

African-American Genealogical Society - Cleveland, Ohio

NEWSLETTER

The President's Commentary



Hello, members.

On February 16, AAGS-Cleveland was invited to participate in a program involving both history and genealogy. The Cleveland State University (CSU) Black Studies Program / Howard A. Mims African American Cultural Center partnered with the Mt. Pleasant Heritage House to virtually present, “Reaffirming Our Story, Reclaiming Our Land, Rebuilding Our Future.”

It emphasized the importance of researching one’s family history and establishing a legacy of generational wealth through reclaimed land. Speaker Rev. Marvin A. McMickle, Ph.D. provided plentiful facts of interest, along with insight pertaining to how land held or previously held by African Americans could be reclaimed as a source of family wealth.

CSU resources included Dr. Donna Whyte, Professor of History, and Prester Pickett, Coordinator of the Howard A. Mims African American Cultural Center. From the non-profit Mt. Pleasant Heritage House, representatives included Yvonne Malcolm, Director; Cheryl Pailin, Executive Director; and Yolanda Burt, Board President.

The program was outstanding. AAGS gained additional exposure in the community and these local resources might be excellent sources for information and potential new members.

Joseph F. Houser, Sr.
Interim President

AAGS MEETINGS

Held on **4th Saturday** (exc. December)

- Meetings will be conducted virtually through Zoom sessions until libraries reopen for in-person gatherings *(An electronic link will be sent)*
- 10:30 a.m. Speaker presentation, followed by a Member briefing



ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Per calendar year
Fees due by Jan. 31st

Students (to age 21) \$15 • Individual \$30
Couple \$40 • Family \$45 • Organization \$50

NEWSLETTER

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*To
Discover
Your
Ancestors

Is to
Discover
a Part
of You!*

GENEALOGY NEWS

- The **NARA** (National Archives & Records Administration) **1950 Census webpage** is full of information to help researchers get ready for the 1950 census release - <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1950>
National Archives Genealogy Series: 1950 Census on YouTube (March, April, and May 2022) - <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-series/2022>
- **Green Book Cleveland** (a Cleveland State University project) is documenting and mapping lost sites of the city's Black history that did not appear in *Green Book* editions (such as Café Society Jazz Club, Benny Mason's Farm, The Majestic Hotel and others) - <https://www.cleveland.com/entertainment/2022/02/green-book-cleveland-rewriting-citys-black-history-finding-lost-sites.html>
- **"How to Find Old Rural Addresses on a Map"** (lengthy, yet thorough video & notes) - <https://lisalouisecooke.com/2022/01/25/how-to-find-rural-addresses-on-a-map/>
- **Washington Post** article - An old Virginia plantation, a new owner and a family legacy unveiled - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/01/22/virginia-plantation-slavery-owners-history/>

AAGS Officers

Interim President.....	Joseph Houser, Sr.	Recording Secretary....	Karen Marshall
1 st Vice President.....	Deborah Abbott	Corresponding Sec'y...	Maxine Hairston
2 nd Vice President.....	Joseph Houser, Sr.	Financial Secretary.....	Gayle Ector
Treasurer.....	Jonathan Stith		

Roots Tech 2022

Free...

More than 1,500 sessions on 185 topics in over 30 languages...

Livestreamed and interactive programs...

Exhibitors and innovations...

RootsTech's virtual global family history event took place March 3-5.

You can still browse the huge collection of videos (all year long) at

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech>

AAGS Members:

If you participated in **RootsTech 2022**,
let us know
about your experience—
for inclusion in the AAGS newsletter

- Was it your first time at RootsTech?
- Did it meet your overall expectations?
- What type of sessions interested you?
- Which speakers captured your attention?
- Did you browse the Expo Hall or take part in live events?
- What info was new or useful for you?

**Drop a few comments to:
newschair@aagsclev.org**

Member Spotlight on...

LaVera Wingfield



On the Right Track



Train, Chair Car, Coach Porters and Attendants
AN INTERNATIONAL UNION
Affiliated with the A. F. of L.

My father, McKinley Brown, was employed by the Illinois Central Railroad (now Illinois Central Gulf). He was very closed-mouth about his job, which only fueled my curiosity.

Some years back, I put the bits and pieces together, thanks to:

- Seeing copies of the *Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union (BSCP) Magazine* around the house while growing up,
- Eavesdropping on “grown folks talk,” and
- Using the genealogy guidebook of the time—“Black Roots” by Tony Burroughs. The chapter on the Railroad Retirement Board was exactly what I needed. It explained,

“At the time Social Security was created, the railroads already had pension plans. However, the coverage was inadequate and many workers never received benefits. The Great Depression also imposed financial hardship on many railroad pension plans. These factors led to creating the Railroad Retirement Board around the same time Social Security was created.”



