



The Searcher

Suncoast Genealogy Society Newsletter

What's happening in January

Check our website:

sgsfl.com

Email us:

info@sgsfl.com

Connect with us on

[Suncoast Genealogy Society](#)
[Facebook](#)

Suncoast Genealogy Society

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

Saturday, 24 Jan 2026, 1:30-4:00 pm
Palm Harbor Library in the Conference Room

Timelines

*for Organizing, Analyzing, and
Breaking Through Brick Walls*

Program Speaker:

Karen Fortin



Timelines can be a valuable tool in genealogical research. This presentation will explore ways to create timelines and use them to organize an ancestor's information, analyze this information for gaps or conflicts, and help break through genealogical brick walls.

Inside this issue

President's Message.....	2
Board of Directors.....	2
Genealogy & DNA IG.....	3
Our Genealogy Friends.....	4
Jewish Genealogical Society...	5
SGS Minutes.....	6
Book Review.....	7
2026 Upcoming Programs.....	7
Beginning Genealogy Course.	10

Karen Fortin received a Bachelor's Degree in History and a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science from the University of South Florida. She worked at the Barbara S. Ponce Public Library in Pinellas Park, FL for 30 years before deciding to focus on genealogical research.

Karen's passion for history and research led her to an interest in genealogy. She began volunteering with the Pinellas Genealogy Society in Largo, FL in 2012, and was the society's president from 2014-2017.

Karen began providing genealogy and history presentations in 2016 and has lectured at various genealogical societies and public libraries, and for other interested organizations. One of her goals is to help people explore historical periods, places, and events so that they can better understand their ancestors and the world in which they lived.

Proud Partner

President's Message



It's the time of year of short days and good times for family get-togethers. I hope you're able to hangout with some of the older people in your family and ask them questions about their past and relatives you never met.

Maybe ask, "When was the first time you ate spaghetti?" (or pizza?) and about some of their favorite foods.

Maybe even, gift some DNA kits to try to find more distant cousins, or see if your family is really from the old country your grandparents talked about.

Now is also the time to start thinking about SGS officer elections that will happen at our April membership meeting. We have several candidates for positions, but it is never too late to throw your hat in the ring if you'd like to volunteer!

Wishing you bright and warm holidays with family and friends.

A handwritten signature of the name John Matthews.

SGS Board 2024-2026

Board of Directors

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

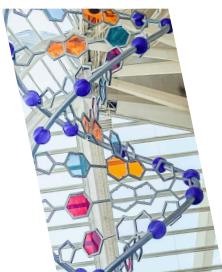
Registered Agent: Shari Harmon

Sunshine: Mary Jane Hough

Web Development: John Matthews

DNA IG: Robert Pierro & John Matthews

Genealogy and DNA IG



Monday, Jan 12 @
1:00-3:00 pm
PHL Conference Room
In-Person Meeting
open to everyone

Topic: Ancestry Pro Tools

KEY FEATURES OF ANCESTRY PRO TOOLS HAS TO OFFER

1. Tree Checker
2. Tree Mapper
3. Enhanced Shared Matches
4. Smart Filters
5. Charts & Reports
6. Networks
7. Clusters



Next Meeting: Monday, Feb 9

Reminder

It is time to renew your membership again! Have you renewed your membership? It will be running out soon. Don't miss out on your upcoming meetings and monthly newsletters.

Send to: Shari Harmon,
1864 Northwood Dr, Clearwater, FL
33764 or bring to our next meeting
24 January 2026

DNA Mentors Available



Are you wondering how to understand your DNA results? Do you have questions about your DNA? Email info@sgsfl.com to connect with a Mentor.

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
Feb 2 @ 2:30pm

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!

Every 3rd Tuesday Tech with John



JANUARY

Jon Burr
Ann McGill
Rosemary Parks
Judy Tovee



NEW MEMBERS

Ellen Breunelle
ellen4454@gmail.com
Barrie Carson
carson5422@gmail.com
Lorraine Spicer
spicerlo@gmail.com



Our Genealogy Friends

Pinellas Genealogy Society

Saturday, Jan 17 @ 11 am-1 pm
Zoom online meeting only

Topic: All Politics is Local: Researching Your Political Ancestors

<https://pinellasgenealogysociety.com/>



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

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, Jan 12 @ 6:30 pm

Topic: Exploring FamilySearch

Speaker: Debbe Hagner

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



Manatee Genealogical Society

First Tuesday on Zoom

<https://mgsfl.org>

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

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 for more information

Let's Get Involved

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

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

Please contact John Matthews for more information.



