee with extensive family roots in Kentucky. He has traveled extensively in both states and enjoys sharing his love of genealogy and the joy of research with others including some historic reenacting.

As a researcher and lecturer, Lowe enjoys working with Genealogical groups and professional organizations. He was a former President of the of the Association of Professional Genealogists, former Vice President and Secretary of the Federation of Genealogical Societies,

In the process of teaching others, Mark builds his own skills and insight for research. His experience as a Classroom Teacher, Principal and Professional Researcher provides a different perspective for each research problem.

Mark lives in Robertson County, Tennessee which lies in Northern Middle Tennessee along the Kentucky border. With family history in both states, a knowledge of the interaction of citizens along borders helps Mark

resolve difficult issues using often overlooked records. As a national and regional speaker, he has brought these areas of expertise along with his unique humor and southern style to many diverse audiences.

**Dr. Deborah Abbott** is a professional genealogist specializing in African American research, manuscript collections, and genealogy methodology. She is a Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Archives Advisory Commission member and serves on the Lake View (Ohio) Cemetery Outreach Committee. She is an associate with the Kentucky-Tennessee Associates based in Springfield, TN; past president of the African American Genealogical Society, Cleveland, OH; and a retired professor of Counseling from Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland. She holds both a BS and an M.Ed. from Tuskegee University in Alabama and a PhD from Kent State University in Ohio.

Dr. Abbott is an instructor and the coordinator for both the week-long African American tracts at the Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research (IGHR), held at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA, and the Genealogy Research Institute of Pittsburgh (GRIP), held at LaRoche University in Pittsburgh, PA. She is also an instructor at the Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy (SLIG) in Salt Lake City, UT. She presents lectures and workshops at national, state, and local genealogy conferences. She lectures at colleges, businesses & libraries. She has published in both the Ohio Genealogy News and Family Tree Magazine. Dr. Abbott can be seen teaching the African American research course “Needles & Threads” in an educational video on Ancestry Academy, available on <http://Ancestry.com>. She coordinates monthly classes for the Genealogy and Family History Clinic for the Cleveland Public Library.

A Cleveland, Ohio native, Dr. Abbott is a life member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the Tuskegee University National Alumni Association, and Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland.

## **Did I Get Everything? A Checklist for Online Genealogy Research**

By Thomas MacEntee, of Genealogy Bargains

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Genealogy Bargains at <https://www.genealogybargains.com>

While most genealogists endeavor to perform a “reasonably exhaustive search” to prove specific data points in their research, is it really possible to “cover all the bases?” How can you be certain that you didn’t miss a record set especially in an area of research that is new to you? Assuring yourself that your research is thorough is easier when you develop a checklist and you approach resources with a new perspective.

### **What Am I Missing? Identifying Gaps in Your Genealogy Research**

While the task of determining “missing areas” of research can be daunting, it gets easier the more you research. You tend to get into a “groove” and tell yourself, “Oh, don’t forget to use \_\_\_\_\_ as a resource” or, “Remember when \_\_\_\_\_ website helped with a similar problem?” Here’s how to track all the gaps as well as helpful resources:

- **Research Log:** Create your own tracking system so you know what resources you’ve already used. A basic list consists of the date research performed, the record or record set, the results, analysis or evaluation of the results, and a source citation. Some genealogy database software such as **Legacy Family Tree** contain “to do lists.”
- **Timelines:** One of the best ways to visualize “gaps” is to use a timeline. You can create one manually by sketching it out on paper or digitally. Also check your genealogy database software program to see if

your research data can be rendered into a timeline report. Also consider timeline websites such as **Timetoast** where you enter events and dates and you can see historical events which influenced your ancestors' migration.

- **Software:** “Helper” programs like **Evidentia** can be used to analyze a GEDCOM file of your research and find errors and also note gaps and suggest resources for research.
- **Mind Mapping:** Again, the challenge of visualizing what's been researched and what is left to do can be accomplished using mind mapping programs such as **Popplet**. Use shapes, lines, and colors to sort out completed research from your “to do” list.

