


CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 811, Westminster, MA 01473-0811

THE SEARCHERS


Summer is here!!!

Does this look familiar???? We are all spending our summer with our sunscreen and face coverings!!! That means we are enjoying beautiful long days and evenings confined to our homes or at very best very limited social events.

Most of our interactions with others is via zoom or some other form of electronic communication. I must admit this has been a life savior for our monthly meetings since everything is “virtual” in our “new normal” We have some very interesting programs planned for the rest of the summer and hope to “see” many of your there—even those who would normally not be able to travel to the meeting.

We now have a new website, cmgso.org and hope you check it out. The members only tab will now work with a password available to members. The board of directors has agreed on a password for this year and it will be sent out to current members this week, so keep an eye out for the e-mail or snail mail.

Our virtual meetings are being recorded and will also be available to members on our website, so if you can not attend, or just want to see it again, you can.

2020 CMGS Membership Virtual Meeting Speakers

July 28, 2020

7 pm

Thomas MacEntee

Did I Get Everything? A Checklist for Online Genealogy Research

August 25, 2020

7 pm

Dave Robison

“Much More than Ancestry.com & FamilySearch.org”

Virtual meetings are held on ZOOM and invitations are sent out electronically so please make sure we have your current e-mail address. You can also get the invitation from our FACEBOOK page

WEBINARS OFFERED

CMGS is offering a webinar each month through the local Libraries in Fitchburg and Leominster. Check the events calendars on each of their websites for the current information. If you know of other Libraries or organizations who would be interested in a program from us, we would be happy to accommodate them and the best part is it is **FREE!!!!**

Contact either Carol Bosworth at cambosworth@gamil.com or Bonnie Bohnet at scrapqueen1945@gmail.com for more information

10 FREE Social History Sites To Improve Your Genealogy Research

Reprinted with permission from lsalisson.com Are You My Cousin Series

Explore these free social history and genealogy resources to find your ancestors, bring the family stories to life and connect with past generations.

Social history is buzzing in the genealogy world these days. More and more genealogy researchers are understanding the importance of social history and how it applies to breaking down those genealogy brick walls.

Or at least, knocking out a brick or two.

I lost my great grandfather for a time in the records. James Abe White of Surry County, NC does not appear in the 1930 U. S. Census. His wife Stella is listed as the head of the household. If you didn't know better, you might think Abe White had died or left the family, but neither is true. He was very much alive!

To solve this mystery, I had to learn and understand a bit about the farming life in the foothills of North Carolina. My dear Aunt Dorothy enlightened me. Farming was hard work and often at the mercy of the weather and the seasons. So, to earn extra money, Abe was doing what many men would do seasonally. He was off building roads in the neighboring state. As a researcher, this makes complete sense, but I missed it for so long.

Losing my great grandfather taught me a valuable lesson. I must learn and understand the pressures of day to day life for my ancestors, if I want to be fully successful in finding and knowing them. I must understand their lives at this level to be able to share their stories with the rest of my family.

Now that I've convinced you to start exploring the social history around your ancestors and their lives, let's talk about *where to find social history*

A note for my non-U.S. researchers: Most of these are U. S. based examples, but use them as examples of the types of resources and sites that can be used. Explore what similar types of records the country where you ancestors lived might have.

1. Google Books

Google books is one of my favorite resources for all types of books when I research, and it is an especially valuable resource for finding sources of social history. Look for county and state histories such as [History of Halifax County \[NC\] by W. C. Allen](#) or [Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia by William Meade](#). You may not find your ancestors named specifically, but you will learn about the area and what was important to its residents. City directories, church histories, family histories and even [historic magazines such as Harper's Bazaar](#) are also found on Google books and are good resources to learn about an area's residents and the community make-up. If you are new to Google Books, read this post: [How To Find & Use Google Books For Genealogy Research](#).

2. The Internet Archive

You will want to explore the [Internet Archive](#) if you have not previously. Find a variety of books including yearbooks, family histories, state and county histories as well as city directories.

3. HistoryNet

Find interesting articles on different time periods and regions through history at [HistoryNet](#). This is a new-to-me site, and I might have gotten "lost" in reading articles on [the wild west](#) and [others on civil rights](#). I always come away with new information to apply to my ancestor's lives!

4. State Archives Digital Collections

Most genealogy researchers are familiar with their state archives. But...you might be missing out on important social history resources if you just look at the traditional genealogy records.

