

African-American Genealogical Society - Cleveland, Ohio

NEWSLETTER



AAGS President
(and former history teacher)
Joseph Houser, Sr.

Every day of
February is a
celebration
of Black History

Every day of
research is a
celebration of
your ancestor's
history

Upcoming 2025 AAGS monthly programs

- Mar 22 LaBrenda Garrett-Nelson "Preparing your Genealogy Research"
- Apr 26 Sharon Batiste Gillins "Journey to Albania: Using the FAN Club"
(followed by discussion of personal brick walls brought in by members)
- May 24 Drew Smith "Organizing your Genealogy Records"
- Jun 28 Robyn N. Smith "Using Social History in Genealogical Research"
- Jul 26 * In-person Tour * Cuyahoga County Archives
- Aug 23 Open Meeting Member discussion | Q&A
- Sep 27 Michael Strauss "Researching Civil War Records"
- Oct 25 Kim Harrison "Genealogy Research Using Railroad Records"
- Nov 22 Open Meeting Member discussion | Q&A
- Dec No Meeting

AAGS MEETINGS

- Held on **4th Saturday** (exc. December) in hybrid format
(In-person, along with Zoom)
Shaker Heights Library
16500 Van Aken Blvd.
Shaker Hts., OH 44120
- 10:00-10:15 a.m. – socialization
10:15-10:30 a.m. – info/announcements
10:30 a.m. – presentations/discussions



ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Per calendar year
Fees due by Jan. 31st

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

NEWSLETTER

Published quarterly
(March, June, September, December)

Editor reserves the right to edit items submitted for publication.
Permission is required to re-publish articles.

Editor: Cathy Neal
newschair@aagsclev.org

Committee Members:
Keisha Bullard • Veronica Ferguson •
Maxine Hairston • Cecelia McFadden •
Ruth Perry • LaVera Wingfield

AAGS • PO Box 201476 • Cleveland, OH
44120-1476 • aagsclev.org



*To
Discover
Your
Ancestors
Is to
Discover
a Part
of You!*

GENEALOGY NEWS

- **“Researching Formerly Enslaved Ancestors Between 1865 & 1880”** - <https://www.ancestry.com/c/ancestry-blog/family-history/researching-formerly-enslaved-ancestors>
- New Fold3 collection - **Virginia military 1876-1947**, includes Spanish-American War, WWI & WWII - <https://blog.fold3.com/new-virginia-military-record-collection/?xid=7673>
- **Finding Your Roots** with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the inspiring family history series, is in Season 11 - <https://www.pbs.org/show/finding-your-roots/>
- **“Finding Widows, Disappearing Husbands, and Lost Relatives”** by Lisa Cooke (Genealogy Gems) | Nov 7, 2024 - <https://lisalouisecooke.com/2024/11/07/finding-widows/>
- **Washington Post** article - https://www.postguam.com/the_globe/nation/a-world-war-i-salute-delivered-in-bronze/article_864f695c-729c-11ef-83b9-f30bf9f6c9fb.html
- **Marriage Records for Formerly Enslaved Individuals in the North Carolina Digital Collections** - <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/collections/cohabitation-records>

2024-2025 AAGS Officers

President..... Joseph Houser, Sr.
1st Vice President..... Deborah Abbott
2nd Vice President..... Joseph Jordan

Treasurer..... Gayle Ector
Financial Secretary..... Ellecia Gant
Corresponding Sec’y... Maxine Hairston
Recording Sec’y.....unfilled

2025 CPL Family History Research



Genealogy Clinics



Dates: Saturday, March 8
Saturday, April 12
Saturday, May 10
Saturday, June 14
Saturday, September 13
Saturday, October 11
Saturday, November 8

Time: 10:30am – 2:00pm

Branch: Main Library, Downtown
325 Superior Avenue, Cleveland OH

Louis Stokes Wing, 6th floor
Center for Local and Global History

These informal sessions allow you to drop in to receive help from Library Staff and expert volunteers from the African-American Genealogical Society of Cleveland. Please bring copies of any research to-date and an idea of what you want to learn during the session.

Take a fresh look at CPL's genealogy resources
(including research guides and databases) at
<https://cpl.org/topic/genealogy/>

On March 8, AAGS volunteers encountered a 'full house' (an overflow of patrons eager to learn about their lineage). Reminder to members: volunteers are essential to continue our successful outreach.



