



# The Searcher

Suncoast Genealogy Society Newsletter

What's happening in October

## 25 Oct 2025 SGS Mini-Seminar

1:00-4:00 pm, Palm Harbor Library  
Speaker Live on Zoom

*Lisa Louise Cooke*  
October Hybrid Mini-Seminar



Lisa Louise Cooke is the author of several books including *The Genealogist's Google Toolbox*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. She produces the popular *Genealogy Gems Podcast*, as well as videos through the *Genealogy Gems Youtube channel* and a Premium Membership service at her website at [GenealogyGems.com](http://GenealogyGems.com). She also writes a regular column for *Family Tree Magazine* and produces the *Family Tree Magazine Podcast*.

### TOPICS

#### • Make AI Your Personal Genealogy Assistant

Discover how Artificial Intelligence tools can act as your personal genealogy assistant. Learn the best strategies for using AI to help you with a variety of genealogy tasks, from organizing information to identifying new research avenues. This session also covers how to automate repetitive tasks and streamline your genealogical workflow. Discover the incredible potential of AI to enhance your genealogy research!

#### • Photo Identification & Discovery: 3 Case Studies

In the session, you'll see how free tech tools and some creative sleuthing strategies turned unidentified photos into identified treasures. These techniques are also excellent for making new photo discoveries. You can do this too, and this class will show you how!

Members - \$10, Guests - \$25

See Registration form on page 11 or website: [www.SGSFL.com](http://www.SGSFL.com) or

Call Shari Harmon (727) 776-0777

**Coming this November****22 Nov 2025 Membership Meeting**

1:30-4:00 pm, Palm Harbor Library

1:30 SGS Meeting, 2:00 Program

# Lets Talk Genealogy!

with Megan Smolenyak<sup>2</sup>  
in Person



This is your opportunity to ask Megan, a leader in our genealogy community, questions about any aspect of genealogy! You can ask about the celebrities she has researched, her research identifying soldiers of wars remains. or her methods of research. Anything about Megan and genealogy.

Please send your questions to Ann James - [jamesamsj@aol.com](mailto:jamesamsj@aol.com)

Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak (yes, that's her real name) is a genealogical adventurer and storyteller who loves solving mysteries, making unexpected discoveries and pushing the boundaries of conventional genealogy.

A popular writer, speaker and TV guest, Megan has appeared on Good Morning America, the Today Show, the Early Show, CNN, NPR and BBC. In addition to consulting on shows ranging from Who Do You Think You Are? to Top Chef, she is the author of six books, a Medium and Huffington Post contributor, a cold case researcher for the Army, BIA, NCIS and the FBI, and former Chief Family Historian and spokesperson for Ancestry.com.

Her most recent books are Hey, America, Your Roots Are Showing and Who Do You Think You Are?: The Essential Guide to Tracing Your Family History, companion guide to the TV series.

## More About Our November Program

Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak will be present, in person, at our November meeting to answer your genealogy questions. We are asking that you submit your questions to Ann James by November 20th. [jamesamsj@aol.com](mailto:jamesamsj@aol.com)

This is to ensure that the same question will not be asked by several people. Once we have your questions, we will set up the order in which you will be asking the questions. This will be done in the order the questions were received.

Once all SGS members, who have submitted a question, have had an opportunity to ask their question, non-members who have submitted questions will have a turn to ask their question. If time permits, questions will be taken from others in attendance.

This is a rare chance to get your questions answered by a well-known, professional genealogist. We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity.

For more information go to: [www.SGSFL.com](http://www.SGSFL.com)

Member Supported. Public Always Welcome

## President's Message



Our September Membership meeting featured Diana Elder of "Family Locket". She presented an introductory but engaging discussion on using Artificial Intelligence with genealogy and included some case studies where she used AI to get more insight into her genealogical problems.

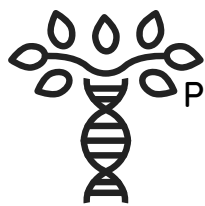
I believe we will be using more of AI in the future, including writing tools and document transcription and translation.

I challenged the audience to learn more about AI and gave a sample assignment: take an ancestor's timeline or similar information and generate a story about the ancestor. There is another article in this issue of The Searcher (page 8) showing how this might be done.