The Florida Archives' [Florida Memory](#) online collection is a rich source of information you can use to learn about issues and current events affecting your Floridian ancestors. Find articles on the [early medical field](#) to [early Florida women holding office](#).

Florida Memory

Explore what your state archives has for free online!

5. University Collections Online

The [South Caroliniana Library](#) is a premiere research archives and special collections repositories in South Carolina and the Southeast region. Located in Columbia, SC at the University of South Carolina, access many of their collections online. They have created nearly 300 digital collections! Find pertinent resources such as historical South Carolina newspapers and private family papers of citizens.

Collection	Link
Abby D. Munro Papers <small>This collection includes letters, legal documents, financial documents, and photographs of the Mt. Pleasant Home for Destitute Children, and an extensive run of the Laing School Visitor newsletter.</small>	Digitized Materials
Armstrong Family Papers, 1900-1930 <small>One of America's foremost early twentieth-century African-American magic acts. 127 items including letters and photographs</small>	Digitized Materials
Berkeley County Photograph Collection <small>66 photographs circa 1900 of plantations, africanamericans, rice threshing, hunting, and churches in Berkeley County before area flooded for Lake Marion</small>	Digitized Materials
Beulah Glover Photograph Collection <small>Photographs by Glover of events and places in the Walterboro, S.C. area, 1941-1952</small>	Digitized Materials
Bishop's Council of the African Methodist Episcopal Church <small>Program of the 1923 mid-winter session held in Columbia, S.C. Includes biographical sketches of ministers and their wives</small>	Digitized Materials
Bonds Conway papers, 1763-1907 <small>Family letters, land papers, and other items documenting several generations of a free family of color in Camden, S.C. and elsewhere</small>	Digitized Materials

Sample from [South Caroliniana Library](#)

Explore what major universities in the areas where you research have available online.

6. Chronicling America

Newspapers are a must for any researcher seeking out the current issues and events

affecting your ancestors. [Chronicling America](#) is the first place I go when I start my newspaper research.

Even if you are searching for a particular ancestor (as opposed to social history research), take a little extra time and just read the newspaper. If you find your ancestor written about in a newspaper, go ahead and read the rest of the paper! The current events and issues will be impacting his/her life as well.

7. The Federal Writer's Project

[The Federal Writer's Project](#) spans the years 1889 – 1942 and is part of a larger government project *The U.S. Work Projects Administration Federal Writers' Project and Historical Records Survey*. It contains 2900 documents, spans 24 states and records the stories of ordinary men and women who lived at the turn of the 20th century.

Was your ancestor a factory worker? Learn about the working conditions.

Was your ancestor enslaved? Read the stories and memories of formerly enslaved African-Americans.

Other's oral history form the same time and place of your ancestor will give you insight into your own ancestor.

8. The Library of Congress Digital Collections

From photographs to maps to personal recollections, the [Library of Congress Digital Collection](#) is another place to seek out how current issues and social history events played out in your ancestors' lives. Here is just a sampling of what you can find:

- [Colorado Folklife Project Collection](#)
- [Veterans History Project](#)
- [Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories](#)
- [America at Work, America at Leisure: Motion Pictures from 1894 to 1915](#) – This is a fun collection to explore!

Library of Congress Digital Collections

9. New York Public Library Digital Collections

Don't miss out on the [New York Public Library Digital Collections](#)! This collection covers much more than the New York area, so even if you do not research ancestors in New York, put it on your list to check.

10. Bethlehem Digital History Project

The [Bethlehem Digital History Project](#) is an example of a site focused on a very specific group of people and town. [If you have Moravian ancestors from Bethlehem, PA, make sure you check out this site to learn about the influences on their lives.]

I encourage you to see what might exist locally that might pertain to the location and time period of your ancestors.

Off-Line Resources For Social History

Sometimes we just need to get away from the computer for a fresh perspective on our ancestors. When that happens, do not overlook off-line social history resources to learn more about your ancestors. Look into what the following might offer:

- **The Local Library** – Look for their *local history section*, and don't forget to check the vertical files and back issues of the newspapers.
- **State and County Museums** – Their purpose is to preserve and educate the public on the life and times of our ancestors.
- **Your Relatives** – Remember my story above about my great grandfather?

Now It's Your Turn!

Set aside time to learn about the current issues and the social influences impacting your ancestor. What customs did they celebrate and why? What political events impacted their lives? Did a natural disaster cause them to re-locate?