### **Crafting a Genealogy Research Checklist**

Every genealogist uses different record sets and different resources. For that reason, no single “checklist form” can possibly cover all the avenues of research. But you should create your own form (based on examples listed under Resources below) to use on a regular basis.

Here are links to the comprehensive Genealogy Research Checklist with over 280 records sets listed. The list is biased towards US research, but you are invited to use this list as a template to create your own. The list is available in Microsoft Excel, PDF, and Microsoft Word formats.

- Genealogy Research Checklist – Excel  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreschecklist-xls>
- Genealogy Research Checklist – PDF  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreschecklist-pdf>
- Genealogy Research Checklist – Word  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreschecklist-word>

### **Tapping into the Power of Genealogy Networks**

One of the focus areas for many genealogists is understanding “what we don't know.” It isn't possible to be an expert on every area of genealogy, and we often need the help of other genealogists. Utilize online as well as offline networks and resources.

#### **Online**

One of the best ways to gain instant access to a vast and FREE network of genealogy knowledge is through social media. While you may not be a fan of sites like Facebook or Twitter, you should consider using them only for genealogy purposes and only to gather information to assist in your research. Remember, no one ever said you had to go “all in” on any of these sites and share all of your personal information.

The fact is that genealogists are beginning to realize that while we may have used AOL, Prodigy and Everton's Genealogical Helper in the 80s and 90s to connect with other researchers, those platforms have been replaced by social media.

**Facebook Search:** Facebook's Search field is located in the upper left corner. Enter your search criteria and click the magnifying glass icon to see search results. Use surnames and locations in your searches for the best results.

- **Explore ALL results:** Click the magnifying glass icon at the top or bottom of the search results list. A new page will appear with results grouped by section in the **Result Type** sidebar on the left.
- **Use See More option:** Facebook limits the number of results shown for each section. Always click **See more** at the bottom of the results list.
- **Explore all Result Types:** Use the **Result Types** sidebar on the left to explore search results for Pages, Groups, Photos and more.

**Facebook Groups:** Before you can use any of the features of a Facebook Group, you may have to make a request to “join” that group. Most groups have a security setting of Closed in order to ensure that members understand the group’s rules and focus area.

- **Search within the group:** After joining a Facebook Group, scroll through the recent posts. Before posting a query, use the search box (upper right below the Cover Photo) to see if your question has already been posted and answered.
- **Post only relevant info:** A Facebook Group is not a billboard or a place to have general conversations. If the focus of the group is on German Genealogy, only post articles and queries relevant to that topic.
- **Update posts:** When asking for assistance with a problem, if a resolution has been found, return to the original post, click **Edit** and type SOLVED or RESOLVED at the beginning of the post.
- **Add group to Favorites:** On the left sidebar, under **Groups**, click **More**. A list of groups to which you belong will appear. Click **+Add to Favorites**.
- **Manage Notifications:** If you belong to an active group, click **Notifications** and decide how and when you want to be notified of updates.
- **Check Files section:** Locate the Cover photo at the top of the group and click on **Files**. Often, the group Admin and members will post templates and other downloadable files for genealogy.
- **Use hashtags:** Did you know that you can use hashtags in a Facebook post and it becomes a search tool for that group? Enter **#genealogy** or **#software** in the post. Then click on the hashtag to find similar posts within the group.

**Facebook Pages:** Facebook Pages have limited use for genealogists and family historians; think of a page as a news channel where you receive updates. Pages don’t allow much interaction with those who “like” or follow a page; the conversation is often “one way.”

- **Use Facebook Page as an information feed:** Click **Like** on a page to follow any updates made on the page. These updates will appear in your **News Feed**.
- **Use Facebook Pages for vendor customer service:** If you encounter an issue with a genealogy product or service, try sending a Message to the page Admin; most vendors monitor their pages for customer-service related inquiries.
- **Get Notifications:** Make sure you are notified when new items are posted to the page. Click the down arrow next to **Liked** and select **Get Notifications**.

### **Going Beyond Online Research**

Remember that just as not every record can be found online, you should leverage in-person networks and resources as well.