For October we have a Mini-Seminar planned featuring Lisa Louise Cooke. You won't want to miss this event, only \$10 for SGS members. See our SGS website for the registration form. See you there!

*John Matthews*

### Genealogy and DNA IG



Monday, Oct 20 @  
1:00-3:00 pm  
PHL Conference Room  
In-Person Meeting  
open to everyone

**Topic: Civil War Pension Files**

Next Meeting: Monday Nov 10



Come join us,  
we will be exploring  
how to retrieve &  
what is in your  
ancestors Civil War  
Pension Files



### Genealogy Help Desk

Tues, Wed & Thurs  
1:00-4:00 pm

PHL Genealogy Section

Need help researching online, breaking down a brick wall?  
Beginners and members are encouraged to stop by!

Come join us at the Help Desk!

### Board Meeting

All SGS Members are welcome to come to the Board meetings. They are on the first **Monday** of this month on ZOOM. The next meeting is on Nov 3 @ 2:30pm

## SGS Board 2024-2026

**President:** John Matthews

**Vice President:** Eugene Girardi

**VP/Membership:** Shari Harmon

**VP/Programs:** Jean Van Horn

**Treasurer:** Joan Baptist

**Secretary:** Marianne Bradley

**Past President:** Robert Pierro

**Directors:** **OPEN POSITION**

Ann James

Kim Croco-Brooks

### Committee Chairs & Others

**Education:** Ann James & Jean Van Horn

**Facebook:** Beth Bleich

**Help Desk:** Marianne Bradley

**Historian:** Ann James

**Library Liaison:** Peter Cannon

**Publicity:** **OPEN POSITION**

**Newsletter:** Kim Croco-Brooks

**Registered Agent:** Shari Harmon

**Sunshine:** Mary Jane Hough

**Web Development:** John Matthews

**DNA IG:** Robert Pierro & John Matthews

### Suncoast Genealogy Society

c/o Palm Harbor Library  
2330 Nebraska Ave.  
Palm Harbor, FL 34683

Proud Partner with



Merriam Burdette

Ron Harmon

Shari Harmon

Russell Martin

Mary Port

Redd Slyker



Which event triggered the outbreak of the Civil War?

- a. The Missouri Compromise
- b. The Emancipation Proclamation
- c. The Battle of Fort Sumter
- d. The Dred Scott Decision

ANSWER: Bottom of page 5

Questions?



Check our website:

[sgsfl.com](http://sgsfl.com)

Email us:

[info@sgsfl.com](mailto:info@sgsfl.com)

Connect with us on

[Suncoast Genealogy Society Facebook](#)





## Our Genealogy Friends

### Pinellas Genealogy Society

Saturday, Oct 18 @ 11 am-1 pm

Hybrid Meeting & via Zoom

**Topic: DNA & Native Americans**

**Presented by Richard Hill**

<https://pinellaskenealogysociety.com/>

### Florida Genealogical Society – Tampa

<https://fgstampa.org/>

### Jewish Genealogical Society of Tampa Bay

<http://www.jgstb.org/>

### Tarpon Springs Library

Genealogy Research Assistance

(727) 943-4922 ext 6010

Monday, Oct 13 @ 6:30pm

**Topic: Dead Men Do Tell Tales**

**speaker: Karen Fortin**

<http://tarponlibrary.org/genealogy/>



### East Lake Community Library

4125 E Lake Rd. S, Palm Harbor, FL  
34685

Contact the library at 727-773-2665

### Largo Public Library

120 Central Park Dr, Largo, FL 33771

Contact the library at 727-586-7410



### Manatee Genealogical Society

**First Tuesday on Zoom**

<https://mgsfl.org>

### SAR, Clearwater Chapter

Members meet the 3rd Wednesday of the month,  
Sept thru May, 11:30 am, Dunedin Country Club.

Go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/SARClearwater/>  
for more information.

### DAR, Caladesi Chapter

Members meet the 3rd Monday of the month  
Sept thru May, 11:30 am, North Dunedin Baptist  
Church. Contact Debbie Smyth,  
[dsmyth927@gmail.com](mailto:dsmyth927@gmail.com) for more information

### Family Searcher Center

**St Petersburg/Seminole**

9000 106<sup>th</sup> Ave N.