AAGS Spotlight on...

(New member) **Nicole Stevenson**

A Meeting by Chance!

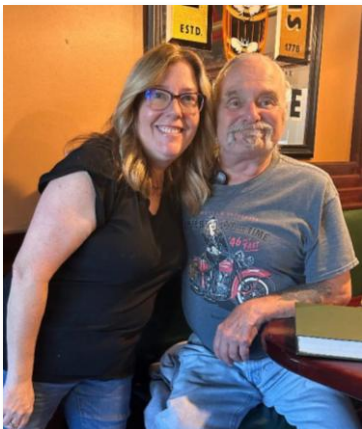
You never know what you'll find out about your family or how you'll meet them!

I always had an interest in genealogy, but didn't have the time or even know where to begin my research. My mom gifted me a 23andme DNA test kit and after receiving results, I reached out to several people on the site in hopes of connecting. A few responded, one being a second cousin, once removed on my mother's side – Tony Szachury. Tony and I messaged back and forth. He has been doing research for over 20 years and shared interesting stories about our family.

One day while on Facebook, I saw a liquidation site located in Twinsburg that had a beautiful garden statue in the image of an angel. I knew my mom would love her and knew just the place for her. So, I made arrangements for pick up, drove there and a nice gentleman put her in my car.

As time passed, I continued to check the liquidation site on Facebook and noticed that the person on the liquidation site (the owner, Theresa) had the same last name as my cousin. I messaged Tony and asked him if he has a liquidation store in Twinsburg, to which he replied "YES." I then asked if he is related to Theresa and he said that she is his wife. With a big smile I revealed, "Well, I believe we've met as you put an angel in my car."

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would make a connection this way!



We recently met for lunch and he shared more stories, photographs and documents. We even went around Twinsburg to several cemeteries where our relatives (**twin sisters**) are laid to rest.



Our connection is my great grandmother, Dorothy (whom my mom is named after) and her twin sister, Doris (who is my great-aunt). Doris is Tony's great-aunt.



We went to Locust Grove Cemetery in Twinsburg, where many family members are laid to rest.

As we entered the cemetery, there was a vault, which is where bodies were stored in the winter when the ground was too frozen to break manually. Inside the vault were also cylinder tubes. These tubes were plot markers.

The historical marker indicates that Locust Grove Cemetery was established in 1846.



The really cool part was going to the Hilton Garden Inn in Twinsburg. In the hallway near the ballroom is a photo of my great grandmother and great-aunt with George Dodge. At the time (1909), the event was known as "Homecoming Days" not "Twins Days" as we currently call it. They are the two standing on the left in the photo. Aunt Doris rarely smiled as she was self-conscious because her face had been burned. She tripped on something and fell on the stove, which disfigured her face and hand.



Imagine going to a restaurant and seeing an old photo on the wall, never giving it a second thought that the person on the photo could be a relative.

(George Dodge was a much loved janitor and they named the local school after him.)

Lastly, the family owned 105 acres of land in Twinsburg, which was sold for a mere dollar in 1924.

AAGS ACTIVITIES

Supporting Genealogy In-House & In the Community



January 25 - AAGS meeting

Ari Wilkins |

"More Than Numbers & Ticks:
Understanding Federal, State and Special Censuses"

This family historian and teacher (and recent contributor to the *FamilyTree Magazine* Jan/Feb 2025 issue with an article on "Reclaiming Roots") enriched our group with "great to know" specifics when evaluating population censuses and non-population schedules (veteran, slave, mortality, agricultural, dependent/delinquent/defective). Ari's case study showed how to use multiple sources to get a more complete picture (censuses from the state, Reconstruction Era and the Freedmen's Bureau).
Tip: Remember to check with libraries and archives.



February 22 - AAGS meeting

Dr. Deborah Abbott |

"Going Beyond the Basics:
Using Vital Records & Related Sources"

Tagging onto Ari's January topic, Debbie re-emphasized the importance of analyzing censuses and other documentation. A few pointers:

- The mortality schedule year is a record of people who died the year *before*
- If death records are not with the state, look at the county level
- Check more than one newspaper source (each may have different info)
- Pay attention to land boundary changes
- Funeral homes and cemetery records are private; not required to share data
- Review marriage license & return dates closely and research witnesses

Members received additional information in handouts.

