

Upgrading Your Genealogical Research Skills – 4 June 2015

There are many educational opportunities available to the genealogist. Some of these are free, or at least inexpensive, and many are available from the comfort of your own home. But you may be thinking – why do I need to upgrade my skills? I am not a genealogy teacher, writer or researcher for hire. My goal is just to research my family. But doesn't your family deserve the best genealogist you can be? And that means working to the Genealogical Proof Standard if you wish to be considered a skilled or advanced-level genealogist.

Getting Started – Join Genealogical Societies:

Most of us started out taking beginner classes at local genealogy societies, adult schools and/or local community colleges. Perhaps we went to the local Family History Center and were mentored by a more experienced genealogist. We joined genealogical societies, at least one where **we** lived, but also societies in the places our **ancestors** lived. We joined interest groups where we could develop our knowledge (e.g. a writers' group, a group using a particular genealogical software program or an ethnic genealogy group) As our skills developed we may have offered/were asked to teach a class or workshop – and filled in the gaps in our own knowledge in the process. Many genealogists join the National and/or Regional Genealogical Societies (e.g. National Genealogical Society (NGS), New England Historical Genealogical Society.¹)

Local Learning:

Even advanced and professional genealogists find excellent learning opportunities at some general meetings at genealogy societies. All-day seminars with nationally known speakers like the recent SMCGS 2 May 2015 seminar with Warren Bittner CG will enhance any genealogist's skills. However you may need to look further afield as your skill level becomes more advanced.

On-Line from the Comfort of your Home

Webinars

Webinars are a great resource and one can be selective – attend the webinar that is right for you. Live webinars are frequently free to all, but the ability to view archived webinars may require a fee or be a society membership benefit. Webinars like "live" talks come with a syllabus and a bibliography – a gold mine for finding further information about the topic of interest. Some webinars are even targeted at advanced level and professional genealogists.

Some webinar examples are:

Southern California Genealogical Society (SCGS) Webinar Series - Jamboree Ext. Program.² Look at societies where your ancestors lived to see if these societies offer webinars.

Legacy Family Tree webinars are typically free at the time they run live.³

Board of Certification for Genealogists webinars (some archives are free, some are \$2.99 - all given by certified genealogists)⁴

Educational videos – FamilySearch.org learning center⁵

Hundreds of beginner and intermediate on-line videos and plus 37 that are considered as advanced skill level. Videos are categorized by record type, skill level and country.

On-line courses (some examples)

Ancestry Academy on Ancestry.com is starting to offer courses. Some are only free to members.

Family Tree University offers beginner and intermediate-level courses that range in price from \$39.99 for 2-week beginner courses to over \$100 for some of the 4-week intermediate courses.⁶

NGS Home Study Course – consider the graded option. Currently this course is being revised and moved to "the cloud".⁷ Unfortunately it has been unavailable for new enrollees for at least 9 months.

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National Institute of Genealogical Studies is affiliated with the University of Toronto. This program offers programs in American, Canadian, English, Irish, Scottish and Australian records. The full 40 unit program costs almost \$2,850, more if you purchase the optional course materials.⁸ The Institute awards the postnominals PLCGS to graduates of the 40 unit program.

Brigham Young University is the only U.S. University offering a degree in Family History.⁹

Pharos Teaching and Tutorials – A variety of on-line courses most slanted towards British Isles research, but some teach general methodology.¹⁰

Boston University offers two on-line courses - an intensive 15-week program that costs \$2,695 or a 4-week genealogy essentials course for \$775.¹¹ They are taught by top genealogists.

Virtual Institute of Genealogical Studies – each course is 6 hours of instruction by a top-rated genealogist. The Virtual Institute started in 2014.¹²

ProGen – This is an inexpensive on-line course where one studies all the chapters in Professional Genealogy – both genealogy and business chapters - over the course of 18 months.¹³ This program targets those who aspire to be professional-level genealogists.