Once you understand the times surrounding your ancestor, go back to your research and see what new revelations you find.

Can't Find a Marriage Record for Your Ancestor? 3 Reasons Why!

by Lisa Allison

Can't find a marriage record for your ancestor? Boost your genealogy research with these places and resources you might have checked yet!

I've looked...and looked...and looked. I still cannot find it!

"It" is the marriage record for my 3rd great grandparents! As I once again set out to tackle the brick wall of Joanna Barrett, I wonder what I have missed. I know I am missing a clue. I can't put my finger on it, but my "genealogy gut" – that genealogy 6th sense – is telling me I'm missing something important. I've learned to listen to it!

[Okay, I have to ask. Does anyone else have a "genealogy gut"? :)]

As new genealogy researchers or genealogy researchers starting on a new family line, we are told to find the birth, marriage and death records and dates for our ancestors. After all, these records often hold lots of genealogical pertinent information including names of parents and other family members.

But, let's face it. Finding that marriage record for an ancestor can be quite a challenge.

Why is that exactly?

1. The courthouse burned [flooded, blew away, insert any natural disaster here].

The destruction or loss of a county's records is unfortunate, but did occur far more often than we like to think. I research a lot in the southern states where we tend to find a number of "burned counties", and when a record is gone, well, it's just gone.

What do you do when the marriage records did not survive? You do have some options!

First, just because a courthouse had a fire or is referred to as a burned county, **do not assume all of the records were destroyed**. Check anyway! Yes, chances may be slim you will find the record you are looking for, but do not chance missing a surviving record because you assumed nothing survived.

Alternately, look for non-county governmental records. In other words, **look for records and resources not kept in the courthouse.**

Church records are a good example for this. Seek out church marriage records or even newspaper accounts of an ancestor's wedding. Perhaps happily ever after was not the couple's future, so check the divorce records. Early divorce records could be found at the state level records. For example, early North Carolinians wanting a divorce had to petition the state's general assembly.

2. The couple married across the border.

Consider if your ancestors crossed the county, state or country's border to get married. Do not assume the couple got married in the county where they lived. A number of reasons could exist for crossing a border to get married.

First and foremost, what was the easiest place for a couple to get to in order to get married? Here's an example:

I have ancestors who lived in Surry County, North Carolina. Surry County is in the foothills of North Carolina (and absolutely gorgeous!). For some of my ancestors to get married they needed to cross a large river to get to the Surry County courthouse. In early spring that river ran high and fast due to melting snow from higher up in the mountains. Or if that winter and spring were especially rainy, that river was tough to cross!



77—The Wedding Ceremony:

Source: Library of Congress

But... getting to the courthouse in Carroll County, VA did not require crossing a river and was a safer trip if a bit longer.

So, put yourself in your ancestor's shoes. Think about what they needed to do to get married. How far would they have to go? What type of land would they have to negotiate? Were they breaking with a family tradition of some sort? Our ancestors did things for a reason and uncovering their reasons or motives, will help you find what you are looking for.

2a. They got married in a "Marriage Mill" or a "Gretna Green"

Your ancestors were in LOVE, but their families may not have been happy about it. The couple felt their only option was to elope and get married in a destination where no one knew them. Yep, my great grandfather broke his original engagement and headed across the state line to marry my great grandmother! [I really wish I knew the rest of that story!] Or maybe the requirements to get married were cumbersome in the couple's home state. Age requirements, medical tests, and parental consent were just some of the impediments over the years to a couple getting married. What the couple needed and wanted was a quick and easy way to married. The "industry" of marriage mills was born.

Marriage mills are those places where couples can go for a quick and easy marriage. You may hear of these areas as "Gretna Greens". Gretna Green, Scotland (just across the English border) became a popular destination in the 1750's for English couples to marry and became one of the early marriage mills.



We see similar examples though more modern in the U.S. Las Vegas is a popular destination for couples to marry, but a marriage mill does not have to be a large city. Other examples in the United States include Dillon, South Carolina for couples from North Carolina. Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada was a Gretna Green for New York and New York was a Gretna Green for Ontario. Other American examples include St Joseph, Michigan and Lake County, Illinois.

[Find many more U. S. Gretna Greens on FamilySearch's Wiki.](#)

Genealogy Tip: Seek out the locations of an area's Gretna Green and check for your ancestor's marriage record there.

