NOV-DEC 2026 Est. 1983 VOL. 43 ISSUE 11

The Searcher

Suncoast Genealogy Society Newsletter

What's happening in December

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

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Proud Partner with Palm Harbor Library You. Us. Together.

Holiday Party

Tuesday, December 8, 2026

at Johnny's Italian Restaurant

2907 FL SR590, Clearwater

See you there!

Reservation Required - Prepaid $36 Per Person

Complete the form on page 2 and include your check. Mail to the Treasurer at her address indicated below and postmarked no later than **December 1, 2026** to:

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

PS - Register early as the room only seats 35 people.

Reservation form & more information on the next page & sgsfl.com

RESERVATION FORM HOLIDAY PARTY



6 pm - Social; 6:30 - Dinner
Buffet Cost: $36 per person, gratuity & tax included
Buffet in private MESSINA 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 Form for SGS Holiday Party – December 8, 2026

Names:_____

_____

Email:_____**Phone:**_____

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

Make check payable to Suncoast Genealogy Society

Jan Membership Meeting

23 Jan 2027, 1:30-4:00 pm
This meeting is at the Countryside Library
In Person Speaker

HEADLINES & HERITAGE: Exploring Family History Through Chronicling America



Debbie Wilson Smyth

Newspapers are a goldmine of information for genealogists. They offer a glimpse into the everyday lives, experiences, and events that shaped our an ancestors' stories. Discover how historical newspapers can help bring your family's history to life. This presentation will explore Chronicling America, the Library of Congress's historic newspaper database, and demonstrate how to navigate its collections, develop effective search strategies, and uncover valuable clues about our ancestors.

"THE SEARCHER"

Due to rising printing and mailing costs, we are transitioning **The Searcher** to a digital-only format. You can now access and read the newsletter anytime on our website at sgsfl.com.
If you do not have a computer or internet access at home, you can visit a Public Library to view and print The Searcher for a nominal fee.

President's Message



I have been taking a class every Thursday afternoon this fall about New York records. It has been very interesting and I have learned a lot. The main organizer of the class was Karen Mauer Jones, which was the reason I took the class. Additionally her husband, Tom Jones, presented one case study class, which reminded me how important all the scraps of papers (indirect evidence) we find are to our research. While we might not know even who wrote that scrap of paper, it is still a clue and when we get enough of these clues, we can solve the puzzle.

Tom Jones wrote an important essay on snobbery in sourcing that, as a class, we recommended to everyone. Even a source with some errors can be useful and should be included in our research. “Don’t throw out the baby with the bath water” comes to mind. Here is the link to Tom’s essay. I think you will find it useful.

https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-perils-of-source-snobbery/

Have a great Thanksgiving and then we will have a fun Holiday dinner! Sign up!

Jean Turner Van Horn

SGS Board 2026-2028

Board of Directors

President: Jean Van Horn
Vice President: Robert Pierro
VP/Membership: Shari Harmon
VP/Programs: Ann James
Treasurer: Joan Baptist
Secretary: Marianne Bradley
Past President: John Matthews
Directors: Sue Martin
Peggy Toohey
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

Proud Partner with Palm Harbor Library You. Us. Together.

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 2027 course will be held on six Friday afternoons from 1:30-4:30 pm

Dates: Feb 5, 12, 19, 26, Mar 12, 26.

There is a week break after Feb 26 & Mar 12.

Classes are at **the Palm Harbor Library 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

Genealogy and DNA IG



Monday, Nov 9 @
1:00-3:00 pm
PHL Conference Room
In-Person Meeting
open to everyone

Topic: YouTube video & general discussion

Next Meeting: Monday, Dec 14

DNA Mentors Available



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

Board Meeting

All SGS Members are welcome to come to the Board meetings.
Members should contact a board member for the Zoom link.
They are on the first Monday of the month on ZOOM.
The next meeting is on Jan 4 @ 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

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Terry Cain
terrylcain6@gmail.com