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

Jewish Genealogical Society of Tampa Bay

How Did They Get From There to Here?

Emily Garber will discuss resources to help understand European migrants' overland journeys between about 1880 and 1914. What did emigrants know before they set off on the overland legs of their journeys? Which routes might they have taken? What did they likely experience during travel from their places of origin to European ports?

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:
inhislovinghands10
@yahoo.com

Resources will include gazetteers, Bradshaw's Continental Railway Guide, the Jewish Colonization Association's *Algemeine Yediot*, high-definition maps and immigrant journals.

Garber is vice president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, is chair of the Phoenix Jewish Genealogy Group and is a board member of the Arizona Jewish Historical Society. She owns Extra Yad Genealogical Services and blogs at extrayad.blogspot.com. She has written two books and several articles on genealogical research.

- Date: Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026
- Time: Social with refreshments & library access begins at 1:30 p.m.; Program - 2 p.m.
- Place: Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services
14041 Icot Blvd., Clearwater, FL 33760
- Speaker: Genealogist Emily Garber

SGS MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES

Membership Meeting 22 Nov 2025
CALLED TO ORDER: 1:30pm by
President John Matthews

IN ATTENDANCE: 26

SECRETARY REPORT: Sept. 27
minutes approved as published in
the October Searcher.

TREASURER REPORT: Joan Baptist
Absent - No report today

MEMBERSHIP REPORT: Shari
announced we had 72 members,
which includes the three who joined
at the meeting today. We had 26 in
attendance, with 9 of those as
guests, including Megan
Smolenyak2 and her husband.

PROGRAMS REPORT: Jean VanHorn
reread the upcoming reports from
September and October, which has
not changed.

OLD BUSINESS: Board of Directors
meeting is on Dec. 1, Monday on
Zoom and in the Conference Room.
Dec. 2, 2025 is our Holiday Party at
Johnny's Italian Restaurant.
Jan 12, 2026 will be our SIG/DNA
meeting, topic to be announced. We
welcome suggestions on new topics.

NEW BUSINESS: John will appoint a
nominating committee for our April
2026 elections for 2026-2028. One
member from the Board and two
at-large.

++ Peggy Toohey corrected us that
we do not need to have Approval
Motions for the monthly reports.
Marianne confirmed this online -
not needed. And a big Thank you to
Peggy for the delicious homemade
treats that she supplied for the
meeting.

GOOD AND WELFARE: none

SHARE THE BASKET: Received by
Katie Graves

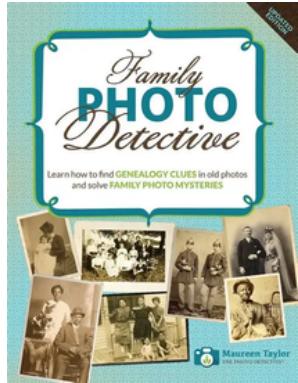
DRAWING FOR DOOR PRIZE: Won by
brand new member Ellen Brunelle,
a one-year subscription to Family
Tree Magazine.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: none

ADOURNMENT: at 1:50 for a 10-
minute break

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:
Marianne Bradley, Secretary

PROGRAM: Welcome to Megan
Smolenyak2 for our Q & A session
with her. **We would like to thank
all who submitted questions as they
were all good ones on many topics
and Megan very professionally
answered them all ~!!