Largo, FL. 33777-1147

Hours:

Tues 10 am-6 pm;

Thurs 10 am-9 pm;

Sat 10 am-4 pm

[FL\\_StPetersburg@familyhistorymail.org](mailto:FL_StPetersburg@familyhistorymail.org)

Services: Computers, Photo negative  
scanner, Photo scanner, Printer

**Answer: c. The Battle of Fort Sumter**



## PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

We are looking for someone who would like to take on this position.

Please contact  
**John Matthews**

## Getting Involved

### GENEALOGY HELP DESK

Hone your research skills while helping others. It's the most rewarding job there is!

We can train you! Contact **Marianne Bradley** to volunteer and/or set up training time with one of the other volunteers.

## Other Local Resources

### Palm Harbor Museum

2043 Curlew Rd, Palm Harbor, FL 34683

Phone: (727) 724 -3054

Hours: Thurs, Fri and Sat; 10 am to 2 pm

<https://www.palmharbormuseum.com>

### Clearwater Historical Society

610 S Fort Harrison, Clearwater, FL 33756

Phone: (727) 754-8019

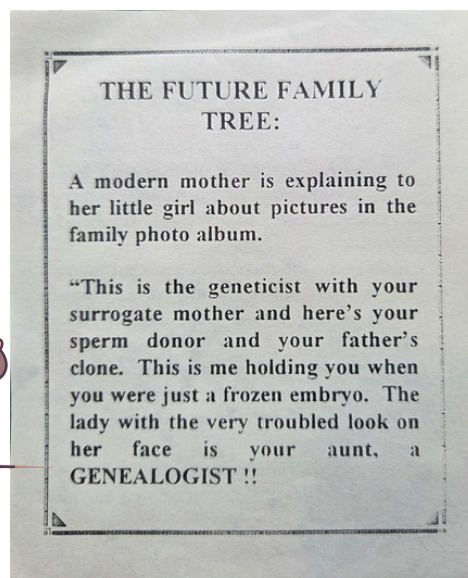
Hours: Wednesdays & Saturdays; 10 am-2 pm

<https://www.clearwaterhistoricalsociety.org>



### DNA Mentors Available

Struggling with understanding your DNA results? Have questions for with you can't find answers? Email [info@sgsfl.com](mailto:info@sgsfl.com) to get connected with a Mentor.



### DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE?

Do you have an idea on how to improve our newsletter?

Do you have a story or a breakthrough?

Is there something you would like to share - a genealogy tip, a website or an upcoming event?

Email your ideas to Kim Croco-Brooks:

[inhislovinghands10@yahoo.com](mailto:inhislovinghands10@yahoo.com)



## SGS MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES

Membership Meeting 27 Sep 2025

CALL TO ORDER: 1:33 pm by

President John Matthews

SECRETARY REPORT: by Marianne  
Bradley

Motion to approved by Peggy Toohey  
2<sup>nd</sup> by Bob Pierro

MEMBERSHIP REPORT: by Shari  
Harmon- 67 current members-  
19 members present at today's  
meeting plus 1 Guest-Sharon Jenkins  
Motion to approve by Kim Croco-  
Brooks, 2nd, by Redd Slyker

TREASURER REPORT: by Joan Baptist  
- Motion to approved by Marianne  
Bradley, 2nd by Kim Croco-Brooks

PROGRAMS REPORT: Jean Van Horn  
not in attendance. John encouraged  
the attendance at the Mini-Seminar  
in October.

DNA/Genealogy Interest Group-  
Oct 20, 2025 on Civil War Pension  
Files

December Holiday Party on Dec 2,  
2025

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

John explained the problems with  
the Web Page recently and hopes  
that it has all been solved.

Election in April for 2026-2028  
Officers - need everyone to think  
about running for an office.

Monthly refreshment - Please take  
your turn & sign up with with Peggy  
Toohey.

Books & Magazines - always for  
sale at our meetings, See Rob  
Jacobson.

