African American Genealogical Society - Cleveland, Ohio

NEWSLETTER

Seasons

The word usually evokes four periods of the year:

spring summer autumn winter

A variety of things entail seasons: sports, tv series, life, relationships, etc.

Even genealogy has its phases:

- (Plant) **Begin** - start fresh, review the basics
- (Grow) **Build** - develop strategy, seek resources
- (Reap) **Gain** - do research, analyze & utilize results
- (Rest) **Chill** - reflect, re-organize

Calendar-wise, we're just entering autumn.

Genealogy-wise, in which season are you?

The good thing is, with genealogy, there is no set timetable.
You don't have to wait an entire year to begin anew.

AAGS MEETINGS

• Held on **4th Saturday** (exc. December)
(In-person and 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

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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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Editor: Cathy Neal
newslchair@aagsclev.org

Committee Members:
Maxine Hairston • Moneak Jones • Cecelia McFadden • Ruth Perry • Regan Richardson • 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

- **Smithsonian Institution chief Lonnie G. Bunch III steps down** - https://www.**npr**.org/2026/09/08/nx-s1-5961323/smithsonian-chief-lonnie-bunch-resigns https://www.**smithsonianmag**.com/smithsonian-institution/secretary-lonnie-bunch-announces-retirement-head-smithsonian-38-years-service-institution-180989460/

- The **National Archives and Records Administration** (NARA) plans to close its San Francisco, Chicago and Seattle Federal Records Centers. No word on where the records will be transferred or how the public can access - https://members.**apgen.org**/news_archive_headlines.php?org_id=APG&sniid=54532651#54532651 *(Also)* https://**federalnewsnetwork**.com/facilities-construction/2026/06/national-archives-to-transition-out-of-three-federal-records-centers/

- ***Finding Your Roots* Season 13**: New Season featuring Bette Midler, Rita Moreno, Mark Cuban and others, to premiere January 12, 2027 on PBS - https://**genealogybargains**.com/finding-your-roots-season-13/

- https://www.**msn**.com/en-us/news/us/**the-strange-business-of-selling-people-their-own-family-s-lost-photos**/ar-AA29B5wh (article by David Pogue)

2026-2027 AAGS Officers

President.....	Joseph Houser, Sr.	Treasurer.....	Ellecia Gant
1st Vice President.....	Deborah Abbott	Financial Secretary.....	Adrienne Waugh
2nd Vice President.....	Joseph Jordan	Corresponding Sec'y...	Maxine Hairston
		Recording Sec'y.....	Moneak Jones
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National Senior Citizens Day

(August 21)

Excerpted from a Thomas MacEntee post

Ask Your Oldest Living Relative for More Than Just Stories

Stories fade. Paper doesn't.

Every family historian knows the drill. You sit down with Grandma, you turn on the recorder, and you ask her to tell you about the old country. She gives you a story. It's warm, it's vivid, and it's often wrong on the details, or missing them entirely. "Somewhere near the border" isn't a research lead. It's a placeholder.

Here's the thing nobody tells beginners: the documents sitting in a shoebox in her closet are more reliable than her memory of events that happened seventy years ago. Discharge papers name a birthplace down to the village. Funeral cards for people who died decades ago sometimes list a maiden name that never made it into any census record. Insurance policies from the 1940s ask for a beneficiary's relationship and full legal name, spelled the way the family actually used it, not the way a census taker guessed at it.

Ask for the shoebox, not just the story.

What to ask for, specifically

Don't just ask "do you have any old papers." People don't think in those terms, and they'll say no reflexively. Ask for specific things by name. Here's a starting list beyond the obvious discharge papers, funeral cards, and insurance policies:

- Church certificates (baptism, confirmation, marriage)
- Naturalization paperwork
- Property deeds
- Pension paperwork, military or civilian
- Old address books (genuinely useful for tracking where relatives lived and who they knew)
- Prayer cards from funerals
- Obituary clippings, especially ones cut from local papers that never made it online
- Employment records or retirement certificates
- Fraternal organization certificates (Elks, Masons, Knights of Columbus, and similar groups often kept detailed membership files)

Each of these has probably sat untouched for years, and each one routinely contains a name, date, or place that no online database has indexed.

The stories are worth recording. Nobody's saying otherwise. But stories are the dessert. The documents are the meal, and the person who could hand them to you is sitting in a house somewhere right now, probably wondering why nobody's asked.

