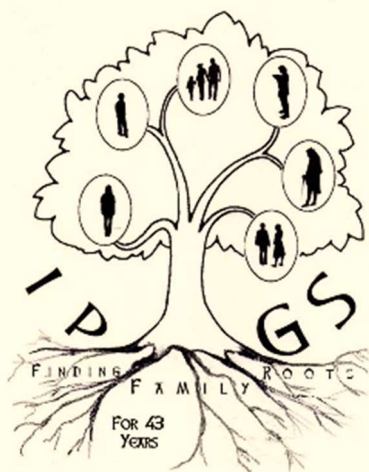




Imperial Polk Genealogical Society

Winter 2026 Newsletter



Get ready to interact with nationally renowned genealogists

Buckle up for a 2026 of new discoveries! IPGS programming will feature nationally recognized speakers for your journey. Each month features 2nd-Saturday, 1 p.m. hybrid meetings, both online and in person, at the Lakeland History and Culture Center.

February 9: **How to develop online newspaper research skills**



**Kenneth Marks of
The Ancestor Hunt**

Build newspaper research skills for genealogy and history alike. Online newspaper research can be frustrating for several reasons. Learn why it can be difficult, and discover some skills that will drastically improve search results. There are four sections:

- Why search old newspapers?
- The challenges in searching old newspapers online
- 7 critical skills and techniques to successfully search newspapers online
- A detailed demonstration of these skills and techniques

You can review Kenneth Marks' rich collection of resources at <https://theancestorhunt.com/>.

April 11: **I have a Civil War ancestor. Now what?**

Civil War soldiers often left a rich genealogical paper trail. Many of these records are tucked away at the National Archives in Washington D.C. Learn what records are available for your ancestors only at the National Archives, what records are online already, and how to access all of them. These may unlock some of the family stories that have been forgotten over time, as well as break down a brick wall or two!

Brian Rhinehart is a professional genealogist, a graduate of Boston University's Certificate of Genealogy Research and a regular researcher for the television show Finding Your Roots. He specializes in research and record retrieval for Civil War and War of 1812 soldiers. Check him out at <https://civilwarrecords.com/>.



**Brian Rhinehart of
Civil War Records**

Welcome new members in 2025

Jayla Pinkston
Cherry Twiggs
Pandora Hallman
Dorothy Burt
Robert Burt

Cheryl Elton
Alyssa Cohen
Jennifer Carter
Steven Danderson
Scott Danderson

Anne Gale
LaTrice Greir
Simmon Reed

Holiday festivities

Our December holiday gathering at the gracious Carpenter Estates private dining room provided a merry afternoon. Here are some of our party-goers.



*Joe Pinkston,
Pandora Hallback,
Cherry Twiggs*



Melvin Sellers and Gay Harlowe



Jim Bowers, Ken and Kathy Mackley, Gale Pinkston



*Bruce Munroe, Marcia Ford,
guest Kellie Sage of Bartow DAR,
and Lois Bowers*

Changing of the guard



With the December induction of 2026-27 President Lynn Hice (left), Gale Pinkston remains on the IPGS board of directors as past president.

Odd-numbered months:

Now we will gather together for Ancestry Forum

No longer in evenings, the Ancestry Forum is moving to our regular, monthly meeting time, 1:00 p.m. each second Saturday in odd-numbered months.

Members and visitors who have gathered for the informal Ancestry Forum have found lively engagement. We have shared expertise about software, DNA, AI, story telling, and myriad other interests.

In addition to good company, we have heard ideas that panned out for each other as we pursue our family histories.

The Ancestry Forum will resume the afternoons of January 10, March 14, and May 9. All up-to-date IPGS members will receive an email link to the Zoom version.

Those who prefer more social opportunity will meet at the Lakeland History and Culture Center at the Lakeland Public Library.



Don't forget! It is time to renew your membership for 2026. Help support quality programs. Renew online at ipgs.org or send a check to IPGS, PO Box 92154 Lakeland, FL 33804-2154. \$20 individual, \$25 family, \$150 lifetime for ages 65 and up.



Have fun as a volunteer archivist

Would you enjoy an educational, short-term-commitment volunteer opportunity? John Laurent will guide volunteers at Bartow's Historic L.B. Brown House and Museum, projected for the first two full weeks of January. Trustees there have collected a valuable trove of documents and photographs from local families, descendants and businesses.

Training will involve scanning, labeling, filing and preserving a great variety of interesting records. If you are interested, contact news@ipgs.org.

More volunteer opportunities

Please indicate your area(s) of greatest interest to participate on committees that provide the lifeblood of our all-volunteer organization.

___ Recording secretary

___ Technology advising

We work with the following software:

Wix, Zeffy, Google Docs, Microsoft 365

___ Sunshine

___ Newsletter

___ IPGS Chronicles (online journal)

___ Membership/Hospitality

___ Publicity/Outreach

___ Speakers Bureau

___ Program sponsor

Do you have requests for programs, research assistance, or other activity? We want to fulfill your wishes!