- **Genealogy Societies:** While it isn’t practical to join every genealogy society related to your research, you might consider contacting a specific society for assistance. Some societies offer research assistance – for free or a fee – while most have a list of resources on their website. And don’t forget Facebook! Most societies now have a Facebook page or group where members and non-members can ask questions.
- **Genealogy Conferences:** Attend genealogy conferences and make sure you set aside time to just sit and talk with other genealogists. Also browse the exhibit hall and look for organizations that assist researchers based on ethnicities and geographical locations. Tip: also see if you can purchase or locate syllabus materials from past conferences related to your research.

- **Archives, Libraries and Repositories:** Locate an archive, library or repository related to your area research. Don't forget university libraries! And remember to use WorldCat to order books via interlibrary loan and have them delivered to your local public library.
- **Family History Centers:** Locate the closest Family History Center for a variety of local, national and international resources. Remember, that as FamilySearch has terminated the ability to "rent" microfilms, you can find some local copies at these centers as well as online databases of records that cannot be accessed online from your home or office.
- **Hiring a Professional Genealogist:** For those of us who pursue genealogy as a hobby, hiring a professional may not seem like an option. Rather than hiring a pro for a long term project, consider hiring a "coach" from GenealogyDotCoach to assist with a focused problem area. In addition, professional service sites such as Legacy Tree Genealogists offer packages within reach of the hobby genealogist.

## Resources

- **Association of Professional Genealogists**  
<https://www.apgen.org/>
- **Conference Keeper**  
<https://conferencekeeper.org/>
- **Evidentia**  
<https://evidentiasoftware.com/>
- **Facebook**  
<https://www.facebook.com/>
- **Family History Center Locator**  
<https://www.familysearch.org/centers/locations/>
- **Genealogy Libraries in the US**  
[https://www.gwest.org/gen\\_libs.htm](https://www.gwest.org/gen_libs.htm)
- **Genealogy Research Checklist – Excel**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreschecklist-xls>
- **Genealogy Research Checklist – PDF**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreschecklist-pdf>
- **Genealogy Research Checklist – Word**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreschecklist-word>
- **Genealogy Research Log (Excel)**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreslog3>
- **Legacy Family Tree**  
<https://legacyfamilytree.com/>
- **Legacy Tree Genealogists**  
<https://www.legacytrees.com/>
- **Popplet (mind mapping)**  
<https://www.popplet.com/>
- **Research Checklist (Midwest Genealogy Center)**  
<https://genealogybargains.com/midwestgencenter-genchecklist>
- **Timetoast**  
<https://www.timetoast.com/>

- **WorldCat**

<https://www.worldcat.org/>

## Effective Use of Ancestry.com

by Scott E. Lee

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Ancestry.com is one of the largest online repositories of historical records with tools to search them. It also allows you to create and store your family tree, and it offers DNA tests with ThruLines® software to associate your DNA matches with your tree.

If you want a local copy of your tree, both RootsMagic and Family Tree Maker have software to sync your data with Ancestry.com.

Here are some tips on how to most effectively use Ancestry.com's website to build your family tree. They have software that uses other people's trees to suggest how to extend your own tree. Possible matches in census records, death certificates, military records, and many others are provided as "hints" based on those found in other people's trees.

This is a huge time saver because, in my experience, most of the hints are correct. However, you must keep in mind that a few of these hints will be wrong. Remember that these hints are based on examining other people's trees, and some people are more careful than others.

Many of the hints are questionable, such as user-created narratives, uploads without original citation, compiled genealogies, and other people's trees. The biggest mistake you can make is clicking on a hint labeled something like "John Smith, in Smith Family Tree" and saving any of that information into your tree. At least some of this is likely to be wrong. Instead, I recommend not even looking at that type of hint until the end of your search. The reason is that it may bias you with incorrect information, potentially clouding your judgment when reviewing quality source records.

