



The Searcher

Suncoast Genealogy Society Newsletter

What's happening in 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 Smolenyak²
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

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.

**For more information go to: www.SGSFL.com
Member Supported. Public Always Welcome**

More About Our November Program

**Will You be at the November Meeting?
Have you Submitted a Question for Megan?**

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 This is to ensure that the same question will not be asked by several people. So far only two members have submitted questions!

You can submit your own brick wall questions or ask her about the famous people she has researched or TV shows she has worked on.

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.

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

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

See you there!

Reservation form & more information on the last page



President's Message



We had another great mini-seminar on October 25 with Lisa Louise Cooke doing 2 very interesting presentations. If you have any old photographs and can't quite figure out where they are from, her tips on how to find out where was very useful. Thanks to all who helped organize the event, especially Ann James who also arranged the door prizes.

A reminder, SGS will be having elections for new officers in April. We are looking for members to step up and volunteer to run the society and we need your participation to make the society successful and meaningful to our members. We are especially looking for publicity and programs chairpersons.

Also, members (and guests) are invited to attend our holiday party on December 2, Tuesday. A sign up form can be found at our website <https://sgsfl.com>.

John Matthews

Genealogy and DNA IG



Monday, Nov 10 @
1:00-3:00 pm
PHL Conference Room
In-Person Meeting
open to everyone

Topic: Ethnicity Estimates

Next Meeting: Monday Dec 8

Ethnicity Estimate

Germanic Europe	43%	>
Eastern Europe & Russia	21%	>
England, Wales & Northwestern Europe	13%	>
Norway	10%	>
Ireland & Scotland	6%	>
European Jewish	3%	>
Baltic States	2%	>
Sweden	2%	>

Let's discover our ethnicity tracts? We will be uncovering the stories behind our family ethnicity & what about your ethnicity face.



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 Dec 1 @ 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: Peggy Toohey
 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



November

Jeanne Carrell
 Susan Foster
 Katie Graves
 Ann James
 Jenny Kidd
 Claudia Matthews
 Linda Rice

December

Joanne Marrazzo
 Karen Morris
 Brianna Smyth



What Native American tribe celebrated the first Thanksgiving with the Pilgrims?

- A. Pascua Yaqui
- B. Squanto
- C. Wampanoag
- D. Choctaw

ANSWER: Bottom of page 5

Suncoast Genealogy Society

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

Proud Partner with



Questions?

Check our website:
sgsfl.com

Email us:
info@sgsfl.com

Connect with us on
[Suncoast Genealogy Society Facebook](#)





Our Genealogy Friends

Pinellas Genealogy Society

Saturday, Nov 15 @ 11 am-2 pm

Hybrid Meeting & via Zoom

**Topic: 1. Americas Westward Expansion:
25 Events in 50 Minutes**

**2. Records of westward Traveling Pioneers
Service Providers**

presented by Katherine R. Willison

<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, Nov 10 @ 6:00 pm

Topic: Genealogy with laptops & snacks

**Bring your laptop for hands-on
genealogy workshop**

<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,
dsmlyth927@gmail.com for more information

Family Search Center

St Petersburg/Seminole

9000 106th 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

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

Answer: C. Wampanoag



Let's Get Involved

We are a group of volunteers, a co-operative entity, depending on each other to get the jobs done. We are looking for someone who would like to take on Publicity or Program position.

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

You would coordinate the advertising of all SGS programs & etc.

2ND VICE

PRESIDENT/PROGRAMS

You would arrange for speakers, programs & seminars & etc.

Please contact John Matthews for more information.