RootsTech 2025

Held in-person and online March 6-8

The infographic consists of two circular icons on the left. The first is a blue circle with the text 'Your skill level?' inside. To its right is a light blue rectangular box containing the text 'Beginner?', 'Intermediate?', 'Advanced?', and 'Professional?'. The second is a blue circle with the text 'Your interest?' inside. To its right is a light blue rectangular box containing the text 'A/I?', 'Analysis?', 'DNA?', 'Ethnic Research?', 'Research Aids?'.

It actually didn't matter.
There was something for everyone
at RootsTech.

With plenty of topics & classes to choose from and 100+ industry experts as speakers, it was a genealogist's ideal experience.

A very small sampling:

The days were packed with titles such as:

- "The Importance of Developing Research Plans" | LaBrenda Garrett-Nelson
- "Exploring Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations Through a Genealogical Lens" | Renate Yarborough Sanders
- "Using Deeds to Uncover Your Ancestors" | Robyn N. Smith

Offerings included overlooked resources such as:

- "Using Indirect Evidence to Identify Enslaved Parents" | LaBrenda Garrett-Nelson
- "Culling Evidence from Freedman's Bank Postmortem Records" | Cecelia McFadden*

The event also included an Innovation and Tech Forum revealing the latest developments to aid in genealogy research.

Unable to attend?
the RootsTech On-Demand Library
touts hundreds of sessions
in dozens of languages
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/rootstech/search>

Can't wait for more programs? Don't miss the summer *GRIP Genealogy Institute, where multiple topics will be studied. Note: Cecelia McFadden (AAGS-Cleveland / Franklin Co. GHS) will coordinate & instruct classes on the coal mining industry - <https://grip.ngsgenealogy.org/>

Freedom Road: the Kanawha Trail

By Rochelle McNorton

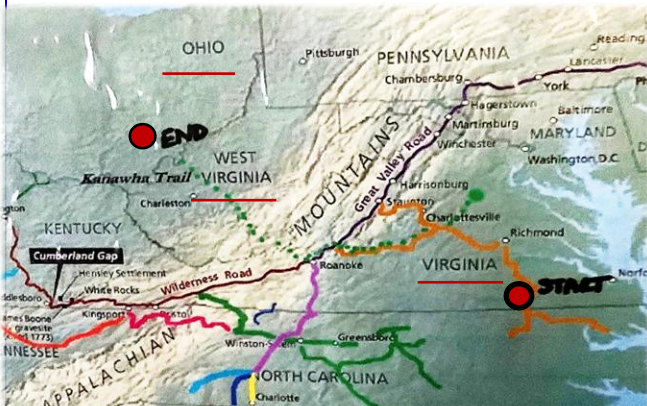
This article is about the road my ancestors traveled **from slavery** in Virginia **to freedom** in Ohio.

A Brief History

The Kanawha Trail follows the Kanawha River from Ohio, through West Virginia, to Virginia (or vice versa). Pre-1800, Shawnee Indians and fur traders were the earliest users of the trail and followed the ridges and summits—which were easier to travel than the valleys. Today, the same routes used by earlier travelers have become state and U.S. highways.

Next to use the trail were settlers from the East coast in the early 1800s. Road construction was completed in 1824 and by 1830 coaches were able to travel from Richmond to the Ohio River. During its heyday in the 1830s, the Kanawha Turnpike and James River offered daily stagecoaches pulled by six horses to Ohio’s steamboats. Numerous stage-stands and taverns (serving statesmen, speculators and peddlers) dotted its route. Mail was carried by stages and the route saw drovers head east with thousands of hogs, cattle and even turkeys. Freight wagons and family Conestoga wagons added to the confusion of dust, mud and noise.

My Ancestors’ Journey



My Lee family ancestors, along with over fifty other ex-slaves, were emancipated by Thacker V. Webb in 1844. The farm is in Somerset, Orange County, **Virginia**. My ancestors walked from Orange County through **Kentucky** and continued to walk the Kanawha Trail to the city of Point Pleasant, **West Virginia**. The families crossed the Ohio River to the city of Gallipolis, **Ohio** then on to Jackson County where they settled. Today, the distance from Orange County to Point Pleasant is 332 miles, about 5 hours 35 minutes by car.