Develop a wide range of skills – Research in a Variety of Repositories

Researching in archives, courthouses and large university library or special collections library - Efficiency is the key here and the skills needed are the ability to plan for a research trip and write a good research plan. Lots of good tips are available online or just talk to your friends at the Genealogical Society of Santa Cruz County. On-site research is expensive, especially if you have to travel more than 100 miles so one needs to make the best use of one's time.

Attend National and Regional Conferences

There are four national conferences each year. The first two cover a wide spectrum of genealogical topics from beginner to advanced seminars. Roots Tech is all about new technology and the APG conference has some advanced topics and some business topics.

NGS – May 2015 St. Charles, MO – May 2016 Fort Lauderdale FL (see NGS website.)

FGS – Alaskan Cruise 28 Aug to Sep 4 2015, Conference 31 Aug to 3 Sep 2016 – Springfield, IL¹⁴

Roots Tech – 3 to 6 Feb 2016 – Salt Lake City, UT¹⁵

APG – 2015 was in Salt Lake City, UT. Location for 2016 not yet announced.

SCGS's Jamboree (this coming weekend) is a convenient regional conference for Californians – you can actually car pool to Burbank. (SCGS website)

New England Regional Conference is held every two years. The last one was April 2015 in Providence, RI¹⁶ Explore regional conferences in the areas your ancestors came from.

Attend Institutes

There are several institutes throughout the US. Of course you have to be willing to go to Salt Lake City in January and Alabama in July to attend the first two. The Pittsburgh Institute is new and fast becoming a major player. The DC Institute teaches one how to research at the National Archives. The British Institute has excellent courses in all UK Countries. Some courses at these Institutes are very competitive to get in. Register the **second** registration opens.

Salt Lake Institute for Genealogy (SLIG) – January – Salt Lake City, UT¹⁷

Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research (IGHR) – June – Birmingham, AL¹⁸ I have recently heard this institute will have a different location in 2016!

Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh (GRIP) – July – Pittsburgh, PA¹⁹

National Institute on Genealogical Research (NIGR) - July – Washington, DC²⁰

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British Institute (International Society for British Genealogy and Family History (ISBGFH) – September or October - Salt Lake City, UT²¹

Mailing Lists

The following three mailing lists are useful for advanced/professional genealogists. The first is a public list. Anyone can join but remember to be careful what you say as search engines pick up information from public lists

Transitional Genealogy (public list) To join this list go to Roots Web.²²

APG mailing list and the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) (are closed lists)²³

Read Refereed Journals

Refereed genealogical journals are not exactly light reading but are an excellent way to learn how advanced genealogists solve difficult problems, use indirect evidence and/or solve cases in instances where normally reliable sources conflict. The articles meet the genealogy proof standard. The following 5 are most prestigious but some large genealogical societies' quarterlies have high class submissions. National Genealogical Society Quarterly (NGSQ)

The New England Historical and Genealogical Register (The Register or NEHGR)

The American Genealogist (TAG) – an independent publication since 1922²⁴

New York Genealogical and Biographical Record (NYGBR)²⁵

The Genealogist – published by The American Society of Genealogists²⁶

Consider joining an on-line discussion group. There are several on-line NGSQ discussion groups. These journals are available in genealogical libraries if you don't have a subscription.

Learn about DNA Testing

Learn how you can incorporate DNA testing, Y-DNA, mt-DNA, at-DNA and X-DNA into your research.

This is currently a "hot topic." I took the first ever institute course in DNA for Genealogy at the Pittsburgh Institute in July 2014. There were 7 or 8 CGs in my class of 33! SMC GS will be having a DNA seminar 7 November 2015. Genetic Genealogist Angie Bush will be the featured speaker.