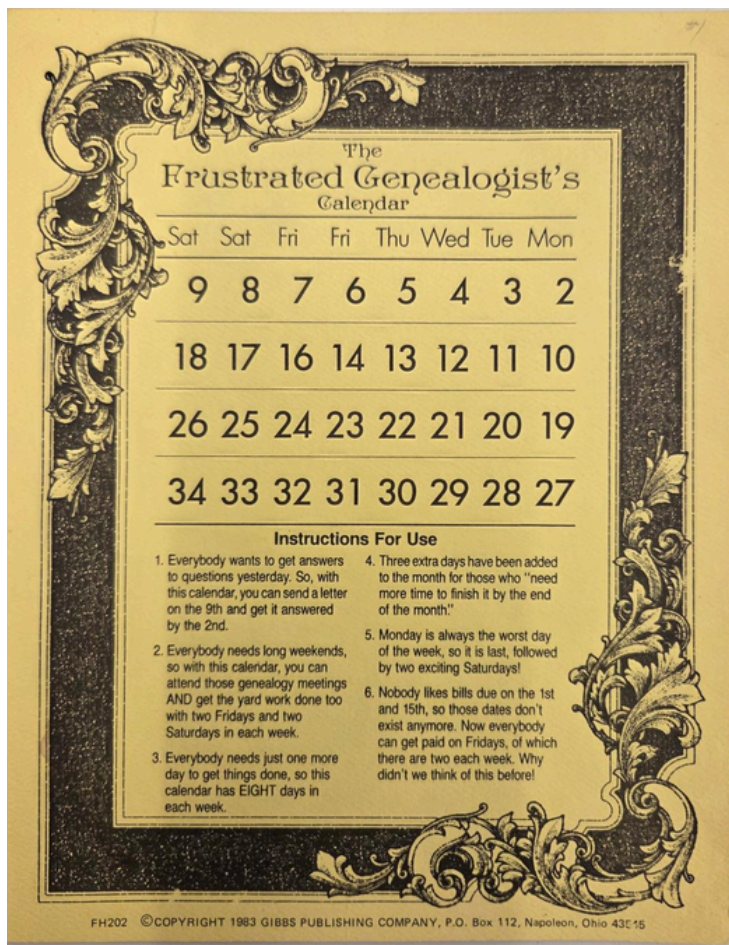


VOTE

We will be voting on the Policies Section of the Policies and Procedures Manual at the January 2026 meeting. The link is included your email.



Looking for a Christmas Gift idea?
How about an Ancestry membership or DNA kit for your family?



DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE?

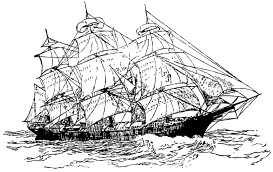
Do you have an idea on how to improve our newsletter?

Do you have a story or a breakthrough?

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

Email your ideas to Kim Croco-Brooks:

inthislovinghands10@yahoo.com



MY IMMIGRATANT ANCESTOR

William R. Matthews (1817 Wales - 1901 Pennsylvania)

My 2nd great-grandfather William R. Matthews, was born in Castleton, Monmouthshire, Wales to Richard and Mary Matthews. Richard was a farmer near the Bristol Channel and later a collier in southeastern Wales as the Industrial Revolution began with a growing demand for coal and iron. Both Richard and Mary died in Wales, he in 1870 and she in 1865.



William had two brothers who also immigrated to the United States, Thomas to Kansas and John to near William in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. I discovered Thomas from DNA matches to cousins in Kansas and Missouri. John I knew about from researching William and have discovered DNA matches from descendants of all three of them.

William married Catherine Evans in Wales in 1838 and they had five children when they immigrated to the US in 1851. William was a collier in Wales and I have to think from the dreadful working conditions in the mines that it was an easy decision to emigrate to a better life. Sadly, their youngest child, a daughter Catherine, died at age 2 on the voyage to New York.

By 1854 William and his family had made their way to Danville, PA, on the Susquehanna River, where there was work in coal and iron mines. Danville was a transportation center between the coal docks in Pittston and Wilkes-Barre, connecting to Harrisburg. In Pennsylvania, William and Catherine added six more children to their family.



The family moved north on the Susquehanna River to Luzerne County and by 1870 William had a farm in Spring Brook Township. In 1878 Lackawanna County was created from a portion of Luzerne County, including Spring Brook and the city of Scranton.

William was a deeply religious man and in the 1880 census is a Methodist Priest. In the 1880 “History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties of Pennsylvania”, where the hamlet Spring Brook is described, William is listed as the pastor of the Calvinistic Methodist church. In 1900 William is living with his son Thomas’ family, and Thomas by coincidence was also the 1900 census enumerator.