SHARE THE BASKET: Won by  
Marianne Bradley

DRAWING FOR DOOR PRIZE: Book  
won by Eugene Girardi

ADJOURNMENT: 2:00 PM

PROGRAM ON ZOOM: With Diana  
Elder on AI IN GENEALOGY

Respectfully Submitted,  
Marianne Bradley, Secretary

*Save the Date*

### 2025- 2026 MEETINGS

25 October Mini-Seminar: Speaker: Lisa Louise Cook

1. Make AI Your Personal Genealogy Assistant

2. Photo Identification & Discovery: 3 Case Studies

22 November: Speaker: Megan Smolenyak - Questions & Answers

02 December: Christmas Party at Johnny's Italian Restaurant

24 Jan 2026: Speaker: Karen Fortin

28 Feb 2026: Speaker: Debbe Hagner - The New FamilySearch



## Using AI to Generate an Ancestor's Story

One can use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate a story from a timeline information file. While this is a very basic use of AI it shows how to get started before doing more complicated problems. Here I will show an example of how to do this using a Timeline from an Ancestry file.

- 1) Select a person in your Ancestry tree and go to their profile.
- 2) Under Tools (upper right), select Print, and a printable version of the Timeline will appear.
- 3) Select Print button in upper left and print to a file (set destination as Save to PDF and select the Save button)
- 4) In a web browser such as Safari, Chrome, Firefox, etc open an AI chatbot, here we will use "chatgpt.com"
- 5) In the Ask Anything box, enter a prompt, which tells the chatbot what you want to do. Our prompt gives a role and goal:  
You are an expert genealogist and can write a life story from a timeline.
- 6) The chatbot asks what style it should use (like 'straightforward genealogical style' or "narrative style". We will pick "narrative style".
- 7) It will ask if we have a timeline, we respond "have timeline".
- 8) It will ask how to finish the life story, we respond "storytelling narrative"
- 9) Now it will ask about what person to write it as, pick "third person"
- 10) At this point drag-and-drop the file on the chatbot window.
- 11) It replies with the life story as flowing text.
- 12) At this point I entered "save file", and it gave a link to a PDF to download which I opened in Adobe Reader. You may want to edit this file, so ask the chatbot for a particular file type that you would like to receive.

You might notice the writing style may not be what you want, with phrases like "...he would proudly give himself the middle name..." You might also notice details that are not true, or hallucinations.

At this point, since it is a chatbot, you can give it more instructions on how to phrase the life story to be more factual and less flowery. You might ask the chatbox to rewrite it without injecting flowery words. Practice working with the chatbot and other AI tools/programs.

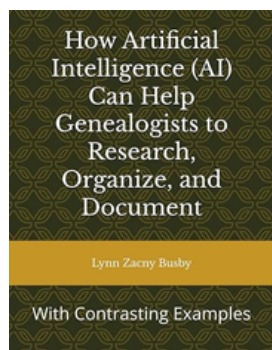




## How (AI) Can Help Genealogists to Research, Organize, & Document

It's important to note that while AI always provides a response, it is not always factual. AI generates answers that may sound logical but can lack a basis in reality, a phenomenon known as "hallucination." Given this tendency, can AI still be beneficial to genealogists who prioritize accuracy and the citation of original documents?

AI can be a valuable tool for genealogists. It can assist in organizing research, suggesting potential sources, and providing contextual information that might lead to further discoveries. The key is to use AI as a supplementary tool, verifying its suggestions with primary sources and documented evidence. This approach ensures that AI enhances genealogical research without compromising its integrity.



### About the author

Lynn Zacny Busby is a lifelong learner and author with a gift for making complex topics easy to understand. Her work spans genealogy, artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, & lighthearted reflections on aging—always with a focus on helping everyday readers feel informed and empowered.



She has written detailed genealogical histories, a beginner's guide to AI for family researchers.

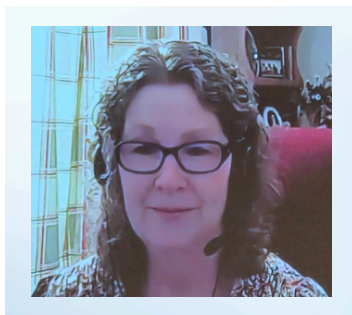


EasyGenie, publisher of forms and worksheets for genealogists, has donated a door prize for our seminar. In addition, they are offering an exclusive 20% discount to Suncoast Genealogy Society members with discount code **SUNCOAST20**.