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD
844 NORTH RUSH STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60611-2092
www.rrb.gov

Armed with info from page 318 re: contacting the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, I requested a copy of my father’s employment records, not knowing what to expect.

(I had previously gone to the Newberry Library in Chicago to research their Pullman Collection. At the time, the records weren’t indexed and I didn’t find anything).

I was more than ready when the large envelope arrived containing about 7-8 pages.

The first document I picked up was the “Employee’s Statement of Compensated Service Rendered Prior to January 1937,” which was his application to receive retirement benefits. It was filled out in my father’s own handwriting!

In the document, he listed his birth year as 1901, yet it was interesting to see a notation in the margin that indicated a different year (1904). With him not having a birth certificate to prove his age, the railroad company established his birth year as 1904. It led to him having to work three more years past his “real” retirement age before he could receive his benefits.

The form verified the oral history, indicating his father’s full name and mother’s maiden name. It included occupations, dates, departments and locations where he worked. I was surprised to learn he was born in a different location (Lakeview, Shelby County, Mississippi) than I had thought (Walls, Mississippi). I also learned that he had worked at another railroad (the L&N, doing track work) before being promoted to coach cleaner. In total, he worked 45 years with the railroad—from 1922 to 1967, mostly based in Memphis on the New Orleans to Chicago line.

These types of records were the basis for workers to obtain retirement benefits in compliance with the Railroad Retirement Act of 1937. The BSCP was the first African American union to sign a collective bargaining agreement with a major U.S. corporation--the Pullman Company. Negotiations resulted in better working conditions, such as an increase in wages for porters and maids, including establishing monthly work schedules and time & a half compensation. Workers with 10+ years’ service also received free uniforms. Porters were highly esteemed in the black community. Socio-economically, this established a black middle class by the time of McKinley Brown, Sr.’s retirement.

This railroad research answered so many questions about why my father was always working and caused me to cherish the few times we did have together.

*[Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters logo,
digitally vectorized, credited to
coryfront.in/ephemera/forensic-graphic-design]*



McKinley Brown, Sr.

AAGS ACTIVITIES

Supporting Genealogy In-House & In the Community



January 22 AAGS Meeting

“Genealogy Check Up:
Ten Commandments
of Genealogy”

Presented by
Sandra Beane Milton

Sandra did it again. She managed to take what could have been an ordinary topic and infused it with a wonderful, fresh take. Her ten major genealogy recommendations were very engaging and included essentials that relate to every genealogist.

She covered: genealogy source locations, using others’ family trees, citing original documents, creating alternate spellings, reviewing multiple documentation, owning up to less-than-desirable findings uncovered about ancestors, continually reviewing resources, using a variety of resources, making timelines and avoiding self-made brick walls. This was accompanied by a handout.

February 26 AAGS Meeting

“Identifying Family
Photographs”

Presented by
Maureen Taylor



Maureen is called “The Photo Detective” for a reason. With her keen eye and remarkable knowledge of photography, history, styles and customs, the title is fully earned.

Her sleuthing skills were on display as she examined the family photos of members [Deborah Dawkins Callahan](#), [Eli Kirshner](#), [Gary Franklin](#), [Marilyn Wainio](#), [Deborah Abbott](#), [Sherry Jackson](#), [Sandra Beane Milton](#), [Angela Allen](#), [Cathy Neal](#), [Barbara Essex](#), [Joe Houser](#) and [Ruth Perry](#). It was fabulous and fun!



(Photos courtesy of AAGS members)

Using specific clues from each photo, Maureen was able to narrow down time periods and clarify other information. She had great advice:

- Pay attention to what the person in the photo is doing, style of dress and props
- Note the type of photograph itself (daguerreotype, tintype, sketch, coloring, frame, etc.)
- Keep in mind traditions of the day, such as:
 - At a particular point in time, boys wore curls/long hair & dresses up to a certain age
 - Younger women tended to wear more fashionable clothing & accessories; older women wore what was more comfortable & familiar
- Look at captions on the back of the photo
- Determine the likelihood of the person by looking at the place, setting and family similarities
- Think about when people or groups were more likely to take pictures (e.g., major family events, emigration, etc.)
- Consider digital preservation

She also showed how she used Vivid-Pix (a restoration product) to colorize and gain more detail:



(original)

(enhanced)

Maureen has authored many books and is available through podcast, e-newsletter, seminars and multiple media forms, including Facebook (offering free classes once a month). Outstanding!