*A note to those new to genealogy:* A **source record** is a document or artifact, such as a census record, death certificate, or tombstone, used as evidence for dates, places, and other conclusions about the people in your tree and how they relate to each other. A good genealogist will document the source of every piece of information in the tree by listing the source records from which it came. That is every date, place, relationship, and all other information in your tree. Without these documented sources in your tree, other genealogists may disregard your tree as the work of an inexperienced novice. A **primary source record** is a document or artifact created at or very near the time of an event by someone who had firsthand knowledge of it. Examples are birth certificates, marriage licenses, and death certificates. A **secondary source** is created after the fact or by someone not directly involved, yet often still reasonably trustworthy. Examples include obituaries, census records, tombstones, indexes, and abstracts.

I recommend starting with all of the hints for primary source records. Second, look at the high-quality secondary record hints. Third, click the Search button in the upper-right corner to perform your own search across the many source records. Finally, after exhausting all other avenues, compare what you found with the less reliable sources and other people's trees.

Ancestry now owns **Find a Grave®**, and its records are provided as hints. This is a very useful resource and highly recommended, but it frequently contains more information than is engraved on the tombstone. This can be valuable, but it is hearsay with no reference to its source. For example, it may list the date of death when the stone only lists the year. It may list the place of death (something rarely on the stone). Or it may list a woman's

maiden name that is not on the stone. I recommend only entering what is on the stone under this source. Use that other information to guide your search for additional sources. If there is no photo of the stone, be more skeptical because it is all hearsay. This same advice applies to any source where an image of the original is not provided.

When using the Search button for a manual search, it will automatically fill the search form with dates, places, and relations. Sometimes this yields a huge number of possible matching records, sometimes very few. Consider these strategies:

- Use the “Broad → Exact” sliders to increase or decrease the number of results.
- Narrow the search with filters like Census, Birth/Marriage/Death, or Military records.
- Click the pencil icon for more control by directly editing the search form.
- Broaden the date search by using  $\pm 2$  years or  $\pm 10$  years.
- Broaden the search for places by using “Adjacent counties” or “Adjacent states”.
- Try name variations (Bill vs. William).
- Change names to initials.
- Use wildcards “\*” and “?” for illegible letters in a name.
  - Use “\*” to match zero or more letters (“McA\*y”).
  - Use “?” to match one letter (“Wil?er”).
- Remove names, dates, and places you suspect may be incorrect.
- Add names, dates, and places you suspect, but haven’t proven.

Why is it important to use the Search button to perform a manual search? The hints are a great first step because someone else in another tree thought the source record matched the person. However, there are billions of records available, and likely several matches that no one has found.

Source records exist on a **spectrum of reliability**, and the distinction between primary and secondary is fuzzy. Evaluate the reliability of a source based on these factors:

- **Is it Contemporaneous** – made close to the time of the event
- **Is the informant reliable** – who provided the data, and how likely are they to know the facts and be truthful
- **Is it a derivative** – copied or summarized from another record
- **Is there an image** – without an image of the original, it is a derivative
- **Is it legible** – poor photography or sloppy handwriting
- **Is there bias** – family histories may be flattering or simplified

When using a hint from another person’s tree, if you see differences between your tree and theirs, never click the Save button. That will likely copy mistakes from their tree into your tree. Instead, look at the source records in the other tree. If you have done your job right, you will frequently have more source records than they do. Sometimes, the other tree may have few or no sources. That is a red flag that the other researcher is not an experienced genealogist, and you should have more faith in your own conclusions than theirs. If they do have sources in their tree, compare them with yours to determine which conclusion is correct. If they have a source not in your tree and you believe it matches, use the Search button to find it and add it to your tree.

Only add a source to your tree when you are confident it matches the person. Just because the name matches doesn’t mean it is the correct person. For example, if you are looking for the parents of Sam Jones and find a census record hint listing a child with the correct name and age, that is not enough. This may be presented as a hint because of a mistake made by someone else. You must find more convincing evidence. Try looking for additional records before adding that census record. You may find Sam’s marriage record listing his parents’

names, or an obituary may list his siblings' names. Sometimes it is helpful to print several sources on paper and spread them out on your desk to see the big picture. Highlight important parts with a highlighter. Ask yourself, what evidence do I have that these are the right parents? Remember that a hint is just a hint. Never trust it just because Ancestry presents it as a hint.