Catherine died in 1887 in Olyphant, PA and William in 1901 in Spring Brook.

William and his family sailed on the “Queen of the West”, a well-known packet ship. By chance, it is mentioned in an article in the “Illustrated London News” – The Tide of Emigration to the United States and the British Colonies, 6 Jul 1850. You can read about a typical sailing ship voyage, including engraved depictions, at:

<https://viewsofthefamine.wordpress.com/illustrated-london-news/the-tide-of-emigration-to-the-united-states-and-to-the-british-colonies/>

or

https://www.iln.org.uk/iln_years/year/1850.htm

My line from William is:

William P. Matthews (1845-1903)

Arthur W. Matthews (1888-1970)

John W. Matthews (1924-2015)

I have had the good fortune to visit many of the places where the family lived in Monmouthshire and Glamorgan Counties, Wales, and Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania.

I have found a great deal of information on the family from UK/Wales and US censuses, ship passenger lists, church records, newspaper articles and other places. I’m happy to share my research upon request.

You can find William R. Matthews on my Ancestry tree at:

<https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/73385927?cfpid=44283612152>

and at FamilySearch at:

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/pedigree/landscape/LRHF-FXR>

Save the Date

2025- 2026 MEETINGS

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

OCTOBER 2025 SGS MINI - SEMNIAR



**Guest Speaker:
Lisa Louise Cooke**

Lisa Louise Cooke showed us how to make AI your personal genealogy assistant by 7 ways: generate name list, creating a family tree, identifying research opportunities, creating a research plan, a timeline, a location guide and generate a reading list.

How Gemini Gems can help you transcribe documents, newspaper articles, letters, translate records, develop research questions & plans and much more.

Lisa showed us 3 cases how to identified photos.

Tools we can use:

1. Google Search
2. Google Images Search
3. Google Earth
4. Google Photos
5. Photo Editing Apps
6. Artificial Intelligence

Lisa Louise Cooke resources:

BOOK: The Genealogist's Google Toolbox, 3rd Edition
by Lisa Louise Cooke

Available at <http://tinyurl.com/LisaGoogleBook>

Premium Membership

Exclusive access to Lisa's video classes, downloadable handouts, premium podcast & more.

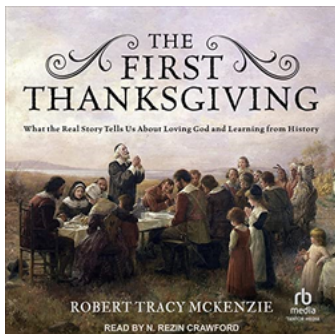
Available at <https://lislouiscooke.com/premium-membership/>



DOOR PRIZES WINNERS OCT 25, 2025



Left to Right: Mary Jane Hough: Genealogy Bank 1 YR Sub., Shari Harmon: Family Tree Webinars 1 YR Sub., Sue Martin: Genealogy Tee Shirt, Peggy Toohey: Family Tree Birthday Calendar, Brianna Smyth: Family Tree Webinars 1 YR Sub. & Find My Past 12 month Everything, Joan Baptist: Research Like a Pro Independent on-line Study Course, Jean Van Horn: Tree of Life Metal Wall Art, Linda Schneider: Roots Magic 11 Software, and Kristine Hughes: Easy Genie Forms & Worksheets, Digital Voice Recorder, Genealogy Tee Shirt and Gift Basket.



The Pilgrims' celebration of the first Thanksgiving is a keystone of America's national and spiritual identity. But is what we've been taught about them or their harvest feast what actually happened? And if not, what difference does it make?

Through the captivating story of the birth of this quintessentially American holiday, veteran historian Tracy McKenzie helps us to better understand the tale of America's origins—and for Christians, to grasp the significance of this story and those like it. McKenzie avoids both idolizing and demonizing the Pilgrims, and calls us to love and learn from our flawed yet fascinating forebears.

The First Thanksgiving is narrative history at its best, and promises to be an indispensable guide to the interplay of historical thinking and Christian reflection on the meaning of the past for the present.

by Robert Tracy McKenzie



**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: _____

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