For the full article: https://genealogybargains.com/senior-citizen-day/

AAGS ACTIVITIES

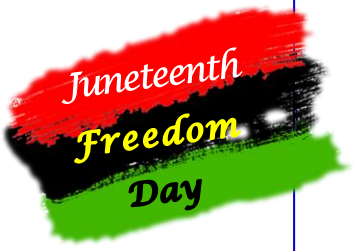
Supporting Genealogy In-House & In the Community

- **June 27 AAGS Meeting – Sharon Batiste Gillins, BS, MS | The True Story of Juneteenth**

It's always a pleasure to get this professional educator's take on significant historical events. Sharon outlined the long, hard road to liberty for enslaved African Americans in the U.S. and how freedom came to Galveston, Texas (her home town) in 1865.

Overriding how Civil War history can be "redacted, revised or romanticized," as she put it, Sharon thoroughly described the valuable role of the Galveston port, the defiance of the state to adhere to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the eventual battle that took place in 1865.

She remarked upon the governmental orders related to freedom and Confederate secession, as well as Major General Granger's enforcement of those orders (with the support of U.S. Colored troops) in Texas on that fateful day of June 19, 1865. She also explained subsequent Constitutional amendments and the widespread celebrations held across the country to commemorate Black independence--celebrations that, of course, have continued to this day.



- **July 25 AAGS Meeting – Drew Smith | Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Genealogy**

Are your ready for AI? Ready or not, it's here.

Drew laid out its origins, progression and impact on genealogy. After addressing the uneasiness and distrust that some people may have about this technological advancement, he touched on AI's wide benefits, its downsides and the genealogy community's advocacy for its responsible use. He also pointed out the importance of disclosure when using AI-produced material (should be labeled and cited).

Drew noted that the topic moves fast, due to constant developments. He covered current applications and how he uses them, evaluating each as he went along. His handout included search engines (Perplexity); transcription tools (Transkribus); writing tools (Google Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude); image generators (Midjourney); and pricing. His tech knowhow allowed him to field questions from AAGS members about Microsoft Co-pilot, DALL-E (Open AI), Google Notebook LM, FamilySearch full-text search, and how to create good prompts then adjust as necessary.

Drew is an internationally-recognized genealogy speaker, writer, podcaster and teacher (Genealogy Guys, Aha! Seminars, Genealogy Connections, Legacy Family Tree Webinars, etc.).

On **August 22**, the **Education Committee** organized two **special educational sessions** for AAGS members at the Shaker Heights Public Library. The programs were designed to help members address two common challenges in genealogical research. The sessions consisted of:

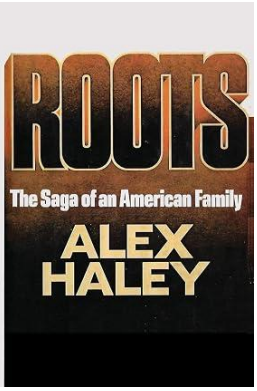
- **RootsMagic v. 11** | Presented by **Joseph Jordan**

  RootsMagic genealogy software assists family historians in tracking, organizing, printing and sharing family history. This session provided practical guidance on navigating version 11, resolving common issues and using the software effectively.

- **Beginners and Brick Walls** | Presented by **Dr. Deborah Abbott**

  This session introduced participants to beginning their ancestral research and offered strategies for overcoming genealogical "brick walls."

AAGS will present this educational session during its regular meeting on **October 24, 2026**. Please note that attendance is in-person only.



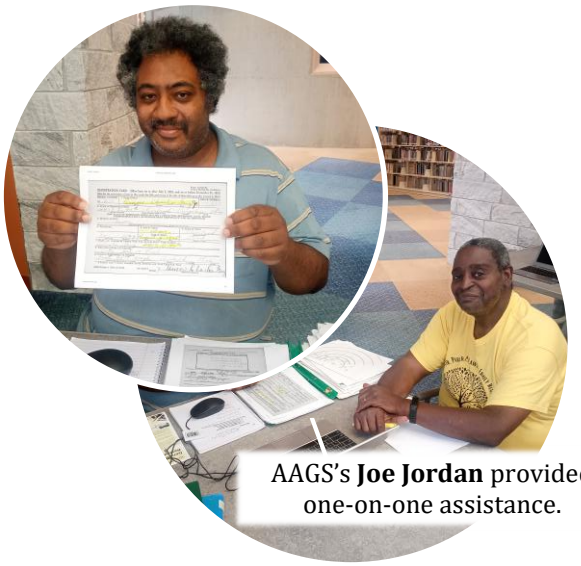
August 2026 marks the **50th anniversary** of ***Roots: The Saga of an American Family***, the groundbreaking book authored by Alex Haley (published in 1976).