You'll learn how to:

- Determine the type of image you have--from common paper prints to stereographs to historical daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes
- Use clothing, accessories and hairstyles to date the image in the correct decade
- Research photographer's imprints to narrow down when and where the photo was taken
- Compare facial features in multiple photos to confirm identity and family resemblance
- Interview family members to gather more information about the image
- Identify props in the photo to create content for the image

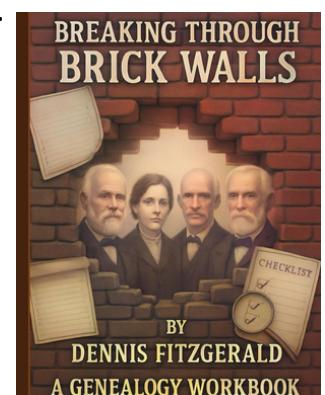
Maureen Taylor: Check out her Youtube video



SO... Get Your Copy Today! You'll Be Glad You Did!!!

You'll start with a section packed with tried-and-true tips and strategies to sharpen your focus and refresh your approach. These actionable suggestions are designed to help you look beyond the obvious and uncover clues hidden in plain sight.

- ✓ Learn how to re-analyze old clues with fresh eyes
- ✓ Discover overlooked record types and where to find them
- ✓ Use timelines, location patterns, and record clusters effectively
- ✓ Get practical ideas for reaching out to distant cousins & DNA matches
- ✓ Master online tools that can help you uncover the missing piece



By Dennis Fitzgerald

Save the Date

2026 MEETINGS

24 Jan 2026: Speaker: Karen Fortin - Timelines

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

28 Mar 2026: Speaker: Robert Weis - Genealogical Gold in New England Town Books and Reports



Megan Smolenyak²

genealogical adventurer
& storyteller

Do you have a brick wall you are working on? How do you plan to approach it? Is there someone you would lie to research?

How do you research women maiden name in the circa 1840-1860, when you only have her married name?

I am very confused about how to interpret DNA results. Is there a way or good place for beginners to learn about how to use it in their genealogy research?



What was the most fascinating or your fondest case?

NOVEMBER MEETING 2025



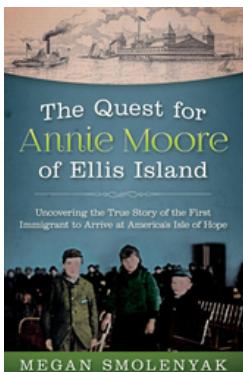
What were some of the questions that were presented to Megan.



Ancestry's new ethnicity results: How can someone have French Canada ethnicity when their family is documented coming from France? French Canada should be Indigenous Native American.

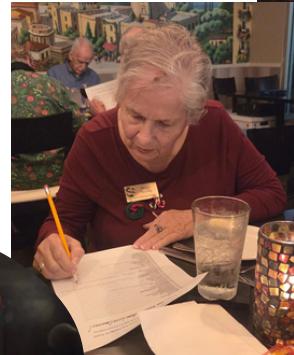
How did you get interested in genealogy?

I would like to know how to organize my research in binders. It is in file folders now. I can do the direct line ancestors but am not sure what to do with the siblings & in-laws.



Megan Smolenyak is the determined sleuth who discovered this case of historical identity theft and devoted years to figuring out how it happened, finding the true Annie, and unveiling what her life was really like. Follow along as the author parks you on her shoulder and unravels the mystery of Ellis Island's first.







Proud Partner with



Suncoast Genealogy Society

Beginning Genealogy Course

A Six-Week Course

Instructors: Ann James, Jean Van Horn, Marianne Bradley; Registrar: Shari Harmon

Classes for the Winter 2026 course will be held on six Thursday afternoons from 1:30-4:00 pm on:

5 February - 19 March 2026
No class on 26 February 2026



at the Palm Harbor Library in the Conference Room.
Register at Palm Harbor Library website - Events Calendar

Please arrive 30 minutes early on the first day for sign-in and fee payment in the Genealogy section of the library.

Cost for the course is \$25.00 - Payable at the beginning of the 1st class
Check or cash only, please.

Please register early as we only have 12 seats available due to the room size.

These classes will teach you the research & documentation process for finding your ancestors and documenting this information in a form that can be shared with your family. We will explore the major research websites (Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org) and give you the "ins and outs" of these sites. We will cover:

Census Records	City Directories	Newspapers	Military Records
Immigration	FindAGrave	Church Records	Naturalization
Timelines	Various Websites	Sourcing	SSDI

The focus of this course is U.S. records

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Shari Harmon - (727) 776-0777 Email: sharih1046@gmail.com
Website: www.SGSFL.com