Underground Railroad (URR) in Ohio

Historically, this is one URR route from Virginia to southern Ohio (where ex-slaves or runaways traveled through multiple counties to stations east of Columbus and then to points north where they were helped by underground operators). Research shows that the 50+ emancipated slaves, including my ancestors, all settled in Richmond Dale (Quaker settlement), Springfield, Chillicothe, Berlin Crossroads, Jackson County & other towns along the Ohio URR.

Here is a firsthand account of that journey. It is from a newspaper article by John M. Lee (my direct second-generation ancestor) titled, “An Interesting Interview with Mr. John M. Lee,” *The Jackson Herald*, Wednesday, January 21, 1891.

Our master on his death left us about \$75 of \$80 apiece, but we were cheated out of it by the administrator of the estate, his brother. We started for Ohio in two four horse and one one horse wagon and a one horse buggy. We walked, rode and rested by turns, starting on the 8th day of September and reaching the Ohio river on the 8th day of October. We crossed the river and came over into Gallia county, and from there came to Franklin township, reaching the place where we settled in November of the same year. I was about 20 years of age at that time.



Where to Look for Great Ancestor Stories

By Diane Haddad | *FamilyTreeMagazine*

One of my favorite aspects of genealogy is finding a good story. Maybe an ancestor took part in an historical event, clawed his way to economic success, survived an arduous migration or even committed a crime.

If you're getting started in genealogy, you might think there's no excitement in your family tree—but there probably is if you look for it. These are some of the best family story sources.

Newspapers

You may not think of your family as particularly newsworthy, but you might be surprised. You may uncover some stories about your relatives in old newspapers that you didn't even know about! Digitized newspaper sites include the **free** [Chronicling America](#) and subscription-based [GenealogyBank](#) and [Newspapers.com](#). Visit your library or state archive to scroll local papers on microfilm.

Court records

Though they aren't always easy to access—most aren't online, and they're not always indexed—court records are often full of information. [FamilySearch](#) has many microfilmed court records, and some counties' records are digitized on the **free** [FamilySearch.org](#).

Military pension applications

You may find correspondence about military service, documentation of marriage, written testimony about wounds received, photos and more. [Ancestry.com](#) and [FamilySearch.org](#) have indexes and some record images for Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War and Civil War pensions. Some of the record images are on [Ancestry's](#) sister site [Fold3](#), which requires an additional subscription (your library or local [FamilySearch Center](#) may offer **free** use of [Ancestry](#) and [Fold3](#)).

Family papers

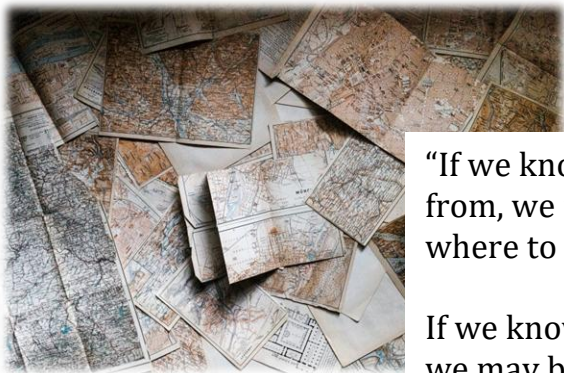
Diaries, letters, postcards, scrapbooks, photos, baby books and other passed-down items from trunks, closets and attics hold "everyday life" details and stories you won't find anywhere else. Go through your house (and your relatives' houses, if they'll let you) for these home sources and examine them for clues.

Histories

These secondary sources may contain errors because they're usually based on recollections and were edited for print, but they're full of research clues. Local and county histories are often digitized on [Google Books](#), [Internet Archive](#), [Ancestry](#), [FamilySearch](#) (some [FamilySearch](#) digitized books are accessible only from a [FamilySearch Center](#)) or your library's website. Find print versions through [WorldCat](#) and in local libraries.