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



NOVEMBER

Jeanne Carrell
Allan Droschak
Jackie Droshak
Katie Graves
Robert Jacobson
Ann James
Jenny Kidd
Claudia Matthews
Linda Rice





DECEMBER

Brianna Smyth

Our Genealogy Friends

Pinellas Genealogy Society
Saturday, Nov 21 @ 11 am- 1 pm
Hybrid Meeting & via Zoom
Topic: Sorting Your Ancestry DNA Matches & How DNA Clusters Can Help Your Genealogical Research
Speaker: Patricia Coleman
https://pinellasgenealogysociety.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 9 @ 6 pm
Topic: Genealogy Research Group
http://tarponlibrary.org/genealogy/
Debbe Hagner available
Appt only

FamilySearch Affiliate Library

East Lake Community Library
4125 E Lake Rd S, Palm Harbor, FL
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, The Regency Oaks, 2nd Floor Conference Room, 2751 Regency Oaks Blvd., Clearwater.
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



Family Search Center
St Petersburg/Seminole
9000 106th Ave N
Largo, FL 33777-1147

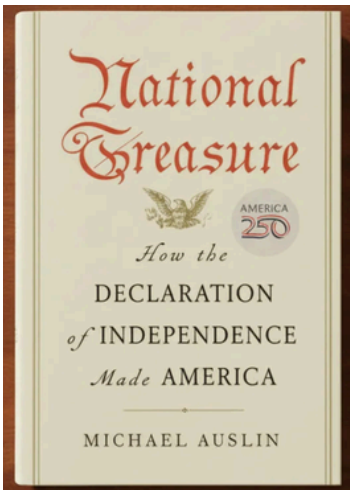
Hours:
Tues 10 am-6 pm
Thurs 10 am-9 pm
Sat 10 am-4 pm

FL_StPetersburg@familyhistorymail.org

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

Review

NATIONAL TREASURE



Quiet and politically untested, Thomas Jefferson was not the obvious choice to draft a statement of principles explaining why the American colonies were breaking ties with the King of England. Yet his soaring rhetoric, refined in small but indelible ways by Benjamin Franklin, would unite even the most bitter rivals around a common ideal. National Treasure is the inspiring story of our most revered founding document, as a physical object and a set of ideals that have made America what it is today.

We follow the Declaration as it is hauled out of a soon-to-be-burning Washington in 1814 (sadly not by Dolley Madison), hidden in a dank cellar, and brought back to a jubilant Washington after the war. By the time it turned 50, the Declaration, long neglected, had become a national treasure. In 1841 it would be mounted in the Patent Office alongside George Washington's commission as commander in chief.

Auslin offers a bold new theory of what happened to the Declaration when the Patent Office was transformed into barracks and a makeshift hospital served by Walt Whitman in the Civil War. An inspiration to both Abraham Lincoln, who insisted he had "never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration," and Jefferson Davis, who saw in its insistence on the consent of the governed a justification for secession, the Declaration has grown more important for each new generation. After the war, the Declaration became a hot commodity: printed on handkerchiefs, reproduced with elaborate illustrations, hung on classroom walls to teach civic values to the growing numbers of new citizens, and even used to flog insurance and hawk coal. In 1924, Herbert Putnam created the first "shrine" for the Declaration at the Library of Congress. Two years later, on its 150th birthday, Calvin Coolidge urged Americans to recommit to its foundational truths. In the 1940s, as FDR reminded Americans that their country was founded on a promise of freedom from tyranny, military officers lowered the precious parchment into a bunker at Fort Knox. After the war, its ink fading, the document was painstakingly preserved and protected.

Through it all, as the country has grown from 4 million to 40 million to 400 million, Jefferson's words have inspired immigrants to become American and fueled implausibly varied causes, from abolitionists, suffragists, socialists and civil rights leaders to groups waging war on the US Government. Over time, as Jefferson hoped, the principles set forth in the Declaration became a beacon to the world. But what lessons should we take from them today? Can this statement of ideals in whose name the signers pledged their lives and sacred honor bring a fractured nation together? As we gather to celebrate the 250th anniversary of our bold experiment in democracy, Auslin reminds us that this enduring document was an eloquent statement of the principles that, for all our differences, still bind us together.