Look for contradictions. Do three different sources give three different birth dates? You will need to look for more sources and justify why you accept one over the others. It may be best to list just the year or approximate year (e.g., "Abt. 1886").

Build your tree up (toward ancestors), then build it down, adding your ancestors' descendants. By adding siblings of your ancestor, you will frequently find additional information about your ancestor. Great-uncle George's obituary may list your grandfather's other wife, you didn't know about.

When you add a source to your tree, Ancestry automatically fills in dates, places, and relatives, so you don't need to type that information manually. Most of the time, the transcription is correct and complete, but not always. Especially with blurry images and sloppy handwriting, errors may occur. Even with good handwriting and sharp images, there may be errors or omissions. **Always look at the document image** and verify that the transcription is correct and complete. I frequently find that information is missing. For example, a marriage license may list the parents of the bride and groom, but they may be missing in the transcription. A death certificate may list the birth date, but the transcription may not.

When you accept a hint by clicking the "Save" button, your tree is updated with the new information, and a source record is created listing the exact location of the source. A link is created between the fact and the source. If you manually add information not in the transcription, such as a birth date on a death certificate, that source will not be linked to the new information. You can see these links on the "Facts" tab by clicking a fact or a source. To manually link a fact to a source, either click "Edit" on the fact and go to the "Attach source" tab or click "View" on the source and go to the "Associated facts" tab.

**Standardize dates and places.** A date may be transcribed as "10/15/32", "Oct 15, 1932", or "15 October 1932". If you click the date field, Ancestry may offer the standardized date, "15 Oct 1932", which matches the standard format used by genealogists. Why is it important to standardize the date? Consider the date "5/3/34". In the US, this might mean 3 May 1934. In Europe, it might mean 5 March 1934. But is it 1934 or 1834?

Likewise, clicking the place field will offer a standardized version. If it lists only a state, "USA" might be added. It will also add the county if missing. Why is this important? Consider a place written as "Georgia". Is it Georgia, USA, or the country of Georgia? Why add the county? Consider "Salem, Arkansas". There are four places in Arkansas named Salem in four different counties. Consider "Richmond, Virginia". Is it the city of Richmond or the county of Richmond? (Richmond city is not in Richmond county.) Also, many records are kept at the county level, making this information useful. Keep in mind that county boundaries change, and counties are sometimes split to form new counties. Just because a city is in a county today doesn't mean it was always in that county. Check the county boundaries at the time of the event.

If your budget is tight, consider purchasing a one-month subscription to Ancestry. Collect a list of what needs research and batch all of that work in the purchased month. When the subscription expires, your tree and all its details are preserved and remain viewable. It just means you cannot use the search tools until you pay for another month. Also, many libraries offer free access to the Ancestry search tools, but you will have to manually add what you find to your tree.

Finally, take the AncestryDNA® test. It will help verify that your research is correct. Your DNA results will allow Ancestry to construct a ThruLines® report showing how you relate to your DNA matches. To make this most effective, build your tree down from your ancestors, listing their descendants for as many generations as

possible. This is because ThruLines only works if your tree and your DNA match's tree have people in common. Encourage your relatives (including immediate family and more distant cousins) to also test.

As I have said many times: *Without DNA evidence, the identity of the father is hearsay.*

A summary of my recommendations: Be skeptical of hints. Use the Search button and adjust search parameters as needed. Save less reliable hints for last. Only add sources when you are confident of a match. Verify transcriptions with the document image. Standardize dates and places. Take the DNA test and encourage family members to do the same. Add descendants of your ancestors to help ThruLines do its job.

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My goal is to make genealogical knowledge freely available while ensuring information remains accurate and attributed.

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



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



### Administrative Staff

**Contributions:** If you have news for The *AGS Ezine*, send it to [ezine@ArGenSoc.org](mailto:ezine@ArGenSoc.org).

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