(Source credit for the following article: “The Best Way to Safely Label Photos,” by Maureen A. Taylor. Copyright Yankee Publishing, Inc. URL: www.familytreemagazine.com/preservation/how-to-safely-mark-your-photos/? Posted May 2020)

The Best Way to Safely Label Photos

By Maureen A. Taylor

We tend to assume that future generations will always know who people are in photos, but (as you may have learned) that’s not always the case. So, it’s important to understand how to safely label photos to preserve the information in them.

This is a common problem for our readers. One wrote in that, “Before I knew any better, all my family photos are marked on the back in ballpoint pen. Will this damage them? Will the ink eventually seep through? I now have an archival marker for pictures going forward.” Another wrote: “It seems that all the articles about photo restoration say not to write on the back of photos with anything other than a soft-lead pencil. Several years ago, I wrote names, etc. on the back of some of my photos using a waterproof and permanent ink marker that I purchased at a photography store. The pictures are still in perfect condition today. Is there any reason I shouldn’t be using this marking pen?”

Both of these questions address a similar issue: How do you safely label photos to identify information in them for future generations? Photo-safe products on the market can help you—as can these three tips for marking photos.

1. Write on back of photo using a soft lead pencil

If you can, use a soft lead pencil to write information—including who’s in a photo, the date it was taken, the occasion, and where it was taken—on the back of a photograph (where the information will never become separated from the image). Soft lead is important because hard lead pencils will leave an indentation. Place the photo face down on a clean, dry surface and write with light pressure.

Consider writing some of the following details on the back of the photo:

- name(s) of the individual(s) pictured, as well as their birth or death dates
- when and where the photo was taken
- where you found the original image, or who has/had custody of the image

2. Use soft-tip markers for photos with coating

Unfortunately, pencils won’t work on the coated papers used for today’s photographs. Instead, purchase an odorless (when dry), waterproof, soft-tip marker. Just be careful to let the ink dry completely before you stack or store the image, because it is permanent.

Ballpoint pens and regular felt-tip markers are not good choices for labeling photos: Ballpoint pens smudge and leave indentations in the photograph, and felt tip markers can bleed through the image. The good news is there are lots of choices for safe labeling tools in art supply stores and craft shops.

3. Scan photos that have damage

If you have photographs marked with ballpoint pens, any damage is already done. Previous generations didn’t have access to the photo-safe tools we have today. Don’t worry too much about it. You can scan the photos to preserve the image and digitally repair ink smudges, and make sure that you use appropriate products when identifying your photographs.

You'll Understand it Better By and By

Submitted by Gayle Ector



For me, that old saying is true as it relates to a genealogy speaker I've heard over and over (yet didn't fully 'take in' what she was saying at the time).

Why? Because in my research I hadn't yet encountered the topics she spoke about. Or due to brick walls I self-created (despite the number of times I've heard "examine each document thoroughly"). Or suggestions to research with a pencil and create a FAN (Friends, Associates & Neighbors) chart. I would say to myself, "that's a lot of work and, in this day and age, it can be done more efficiently with technology."

I'm referring to Dr. Deborah Abbott and the 3-part series she presented in February at the Cleveland Public Library, *"Uncovering Our Roots: African American Genealogy Workshop Series."*

I've been a member of AAGS 10+ years and have heard Deb many times. Before the days of Covid, when she was giving presentations at our meeting location, I was always in the back of the room doing some AAGS administrative task. Therefore, I heard but didn't listen. The best thing about Covid is Zoom. Now I'm listening without distractions, seeing the brick walls I've created, facts I've overlooked and research questions I didn't ask myself. I've not arrived, but I see a few sparks of light at the end of some of my many tunnels.

Part 1: Introduction to Genealogy

This focused on using census records, FamilySearch and Ancestry. My family "Rosser" had people appearing, disappearing and reappearing from one census to the next.

Now I could understand the importance of creating a FAN (Friends, Associates and Neighbors) chart to help confirm I had the right people in the right place. But the thought of doing this manually went against my nature—so, by subscribing to YouTube presentations of another genealogist, I learned how to extract the census data sheet by sheet and save to Excel. Now I have FAN charts from 1880 to 1940 which have helped me compare, question and develop possible research strategies to fill in the blanks.

Part 2: The Importance of Vital Records and Other Sources

Now that I have my FAN chart, I need to find vital records for births, marriages and deaths. I've found no birth records, so I'm stuck with the approximate birth year listed on the census (which changed each census).

I've been somewhat successful with the marriage records but have uncovered very few divorce or death records.