BY MICHAEL AUSLIN



Italian Ethnicity and Heritage

Italian Cultural Heritage traces its lineage to two primary ancestors: its patrilineal progenitor, the Roman Empire (c. 753 BCE–476 CE), and its matrilineal progenitor, the Italian Renaissance (c. 14th–17th centuries). From Rome, it inherited structural traits including civil law, engineering, and monumental architecture like the Colosseum. From the Renaissance, it inherited humanism, scientific inquiry, and fine arts exemplified by primary descendants Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Today, this legacy survives through living offspring—a world-record estate of UNESCO sites, intangible assets like opera, and regional traditions that pass ancestral antiquity into modern daily life.

Italian Genealogy Websites

Ancestor Portal
The Archives for Registry Research

https://antenati.cultura.gov.it

Explore the Italian State Archives preserve many funds and series useful for genealogical research and the history of individuals and families.

ITALGEN
ITALIANGENEALOGY.COM

https://www.italiangenealogy.com

This site offers a free platform for genealogical research, including forums where users can ask questions and share information. It also provides guidance on Italian heraldry, nobility, and onomatology, which can be useful for tracing family history beyond basic records

ITALIAN
GENEALOGICAL GROUP

https://www.italiangen.org

The Italian Genealogical Group is dedicated to promoting Italian family history and genealogy.

2026- 2027 Presentations



08 Dec: Christmas Party - Johnny's Italian Restaurant

23 Jan: Using Chronicling America
Speaker: Debbie Smyth

This meeting is at Countyside Library

27 Feb: PGS Annual Seminar - Genealogy Reimagined
27 Mar: Who Is That Mystery DNA Match? Solving a Genetic Genealogy Brick Wall - Speaker: Diane Hendrix
24 Apr: Strapped for Cash: Records of Poor Ancestors and the Stories They Tell - Speaker: Pam Vestal
22 May: Researching Your Ancestors Prior to 1850 - Speaker: Julia Anderson

OCTOBER 2026 MINI-SEMINAR MEETING

We have the privilege of having a gem as one of our members, Debbie Wilson Smyth as she presented to us the history of the "Nation's Attic," the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) contains a treasure stockpile of genealogical records—though searching its vast catalog can easily require a roadmap. In a fantastic double-header presentation, Debbie delivered a multi-part session guiding us through these holdings. First, she demonstrated how to treat NARA's catalog like an organized filing cabinet to locate records buried in the stacks of original documents.

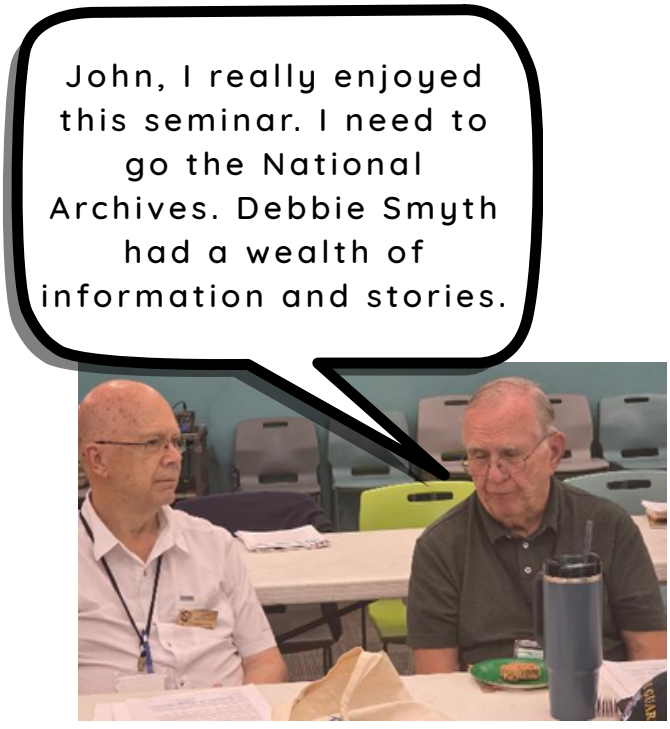
She then returned with "Befuddled by the Records," using practical case studies to highlight the common ways researchers inadvertently construct their own genealogical brick walls. She reminded us that sometimes the name you see is actually a middle name rather than a first name, and while we often look for shortcuts to find things quicker, we must remember not to rely solely on the index—always go back to the original documents. Don't stop digging for your diamond!