Credit: "Where to Look for Great Ancestor Stories," by Diane Haddad. Copyright Yankee Publishing, Inc. URL: www.familytreemagazine.com/storytelling/beginner-genealogy-tips-where-to-look-for-great-ancestor-stories/

FAMILY HERITAGE:



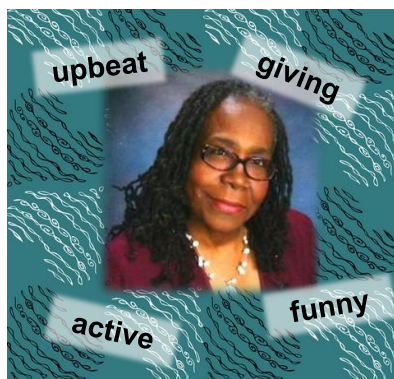
“If we know *where* we came from, we may better know where to go.

If we know *who* we came from, we may better understand who we are.”

~Anonymous



Remembering Carrie



Carrie Stokes passed away January 29, 2025

Carrie served as AAGS-Cleveland president from 2003-2006 and coordinated very successful AAGS Heritage Dinners for a number of years. During her time with AAGS, she was involved with many group functions, trips & projects and had a unique talent for promoting harmony. We will remember her creativeness, candor and generous spirit. Carrie was a joy to be with. Condolences to the family.

My Golden Rules of Genealogy to Pursue Genealogy and Family History Research

From Thomas MacEntee | thomas@genealogybargains.com [reprint permitted]

I like the term "golden rules" because it invokes the spirit of 'The Golden Rule' and focuses not just on my own research practices, but also on how I interact with other genealogists.

1. There is No Easy Button in Genealogy

You will work hard to find your ancestors. Genealogy will require more than passion; it will require skills, smarts, and dedication. Don't believe the hype of instant hints, smart matches, and shaky leaves. If it were that easy, the journey of discovering our roots would have little or no meaning.

2. Research from a Place of "I Don't Know"

Your genealogy research will likely run counter to your cherished family stories. It will upend your preconceived notions about certain events and people. It will change the way you think about your ancestors. This can only happen if you research with an open mind and take off the blinders.

3. Track Your Work and Cite Your Sources

When I started out in genealogy, I'll admit I was a name collector and would "dump" almost any name into my database. Years later, I am crossing out entire branches of a tree that never really should have been "grafted" on to mine. Use a research log, track your work, cite your sources, and analyze data before it is entered into any software or online family tree program.

4. Ask for Help

The genealogy community is populated with people of all skill levels and areas of expertise, most of whom want to assist others. There are no stupid questions; we all started as beginners. There is no right way to ask. Post a query on Facebook or ask a question during a webinar or email your favorite genealogy rock star.

5. You Can't Edit a Blank Page

Which means you have to start in order to have something to work with. That project you keep putting off, like publishing your family history, won't complete itself. Commit yourself to move from "obsession" to "reality." Remember: A year from now, you'll wish you had started today.

6. Work & Think Like Your Ancestors

While I'm not sure about your ancestors, mine were resourceful and developed tools and skills to get what they wanted. They were not "educated" per se, but they had "street smarts" and knew where to go so they could learn new things. Also make sure you have a plan; my ancestors didn't just wake up one day and on a whim decide to come to America and make a better life. They had a plan, they had a network of people to help them, and they made it happen.

7. You Do Not Own Your Ancestors

Researching your roots can create emotional connections to not only your ancestors, but to the actual research itself. Many people become "possessive" of their ancestors and fail to realize that a 3rd great-grandparent is likely the ancestor of hundreds of others. You can't take your research or your ancestor with you when you die; take time to share your research and be open to differences in information & research when collaborating with others.

8. Be Nice. The Genealogy Community is a Small Place

While there are millions of people searching for ancestors, genealogists worldwide have developed a community with relatively few degrees of separation. Whether it is online in a Facebook group or in-person at genealogy conference, it is likely you'll already know someone. Being "genealogy nice" is not fake; the connections with other researchers tend to be deep and genuine. We know that all of our roots are inter-locked, and a genealogist can't always go it alone.

9. Give and Be Abundant

Exchange information freely with other researchers; don't hold data "close" to you or exchange it in lieu of something else. Most genealogists who have heard me speak know my own story of abundance: Don't let your hand keep a tight grip on information. Let it go. Once your hand is free, it can be open and ready to receive the next good thing coming your way.



P.O. Box 201476
Cleveland, Ohio 44120-1476
aagsclev.org