Some articles and interviews:

- "Alex Haley and the 'Roots Effect': How One Book Revolutionized Genealogy Forever" - https://**genealogybargains.com**/alex-haley/
- "50th Anniversary of Roots with Chris Haley" – Podcast Episode 309 - https://**lisalouisecooke.com**/2026/07/08/50th-anniversary-roots/
- "The Meaning of Roots at 50" by Anne Haley - https://**time.com**/article/2026/07/28/roots-50th-anniversary-alex-haley/

Sep 12 – Research Clinic | Downtown Cleveland Public Library

Research clinic attendees included **Chanson Jimson**, who has a high interest in learning more about his family—and from where he originally descends. His parental lines stretch across several states (Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Louisiana, New York, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Mississippi) but his focus of the day was on Cuyahoga County, Ohio. He walked away with a lot. Not only did he find multiple census documents, he also found the 1943 WWII draft registration of his paternal grandfather, Amos Charles Guy. It surprised him to see that the record showed "Amos" as the first name instead of "Charles," by which his grandfather was known all his life. When asked for comments about the hands-on session, Chanson said that the advice and blank census forms were very useful and added, "Yes, I'm coming back."



AAGS's **Joe Jordan** provided one-on-one assistance.

Family History Day

Discover your family's roots. Learn essential research techniques from expert genealogists and connect with like-minded researchers. This full day of engaging lectures is perfect for beginners and experienced researchers alike. A boxed lunch will be served.

Date:	**Saturday, October 3, 2025**	Time:	10:15am - 5:45pm
Location:	1st Floor, Louis Stokes Legacy Room	Branch:	Main Library - Downtown

Featured Speakers & Topics:

Deborah Abbott – Goals | Finding enslaved ancestors
Kelli Bergheimer – DNA testing | Family tree software options
Karl Brunjes – Erie Street Cemetery
Laura Hedgecock – Bringing family stories to life
Sean Martin – Cleveland Jewish history
Drew Smith – A/I & genealogy | AncestryDNA
Dro Sohrabian – Cleveland city cemeteries & GIS
Maureen Taylor – Identifying family photos | Finding images

https://cpl.libcal.com/event/13136946 OR 216-623-2864, Center for Local & Global History

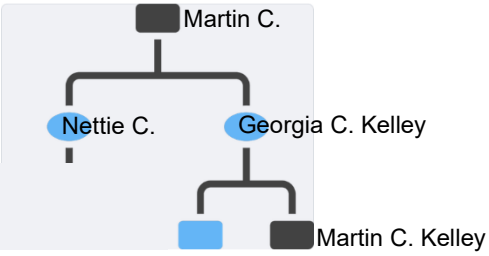
Aunt Nettie

Submitted by AAGS member Frances Kelley

When it comes to family history, I know my father's side (the Crittenden line) the best, tracing them back to 1870. This article is about one of them – my great aunt Nettie – and what I learned about making assumptions.

Nettie is the aunt of my father, Martin Crittenden Kelley.

She's the daughter of my great grandfather (Martin Crittenden) and was born with the same last name in approx. 1882.



The 1870-1910 censuses show the Crittendens in Baldwin and Bibb Counties, Georgia. Family members started leaving the state for better jobs during the Great Migration and eventually moved to Cleveland, Ohio.

I don't know exactly when Aunt Nettie moved to Cleveland, but I grew up around her and she always went by the name of Crittenden. I assumed she was single because of her last name. My father looked after Aunt Nettie (who often claimed to be "dying," ever since I was a little girl). Throughout the 1960s, it went like this: Nettie would call my father on the phone saying she was dying. Each time, he would rush over and drive her from her house on Central Avenue to Charity Hospital for emergency treatment, followed by medical staff saying: "She's fine; she can go home." She actually passed in 1972 at about age 90.

In 2000, when my father died, I got to see all the papers in his strongbox. It contained various vital records, including Aunt Nettie's death certificate indicating that she was divorced. Divorced? My mouth dropped. Who was this woman? I never knew she had been married at all. As far as I knew, she had been single all her life, with no children. But my father was the informant on the death certificate so, surely, the marriage status was correct. He didn't really talk a whole lot about family history--but in that strongbox he left a great paper trail. *Everything* was in there.

With this fresh (at least to me) information, I did more research. Through Ancestry, FamilySearch and other resources, I discovered Nettie had been married three times:

- She married her 1st husband in 1904 in Georgia
- She married her 2nd husband, a McGregor, in 1912 in Georgia
- And she ended up marrying a 3rd husband in 1927 in Ohio

That was a revelation for me--three marriages! And, after those three marriages, she still went by her maiden name of Crittenden.