Tell us at news@ipgs.org or **Imperial Polk Genealogical Society**, PO Box 92154 Lakeland, FL 33804-2154. Or notify Membership chair Marcia Ford at marciaford@hotmail.com.

Congrats to Gale!

Watch for our esteemed member's article in the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. Parten, Bennett. *Somewhere Toward Freedom: Sherman's March and the Story of America's Largest Emancipation*. Reviewed by Gale B. Pinkston, JD, CG.

Join Us!

Monthly program meetings (even months) and chat sessions (odd months) are 1-2:30 p.m. Eastern each second Saturday.

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All meetings are both in person and online. (Watch your member email or request a link from news@ipgs.org.) Join us at the Lakeland History & Culture Center, at the Lakeland Public Library, [100 Lake Morton Drive, Lakeland, FL 33801](https://www.lakelandhistory.org/). (Ph: [863.834.4280](tel:863.834.4280))

President Lynn Hice
Vice Pres. Neil Brown
Past Pres. Gale Pinkston

Secretary (open)
Treasurer Jim Bowers
Trustee Steve Schultz

10 Must Haves for Genealogy and Family History Success

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Whether you're just "dabbling" in genealogy and researching your roots, or you've become a "hard core lifer" obsessed with "the hunt," there are basic skills that family historians of all levels have in common. We'll review those skills that can help you find success researching online or in-person.

Is there a RIGHT WAY to do GENEALOGY?

I've never liked living in a "black and white" world where there are only two ways of doing something. Telling another genealogist that they aren't doing it "right" can quickly turn a misunderstanding into a battle royale. However, I do think there are some BASICS of genealogy and family history research that should be learned and employed so that we aren't just "playing around." Sites like Ancestry have "gamified" genealogy so it is fun to build family trees, click on hints, add info, etc. But are you really building a legacy and leaving a solid body of work for your future generations?

The 10 Must Haves

My list of "must haves" for genealogy is one I think most genealogists can agree with.

A Sense of Purpose

Seriously consider why you want to search for your ancestors and know more about your family history. Take into account how many years you've been doing this, how much time you spend each week researching, and how much money you spend each year going to conferences, society meetings, ordering copies of records, subscribing to websites. It is so easy to just bounce from thing to thing and never really have anything to show for your investment of time and money. Having one big goal such as "I'm going to write a book about the MacEntee family history" is admirable but it

might be too big and overwhelming. Start with small goals: "I'm going to write a two-page biographical sketch on Elmer MacEntee, my great-grandfather." Then more small goals and pretty soon you'll find you can string them together into that one big goal!

Communication Skills

Why Can't We All Just Get Along? You think it would be simple especially since the genealogy community is generally known as a dedicated and intelligent group of researchers all focused on a similar goal: finding our ancestors. Yet researchers are people and as such little things like the ego and even misinformation or lack of knowledge can be like sand in the gears of the genealogy machine.

It all comes down to COMMUNICATION. Whether dealing with family members, cousins with whom I've never met before, or archivists and librarians, I always try to remember the 5 Cs: **Clear, Concise, Complete, Congenial, and Compensation.**

Writing Skills

I was fortunate enough to become a good writer in high school and a better writer in college. In genealogy don't feel pressured to write a long "proof" argument like those you see in society journals. Employ the KISS concept: Keep It Simple, Stupid. I contend that you can compose a written proof of an ancestor's birth date or birth location in 50 words or less and still follow guidelines set out by professional genealogy societies and associations.

In addition, learn to master whatever writing application you are using whether it is Microsoft Word, Google Docs, etc. Once you acquire those skills, you'll have an easier time documenting your research efforts as well as getting those family stories in a fixed and written format.

Genealogy Research Toolbox

Have you ever sat down either in front of your home computer or at a library prepared to start some genealogy research and then *bam* you can't find that wonderful website or resource you used last week or last month? Wouldn't it be great if you could build your own little toolbox of research resources that you could use anywhere? Building a research toolbox with your own favorite links, books, articles and more is what you need. A personalized research toolbox not only can help you locate information about your own ancestors, but it is a great way to share resources with your fellow genealogists.

- **Containers:** Think of a physical toolbox, perhaps made of metal or plastic. Which design would work best for you? Large or small? With a handle? Lots of small drawers inside for items? For a "research" toolbox, especially one with lots of links to websites, consider a container where you can organize your browser "bookmarks." A big consideration is portability.
- **Content:** Think of what you would want to have at your fingertips during genealogical research. Are you constantly going out to Google to search for something like a list of old occupation names or abbreviations for given names? If you already had these website links in your research toolbox, imagine the amount of time you could save? And that time could be used to search for ancestors instead of tools!

Organization Skills

If you're a beginning genealogist you want to research "the right way" and if you're an intermediate one, you probably have learned from your early mistakes. While some would argue as to what is "correct" we would probably all agree on these points as to what a research log could and should do:

- **Create an action plan.** Many genealogists have some sort of research plan whether it is written down

or in their heads. A research log can help you fine tune that research plan and convert it into an action plan. For many of us, that is the challenge . . . getting from "What I want to look for" to "Oh, look what I've found!"