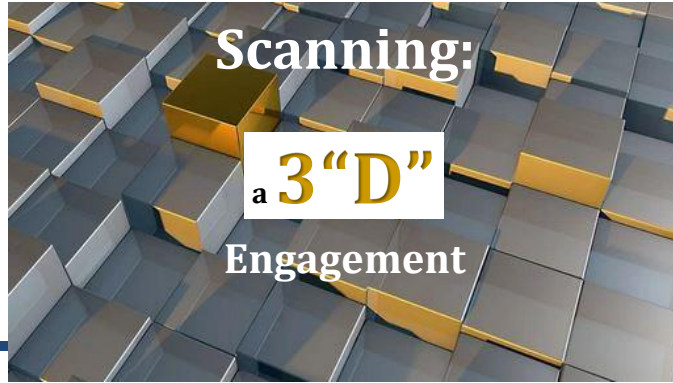
What has helped me narrow down the timeframe are city directories.

So, this is still a work in progress, but I'll use the handout Deb provided regarding vital records as my starting point.

Part 3: Strategies & Techniques Tracing a Family from Slavery to Freedom

This is the session that I most enjoyed. Using Elvira Dusenbery Gilchrist as a case study, Deb walked us through her thought process and questions to get to the Dusenbery slave holder. I can't say whether I actually took notes because Deb just unfolded the story giving us the highs, lows and setbacks until reaching the end.

I know this much—my understanding of genealogy research has been enhanced after following this series. I can truly say I understand it better now because I've experienced & know firsthand that genealogy research is hard work but worth the effort. A big thank you to Deb Abbott and the Cleveland Public Library for this enlightening, enjoyable event.



By Cecelia McFadden

Family historians and genealogists have accumulated a lot of paper and artifacts through research. You may have vital records, heirlooms, event programs, diplomas, photos, family bibles, correspondence, personal letters and other paraphernalia too numerous to mention. Over the last decade, publications and organizations have been urging you to invest in technology to create backup copies of your tangible treasures. **How's that been working for you?**

Do you have access to a flatbed scanner, sheet-fed scanner, portable scanner, slide scanner, photo scanner, high resolution copier/printer and a 3D printer? Each of these items, if owned individually, may have set you back thousands of dollars depending on when you made the purchase. Recent advances in technology and pandemic business processes make it necessary to revisit this foundational research strategy and your accompanying investment plan. We're at a point where readers need to become familiar with new terms and technology in order to keep pace with trends that may have impacts on virtual archiving and backup plans. A short primer follows.



Scanning No More

Over time, the term scanning has waned in technology literature when referring to the process of making copies of 2D and 3D objects in digital form. If you are interested in tools and trends, you will find much of the information previously categorized under scanning searches by mining the term "**digitization.**"

Digitization is the process of creating a digital or virtual representation of a physical object

There are various tools that can activate digitization. Scanners are one such tool. Digitization has been around for some time and is a foundational task that has been accelerated by organizations during the pandemic so that products and content can be made available to customers remotely.

If you’ve been on a digitization journey for some length of time, you may have digital formats that are now obsolete technically. Some examples would be a cassette recording of an interview with an ancestor or a VHS tape of a family photo album. In order to keep digital access to these artifacts current, you would need to do a “**conversion.**”

When you engage in a process to convert or improve material that is already digital, you are participating in “Digitalization”

Digitalization is not an equivalent to the third “d” definition, “**digital transformation.**”

Digital transformation is the use of technology to radically improve the performance and virtual reach of organizations

Digital advances such as artificial intelligence, analytics, social media, automation and electronic archive access are examples of how groups transform their business and the culture of their product offerings and clients. The Digital Public Library of Cleveland is a business case that is creating a roadmap for digital transformation in Northeast Ohio.

Next Steps. What does this mean for your research and for historical and genealogy organizations? It means that you should be actively engaged in some type of digitization on an ongoing basis. It means that organizations that you rely on for history and genealogy data should have some transformative programming and support for you as you pursue a virtual legacy framework. Poll your favorite library and archives about their 3 “D” plans. Know what services and tools are available to you. Look for software and hardware that can support you wherever you are on the digitization map. Keep in touch with AAGS and participate in our monthly Zoom webinars for the remainder of the year to stay abreast of digital content in the industry. Keep reading our *Tech and You* newsletter articles where we’ll continue to showcase software and hardware that is technologically current.

In the meantime, here are a few video links from the National Archives and the Plano Public Library on YouTube that will jump start or assist you in creating or tweaking an existing plan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyrX-YxSHYM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2It9_PjXoc

Keep up the good work! **It pays to know your 3 “Ds”!**



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