I had even come across her in a 1961 *Call & Post* newspaper article for the opening of the Dunbar Nursing Home listed as "**Mrs.** Nettie Crittenden."

Meanwhile, in 2018, I won an Ancestry DNA kit at an OGS conference (I shelled out *$20 in raffle tickets* to get it). Little did I know that in that same year a Crittenden cousin would submit her DNA, too. (We were related through my father's cousin Charles M. Crittenden, a prominent doctor in Washington DC. The previous year, I had discovered his obituary in the *Washington Post*.) Test results showed that we were the first DNA matches on each other's lists. I'm older than her and more familiar with family background. After we connected by phone, I told my newly found DNA cousin that I remembered the two times our families were together. The first time, they came to Cleveland when I was young. The second time was in 1966 when my Dad and I (by that time a teenager) traveled to Washington DC to visit friends and family. She was a child and her brothers were running around playing cowboys & Indians. Years later, after my immediate family passed away, I tried to locate that branch of the family again.

So, now, usually around Christmas time, I'll send a card to my DNA cousin along with anything of interest I find out about the family. In this case, here's the eye-opener I sent her for Aunt Nettie:

> Seeing that Nettie married husband #3 here in Cleveland, I thought "Great, I don't have to send out of state for the divorce records." I looked up the procedures to obtain the records, starting with the Cuyahoga County Courthouse, who steered me to the Justice Center Building, where I had to send an email request to their Common Pleas Court. I went in person for the pick-up. Consisting of about four pages, it was packed with juicy reading. In 1937 the husband worked for the WPA at Brookside Park. However, according to Nettie, he was not taking care of her financially. She had a part-time job as a doctor's receptionist. In the document, Nettie stated that he pulled a knife on her and threatened to kill her twice. He also pulled a gun on her; a neighbor in the apartment complex got it away from him. It shows she took legal action to restrict her husband from coming near her at the job, at her home or on the street. And she also said, "**I want my maiden name back**."

This finally answered the question of "why" Nettie was still a Crittenden.
I got my answer. Even so, l told my DNA cousin "We weren't supposed to know all this."

This goes to show that researchers shouldn't get too comfortable with what we "think" we know, or make assumptions. It's worth it to uncover the full facts.

Avoid Genealogy Regrets with These 10 Smart Strategies

From Lisa Louise Cooke's Genealogy Gems at https://lisalouisecooke.com

Most genealogy regrets are not caused by bad luck. They happen because researchers get excited, move fast, and fail to build a system that can survive the next five years of work.

Do you want to avoid the biggest genealogy mistakes before they turn into major regrets?
If you're a genealogy beginner, these tips will save you headache and regret. If you're an experienced genealogist, now is the time to do clean up and update your research process.

1. Build one family tree

Make children and grandchildren the focus of the family tree rather than building separate trees around each spouse. Separate trees may seem practical at first, but they create extra work and confusion once later generations need to connect across both sides of the family. If separate trees already exist, begin planning a merge or forward-looking transition now. The sooner the structure is corrected, the easier it will be to maintain and expand the family record.

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2. Keep your master family tree on your computer

A genealogy website can be a useful workspace, but it should not be the only home of the family tree. The computer-based tree should contain conclusions, notes, media, and supporting materials because websites can change, disappear, or become inaccessible when subscriptions end.

A practical starting point is to choose genealogy software such as RootsMagic, Legacy Family Tree, or Family Tree Maker, export the current online tree as a GEDCOM, and import it into the software.

Online trees can still be used selectively for hints, syncing, or testing ideas. Think of your online tree as a work-space and your software as the master archive.

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3. Download every record

Records attached only to an online tree may become inaccessible later, especially if access to the subscription ends. Download each genealogical record to the computer as it is found so there is always a permanent copy available for review, citation, and future work.

Researching primarily on a phone or tablet increases the chance that records will be attached but not actually saved. And smaller screens can lead to errors.

Researching with a full-size monitor solves both issues.

Workflow: download the record immediately into organized folders, rename it clearly, and add annotations if helpful before attaching it online as well. I use Snagit for robust annotation features.

4. Use a consistent file naming system

A file name should make the record identifiable at a glance and help the computer sort it logically. The recommended formula is when, who, where, and optionally what, such as 1900-04-17 BURKETT Conover Union City IN Census. The key is consistency. Rename files when saving them rather than relying on website-generated names, and clean up older files gradually as they are encountered during ongoing research.