This code is good through October 31st on their web site. Apply the code at checkout to save 20% on any order. It can be used for printed genealogy charts, or fillable PDF's and other accessories. Free shipping on orders over \$60. Check out their merchandise at: <https://easygenie.org/SUNCOAST20>.

The link is active now until Oct 31st.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING



**Speaker:**  
**Diana Elder**

Diana shared how to understanding AI's role, using AI as we research our ancestors, forming research objectives, timeline creation & document analysis, locality research, creating research plans, writing research reports, and so much more.

### Don't miss her Blogs & Podcasts

#### Blogs

Dyer, Nicole and Diana Elder. Family Locket.

<https://familyloket.com/>

Little, Steve. AI Genealogy Insights. <https://aigenealogyinsights.com/>

#### Podcasts

Dyer, Nicole and Diana Elder. The Research Like a Pro Genealogy Podcast . Many podcasts discuss AI. Listen on [YouTube](#), [Family Locket](#), or other podcast programs such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Blubrry, IHeart and Podscribe.

Little, Steve and Mark Thompson. The Family History AI Show. Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Blubrry, IHeart and Podscribe.

#### Here are 5 Key Tools:

**ChatGPT** (chat.openai.com)

**Claude** (anthropic.com/claude)

**Gemini** (gemini.google.com/app)

**Perplexity** (perplexity.ai)

**Transkribus** (app.transkribus.org)

**Note: These are free or you can upgrade if you want to explore into it deeper.**



Eugene won book:

"The Chester Creek Murders" by Nathan Dylan Goodwin donated by Shari Harmon



## Genealogy Research in Québec & Maritime Provinces

One of our SGS member, Joan Baptist presented at the East Lake Library her wealth of information on the types of Notarial Records of Québec, understanding PRDH-IGD, census records for Québec & Acadia prior to 1871, women's maiden names, registration of births, marriages, deaths, and naming customs.

Joan Baptist is at the Help Desk if you need help with your French Canadian ancestors or any other research that you need to discover.



# Suncoast Genealogy Society

## Fall Mini-Seminar Registration Form

**Saturday, 25 October 2025, 1:00 - 4:00 pm**

at the Palm Harbor Library, Clearwater, or on Zoom

**Featuring: Lisa Louise Cooke**

Register by mail and check. **Registrations must be postmarked by Tues., Oct. 21, 2025.**

PLEASE PRINT:

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **\*\*Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*Email is required to receive the meeting link.**

Please indicate if you are: \_\_\_\_\_ Member of Suncoast Genealogy Society (SGS) or a \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Member

If you are a member of another genealogy society, please let us know which one

\_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate if you expect to attend \_\_\_\_ in person \_\_\_\_ via Zoom

SEMINAR FEE(S): (Add number of registrations) \_\_\_\_ \$10 SGS Member \_\_\_\_ \$25 Non-Member

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Check Total Check # \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE: No refund requests accepted after Tues. 21 Oct. 2025**

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**MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: *SUNCOAST GENEALOGY SOCIETY***

**Mail check and completed Registration Form to:**

**Shari Harmon  
1864 Northwood Drive  
Clearwater, FL 33764**

For questions or more information email: **info@SGSFL.com**

**Reminder:** Registration envelope **MUST** be postmarked by **Tues, 21 Oct. 2025**



**Suncoast  
Genealogy  
Society**

Palm Harbor, Florida

# Holiday Party

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

**at Johnny's Italian Restaurant**

**2907 FL SR590, Clearwater**

6 pm - Social; 6:30 - Dinner

Buffet Cost: \$36 per person, gratuity & tax included

Buffet in private dining room for our group

**Buffet includes:**

**CHICKEN MILANESE - VEAL MARSALA - SALMON PICCATA**

includes Fettuccini Alfredo, salad, bread & non-alcoholic drinks

Full bar available from your server

**Reservation Required - Prepaid \$36 Per Person**

Complete the form below and include your check. Hand it to the Treasurer at our Sept or Oct meeting or mail it to her postmarked no later than **November 15, 2015** to:

**Joan Baptist, 2284 Philippine Drive, #29, Clearwater, FL 33763**

**Reservation Form for SGS Holiday Party - December 2, 2025**



Names: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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Total Amount Enclosed for \_\_\_\_\_ Person(s) X \$36 Each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_