3. The couple did not actually get married!

Sometimes we have to talk about the elephant in the room. Or the family tree!

As genealogy researchers we must take our blinders off and consider all possibilities. *Did your ancestors actually get married?*

The couple you are researching may not have actually gotten married. No marriage. No record.

The couple may have lived together. They may have even had children together, but never actually got married. [Sarah Talley Blanks \(b. ~1800\) of Halifax County, Va never married Langley Talbot despite having a long term relationship over 50 years.](#) As a widow, Sarah would have lost her property to Langley if she married him and well, Langley had gambling issues. She may have loved him, but she was *not* letting him handle her money. Maybe you have an ancestor who was a young widow with a small child, but no marriage record could be found. Sometimes, women chose to call themselves a widow who was deemed more acceptable in society than a woman who had a child out of wedlock.

Consider all the possibilities.

Love was (and is!) a complicated thing and no less so for our ancestors. Family expectations, burned courthouses, and unconventional domicile arrangements makes trying to find a marriage record difficult at times.

While you may not be able to find an official marriage record, you do have options for finding evidence of a marriage and/or a couple's relationship. Read [How To Confidently Research Your Ancestor's Marriage Records – Part 1](#), [How To Confidently Research Your Ancestor's Marriage Records – Part 2](#) and [Find Alternatives To Vital Records When Birth Records \(& Others\) Cannot Be Found](#) to learn more.

Genealogy Research in 20 Minutes a Day

Reprinted from Are you my cousin by Lisa Allison

I'm trying to get back into doing my research– so right now I'm making a plan to carve out time AND be productive in getting back into the swing of things. I would like to spend 20 to 30 minutes a day doing research. My challenge is where to start and how to stay focused daily so I don't have to backtrack or start over every day.

(Thanks, Emma, for asking what many of us have been struggling with!)

We all desire to be efficient AND productive researchers. To do that, we need a plan!

The most successful plan for short bursts of research is the one you consistently perform. Let's get prepared first...

Having a few supplies set up and ready for you when you are ready to begin research will go a long way to improving your overall research efficiency.

As you will see from the list below, you do not need anything extravagant or unusual. The simpler you keep things the better.

For efficient genealogy research, have these handy:

- **A Timer** – The one on your cell phone is just fine.
- **A Legal pad**
- **Pencils and/or pens**
- **A Designated place to research** – A home office is wonderful if you have that option. If

not, the kitchen table works just fine. Really, anywhere you can keep your supplies together and “ready to go” is a good place.

- **Your Computer or Tablet**

You will need one more thing – it’s the MOST IMPORTANT – to keep your genealogy research moving ahead when researching in 20-minute time increments.

The Most Important Thing You Need To Be An Efficient (and Successful!) Researcher
You need a PLAN.

Finding your ancestors in just 20 minutes of research a day requires intentionality on the part of the researcher. You must know what you are looking for and how you are going to accomplish that or you will find yourself going down research rabbit holes. [And dinner will be late again!]

I keep several research plans at the ready.

When inspiration strikes or new databases become available, I am ready to research.

Having several research plans always ready and available allows me to switch between research projects easily and quickly.

SO... what does having a plan look like? How does a researcher go about creating a genealogy research plan?

- **Decide what you want to know.** Break your larger research goals of “trace the Smith family back to their country of origin” down to more manageable goals of “Who were the parents of Tate Smith of Waverly County, TN?”
- **Plan where to look** for the information. Do your homework up front. Research where the records you need are housed and what is available to you online. Obviously, offline records will fall outside of your 20-minute time increments and may well require a genealogy road trip. That’s not always a bad thing! (once we can actually go and visit an repository or library!!!)
- **Prep your research plan/log.** You can use the one at the bottom of the post or create your own. It’s personal choice if you keep your research plan or log online or print it off as a hard copy. I find it nice to have a printed copy to avoid clicking back and forth as I research. Also, when a thought strikes, I can

quickly make a note without having to open everything back up.

- **Schedule your research on the calendar!** If you know you only have 20 minutes to research, block out that time on your calendar. You are more like to keep that research appointment with yourself and be in the genealogy frame of mind at the appointed time. If possible, I recommend performing your research at the same time each day to consistently build your habit.

Tip: Do not forgo making your research plan. Having a specific research goal and plan can make the difference between finding your ancestors or not.