Learn to:

Cite your sources completely and accurately.²⁷

Learn to read old handwriting/Latin/Gothic Script, and transcribe and abstract documents. There are tutorials at FamilySearch and elsewhere. Kip Sperry's book is my favorite for early American Handwriting.²⁸

Test your work against the Genealogical Proof Standard. ProGen was beneficial as the peer review process was very helpful. The new revised (in 2014) BCG Standards manual should be on every skilled genealogist's bookshelf.²⁹ This is easier to read and understand than the 2000 edition

Use technology so you can increase your efficiency. Scan or photograph documents. Use note-taking tools such as Evernote or Scrivener. Attend talks or webinars and follow up by trying it out for yourself.

For those wishing to test themselves against professional standards – CG or AG Certified Genealogist (CG)

The Board for Certification of Genealogists' website outlines the requirements for submitting a certification portfolio. The standard is high but good preparation enhances one's chance of success. CGL means certified genealogical lecturer.

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Accredited Genealogist (AG.)

The accreditation process is under ICAPGen (The International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists.) One is accredited in a specific geographic area. The 3 step process requires the taking of 2 exams or tests in specific repositories, one of which is the FHL. More information is found on their website.³⁰

Have fun learning and increase your genealogical skills.

All web addresses below were current as of 24 May 2015.

¹National Genealogical Society <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/> and American Ancestors – New England Historic Genealogical Society <http://www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx>

²SCGS Webinar Series – Jamboree Extension Program <http://www.scgsgenealogy.com/webinar/overview.html>

³Legacy Family Tree Webinars <http://www.familytreewebinars.com/upcoming-webinars.php>

⁴BCG Webinars <http://bcgcertification.org/blog/bcg-webinars/>

⁵FamilySearch <https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/home.html>

⁶Family Tree University <https://www.familytreeuniversity.com/>

⁷NGS Home Study Course http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/homestudy_course_cd

⁸National Institute for Genealogical Studies <http://www.genealogicalstudies.com/>

⁹Brigham Young University <https://familyhistory.byu.edu/Pages/Home.aspx>

¹⁰Pharos Tutors <http://www.pharostutors.com/index.php>

¹¹Boston University's On-Line Program in Genealogical Studies

<http://onlinecourselearning.com/bu/genealogyonline/>

¹²Virtual Institute of Genealogy Research <http://virginealogy.com/>

¹³ProGen <http://progenstudy.org/> and Elizabeth Shown Mills editor *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers and Librarians* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001)

¹⁴Federation of Genealogical Societies <http://voice.fgs.org/2014/05/fgs-announces-upcoming-events-for-2015.html>

¹⁵Rootstech https://rootstech.org/bc/content/pdfs/about/call-for-presentations/CallForPresentations_FINAL_web.pdf?lang=eng

¹⁶The 2015 AMTA New England Regional Conference <http://www.amtanerc.org/>

¹⁷Utah Genealogical Association (SLIG) <http://www.infouga.org/cpage.php?pt=42>

¹⁸Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research (IGHR) <http://ighr.samford.edu/>

¹⁹Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh (GRIP) <http://www.gripitt.org/>

²⁰National Institute on Genealogical Research (NIGR) <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~natgenin/>

²¹International Society for British Genealogy and Family History (ISBGFH) <http://isbgfh.org/>

²²Transitional Genealogist Mailing List

<http://lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com/index/other/Miscellaneous/TRANSITIONAL-GENEALOGISTS-FORUM.html>

²³Association of Professional Genealogists <https://www.apgen.org/index.html>; Board for Certification of Genealogists <http://www.bcgcertification.org/certification/>

²⁴The American Genealogist <http://americangenealogist.com/> published since 1922

²⁵New York Genealogical and Biographical Society's Journal founded in 1870

<http://newyorkfamilyhistory.org/global/about-us/record>

²⁶American Society of Genealogists – The Genealogist <http://fasg.org/the-genealogist/>

²⁷Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace – 2nd Edition* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2009)

²⁸Kip Sperry, *Reading Early American Handwriting* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogy Publishing Company Inc., 2005)

²⁹BCG, *Genealogy Standards*, 50th-anniversary edition (Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry, 2014)

³⁰ICAPGen <http://www.icapgen.org/icapgen/home>