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5. Create a folder structure and stick with it

Once records are named, they need a dependable home. A practical structure begins with surname folders, then moves to head-of-household folders, and later to record-type folders as the collection grows. This makes retrieval faster and keeps the hard drive from becoming a digital junk drawer.

Sorting by record type can be especially useful because it reduces the number of files that must be searched when looking for a specific kind of record such as newspapers or census entries. Whatever system is chosen, it should be scalable and simple enough to use consistently.

6. Set up cloud backup now

Cloud backup is the insurance policy for genealogy work because computers fail, homes suffer damage, devices are stolen, and people make mistakes. Offsite cloud backup provides the redundancy needed to protect research from disasters that would also destroy local devices and external drives kept in the same house. Backup should not just be installed and forgotten. Periodically test backed-up files to confirm they are present and readable, because many people discover backup failures only after data has already been lost.

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7. Never trust someone else's tree without proof

Another person's family tree is a clue, not proof. Trees are often copied from one another without verification, so errors can spread quickly and begin to look trustworthy simply because they are repeated often. Before adding information from another tree, identify the actual source behind the claim and evaluate whether the same conclusion holds up. If no usable source can be found, the information should not be added to the master tree.

8. Save digitized photos in the right format and size

Digitized family photos deserve archival care because the scan may become the only surviving version if the original is later damaged or lost. Keep the highest-quality master copy untouched, then create additional copies for editing, sharing, or posting. It is wise to keep both an archive version and a working version that are clearly labeled.

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9. Create a research plan for brick walls

Before you shelve your research project with regret that you couldn't bust your brick wall, try implementing a strategic research plan. Start with a precise research question, list what is known and unproven, identify record sets that might answer the question, and expand beyond the person to research family, neighbors, place, and time period when necessary.

Keep a research log so repeated dead ends are not revisited without purpose. A good plan turns frustration into targeted action and helps the researcher move beyond circular searching.

10. Cite sources consistently

Source citation protects future research by showing where each fact came from, what kind of record supported it, and how to find it again later. Without citations, even a complete-looking tree becomes difficult to trust, defend, or revisit with confidence.

Citations do not need to be perfect before moving on, but they do need to be captured consistently while the record is fresh. At minimum, record where the item was found, what database or website was used, the original source if known, and enough detail to relocate it later.

The strongest overall workflow from the episode is simple: maintain one master tree on a computer, download and rename records as they are found, file them into a consistent folder structure, back everything up in the cloud, verify every claim, create plans for hard problems, and cite sources as work progresses. These habits reduce regret by making research both durable and reusable.

Final takeaway

Genealogy is a long game. The researchers who avoid regret are not only good at discovery, but also good at protecting their records, organizing their materials, and preserving the reasoning behind their conclusions.

For the full video/podcast - Genealogy Gems Podcast and Genealogy Gems YouTube channel: https://lisalouisecooke.com/2026/04/22/avoid-genealogy-regrets/

Looking for a fast-paced, non-fiction read that will keep you turning pages?

There's a Stranger in my Blood

Author: Michael Smith (former Clevelander) | Format: Paperback

What if the story of your life… your name, your bloodline, your very identity… was built on a lie?

When former police officer and Air Force veteran Michael Smith sent off his DNA test, he wasn't chasing fame or scandal. He was chasing belonging. A name. A history. A truth.

But the results that arrived didn't just rewrite his story—they shattered it.

What began as a search for roots became a descent into a generational mystery so tangled, so unthinkable, it could have only been hidden in plain sight. Piece by piece, Michael followed the clues—each one peeling back layers of silence, betrayal, and buried pain that stretched far beyond his own family tree.

Armed with the instincts of an investigator and the heart of a survivor, he discovered that sometimes the most shocking crimes aren't committed in the streets—but in the places we're supposed to feel safest.

There's a Stranger in My Blood is a gripping true story of identity, betrayal, and redemption—of one man's relentless pursuit to uncover who he really is and what it means to heal from the truth.

Some secrets destroy.
Others set you free.
The choice is yours.

https://www.amazon.com/Theres-Stranger-Blood-Michael-Smith/

Lois O. Smith passed away August 9

Involved in countless AAGS activities throughout the years, Lois, a long-time member, was the epitome of service and graciousness. Whether at a group meeting, committee meeting, conference or reception, she wore a welcoming smile as she took care of business. Lois volunteered for a long list of responsibilities, including the Hospitality, Telephone and Heritage Celebration committees. She also contributed to the Call & Post Index project and lent her support to other projects wherever needed. She took part in the Alabama Special Interest Group and participated in research trips, where she was dedicated to preserving her family's history. Her calm and generous nature will leave a lasting imprint on our organization.

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