Now, Let’s Research Your Genealogy in 20 Minutes a Day!

You’ve got 20 minutes, your supplies and that all important research plan. Now you are ready to start finding your ancestors.

- **Set Your Timer and turn off distractions** – Multitasking is not your friend and leads to mistakes in the research process.
Tip: Plug your earbuds in. For some reason, having my earbuds in, even with no music playing, facilitates my focus. I’m not really sure why, but it works for me. Having earbuds in also diminishes interruptions from others since they assume you are listening to something!
- **Begin your search** – Start looking for those ancestors! Research is what you have been waiting for.
- **Make notes and analyze the information you find as you find it.** In your genealogy research, you will inevitably not find your ancestor or your research lead will not pan out. We call that “negative” results. Do not neglect to make notes and/or document where your ancestors do not appear. Negative research results can direct your next research steps.
- **Repeat the search/analyze portion** as many times as necessary until you have found your answer or exhausted your search.

- **When your timer goes off, stop. Make a note where you stopped and what you need to continue with the next session!** Do not skip this step. You will find yourself wasting precious time trying to remember where you want to start the next time you sit down to research.

Start again the next day.....

Let's talk about distractions and focus for a moment. Have you ever been researching and come across information on ancestors other than the one you are currently researching? An hour later, you have completely forgotten who you were originally researching?

A *yellow legal pad* can solve this problem for you. When you come across information on a different ancestral line or you have a random thought not pertaining to your current research project, simply make a note of what or who you found that you want to research further at a later date. Include the source information, so you can find the record again when you need it. Return to your original search confident that you have not lost that valuable spark of inspiration.

And if you go beyond your time limit (way beyond your time limit), well, cereal for dinner is not such a bad thing

Research Pitfalls of Beginning Genealogists



“I’m a direct descendant of George Washington!” Be wary of claims like this and check their veracity! Our first president had no children.

If you’re looking for ways to improve your research skills, it’s always best to take a personal inventory of your research practices and habits. Following are some errors that many beginners and hobbyists make which, if eliminated, could save time and increase accuracy immensely.

Collecting Ancestors – This is one of the most common mistakes. Simply copying down someone else’s tree or taking their information at face value without sources or explanation is a quick way to perpetuate untrue lineages and family stories. A good rule of thumb is to be able to give a solid reason for every bit of information you add to your database/tree/chart. How do you *know* that John is the son of Robert? And how do you know that that Robert is the right one when there is another man by the same name a county over? Traditions handed down can be helpful and even true, but a good genealogist always double check! (And P.S. – use special caution when attempting to tie into “royal lines”; many are known to have been fabricated long ago.)

Fishing for the Famous – We encounter this fairly frequently, and it involves trying to prove a relationship to a notable person simply because you share the same last name. “I am from the South and my last name is Lee. We are probably related to the famous Confederate General Robert E. Lee.” Such an assumption is not a sound approach and is very seldom true. The best course of action is to start with your recent family and move backward. Avoid beginning with a celebrity or historical figure and trying to force him into your tree!

Tunnel Vision – It is usually difficult to find direct-line ancestors if the rest of the family is ignored. In your research, build complete families, not just single lines of descent. Don’t just know who your ancestor was and who he married, but research who his siblings and their spouses were. Even studying his unrelated close friends and associates can often be the

key to solving a brick-wall problem. If your ancestor didn't leave much of a paper trail, there's a good chance that one of his siblings did, taking you back to the next generation you couldn't have found only researching one man or woman.

Incomplete Research – Lone records can often contain inaccuracies, or at the very least, a fragmented part of the story. Be sure to make the effort to confirm information that you find with multiple records whenever possible. Find a headstone? Great! If possible, also locate a death certificate, parish record, obituary, and/or will.

Being Disorganized – Do you have notes scribbled on three different notepads and tucked away on Post-Its, backs of envelopes, and other random slips of paper? This one is for you! Your research experience will improve if you make a concerted effort to keep everything in one place. The same can go for Word documents scattered around your hard drive. Make folders, keep notes in your pedigree software, and always back-up your files externally! No one wants to lose ten years' worth of research because their computer crashes!

Don't be discouraged if you find yourself making these mistakes from time to time! Genealogy is a fun field, but it can also be exacting, with a steep learning curve. Even as professionals, we are constantly growing and figuring out better ways of doing things, and everyone benefits from raised standards! We want to hear from you! In the comments, feel free to share

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