SPEAKER: DEBBIE WILSON SMYTH

Oak Trails Genealogy Services, LLC
oaktrailsgenealogy@gmail.com







FALL MINI-SEMINAR DOOR PRIZE WINNERS



- Genealogy Bank - 1 yr membership (Value $99.90) - Kim Croco-Brooks
- My Heritage - 1 yr Complete Account (Value $309) - Shari Harmon
- My Heritage - 1 yr Old News subscription (Value $99) - Barb Katcha
- Legacy - 1 yr membership to Family Tree Webinars (Value $59.95) - Kim Croco-Brooks
- Legacy - 1 yr membership to Family Tree Webinars (Value $59.95) - Bob Pierro
- Family Tree Magazine - 1 yr print subscription (Value $32) - Jean Van Horn
- Genealogist Tote - donated by Ann James (Value $16.99) - Peggy Toohey
- RootsMagic Software Program - donated by Bruce Buzbee (Value $29.95) - Shari Harmon
- Great Creations Tee Shirt - donated by Marianne Bradley (Value $30) - Sue Martin
- Tavel Mug Tree of Life - donated by Elaine Campoli (Value $28) - Peggy Toohey
- Tree of Life Pencil Case with 2 mechanical pencils & Dry Wite Out - donated by Elaine Campopi (Value $15) - Kim Croco-Brooks
- Genealogy Framed Sign - donated by Elaine Campoli (value $18) - Russ Martin
- Tree of Life Tote Bag - donated by Elaine Campoli (Value $6) - Shari Harmon
- Halloween Treat Box - donated by Shari Harmon (Value $20) - Bob Pierro
- Family Tree DNA Kit - donated by family Tree (Value $79) - Joan Baptist
- Find My Past - one 12 month Everything Subscription - (Value $299.99) - Rhama Atwell









A Message from Ann James VP Programs

I want to thank everyone who helped with our Seminar. All the board members, plus Rob Jacobson and Barbara Loizeaux stepped up to help. Thank you to everyone who also helped with setting up and breaking down the room and to all who attended. Your support is greatly appreciated.

A special thank you to Debbie Smyth who, in addition to doing her scheduled presentation, filled in at the last minute for our absent speaker. She did a great job! We are so lucky to have her as a member of SGS.

At our last meeting I passed around a questionnaire asking about programs that members were interested in. It was also emailed to all members. Sadly, only 11 of our 69 members responded. Thank you to those who responded.

Nine of you were interested in a program on Finding Ancestors Before 1850. I have found a speaker for that topic, Julia Anderson. She will do her program for us in May.

Lastly, I am looking for a volunteer to work with me. If you are interested in learning how to find programs for meetings, please let me know. We will work together so that you will learn the job of the VP Programs with the possibility of running for that office in the future.

Ann James

CALL for VOLUNTEERS

Our society thrives because of the dedication of our members, but we cannot sustain it without your help. We are currently looking for members to step up and join our efforts to keep our genealogy strong.

If you are interested in getting involved, please speak with any of our board members—we will gladly guide you and show you how you can contribute. Together, we can ensure our society continues to flourish for years to come.

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

We are seeking a volunteer to step into the Publicity Committee role. If you are interested in joining us, please reach out to any Board Member. We will collaborate closely with you to help you get started before you transition to running things independently.

VP PROGRAMS

Ann James will work together so that you will learn the job of the VP Programs with the possibility of running for that office in the future.