- **Keep you organized.** Do you spend hours just bouncing around on Ancestry.com or another website? What about in-person at a repository . . . do you use your time wisely or just go from resource to resource? A research log can help you not only organize your research finds, but also identify areas where you need to do more research.
- **Allow instant recall.** Even if you are successful at finding the records and information you need in genealogy, what good is it if you can't locate that information easily and quickly? Especially if you store your finds on a computer, it helps to have a "map" to where all that stuff is! Use links and entries in a research log to find items fast.
- **Reduce "do-overs."** There's nothing worse than spending time researching only to find out that you already had that particular record. A research log lets you know where you've been and where you should be spending your time.
- **Help analyze data.** If you've located several different records related to an ancestor's marriage, how can you really analyze all the information and come to a conclusion if you can't see the details all at once? A research log lets you sort by fields or column headings and also search for specific keywords so you can easily analyze results.

Evidence Evaluation Skills

Have you ever looked closely at a vital record such as a birth or death certificate? I mean REALLY close . . . every line, front and back, every stray mark? That is what we should do as genealogists but many of us get caught up

in the excitement of the find, that our eyes only gravitate towards what we feel matters at that time. The following fields can be used when working with *The Board for Certification of Genealogists' Skillbuilding: Guidelines for Evaluating Genealogical Resources*.

- **Source Type:** A source is Original if it is the first written statement, photograph, or recording of an event. Subsequent copies are Derivative and may be reproduced by hand, machine, camera or scanner; they may be reproduced on paper, in microform, as photographs or digital images, or in any other medium that records the image whether transcribed by hand or technology.
- **Clarity:** Use Clear If the information can easily be read. Use Marginal if information is not clear, is partially obscured and researcher must "guess" at words or letters.
- **Information Type:** Use Primary if a piece of information is recorded by a knowledgeable eyewitness or participant in that event, or by an official whose duties require him or her to make an accurate record of the event when it occurs. Use Secondary if information is supplied by someone who was not at the event and may include errors caused by memory loss or influenced by other parties who may have a bias or be under emotional stress.
- **Evidence Type:** Direct evidence is any fact that is explicitly stated. Indirect evidence is inferred from one or more pieces of evidence within the record.

Source Citation Skills

When I first learned about source citations, I didn't believe they were necessary. I thought they were a waste of time. Over time, I realized the importance:

- **Establish Proof.** Cited material gives credibility to a fact or relationship while proving a connection.

- **Determine Reliability of Evidence.** Some sources are more reliable and make a stronger proof. Compare points of evidence based on their source.
- **Track Records and Resources.** Easily go back and locate records and their repository. This is effective when the original record or a copy is lost.
- **Expand Research.** When encountering a difficult area of research, look for sources that were successful in making a proof and check them again.
- **Discover Conflicts.** Locate contradictions in existing research or when new evidence is found.
- **Understand the Research Process.** When using another researcher's work, sources can give a glimpse at how that research was developed.
- **Placeholders.** Pick up a research project where you left off by looking at source citations.

Tech Skills

Even for a "techie" like me, it isn't easy to keep up with the latest genealogy technology. A great way to stay up to date is to visit the RootsTech website and sign up for their e-newsletter. And also attend the FREE virtual portion of RootsTech each year!

One bit of advice on updating technology: never go for the latest and greatest. Never be a ".0" person. What do I mean by that? Well when a new version of a genealogy software comes out – like Version 8.0 – don't run to update your copy even if it is free. I've found that most .0 versions of software and apps have bugs and glitches. Wait for the Version 8.1 which usually is available a few weeks after the .0 version. You'll have a better upgrade experience and why should you be a bug fixer for that company?

A Sense of Fun

It can be difficult to quantify fun when it comes to genealogy. I'm sure anything we

genealogists find enjoyable like indexing records on FamilySearch or transcribing an old letter from an ancestor will appear just plain weird and nerdy to friends and family.

For me, each time I am doing my genealogy I ask myself “Thomas, is this fun?” And if it isn’t I move on to perhaps a different ancestor or a different task. I don’t mean to say that you should avoid the menial tasks, but look for balance between what **MUST** be done and what **CAN** be done ... and go for the fun stuff!

A Sense of Legacy

I strongly believe that the 45 years I’ve spent doing genealogy should have something to show for that time and effort. If my family is not interested and I don’t have a family member who wants to inherit my work. At the very least when my “expiration date” arrives, I will have already donated my research to one or more genealogy libraries and societies, or have left instructions with my family on how to dispose of my research and everything that goes with it.

What if I did it WRONG?

Finally, how can you do it **WRONG** if there is no **RIGHT WAY** in genealogy? And even if after reviewing the 10 must haves above, you notice something you’ve done wrong, it is easy to fix. Like evidence evaluation ... just review the section above, look at the Resource List below, set a reasonable goal for yourself like “spend an hour learning the best way to evaluate a historical document,” and just do it! That small time and effort investment will really pay off as you continue your genealogy journey.

Resources

Genealogy Bargains

- **Genealogy Cheat Sheets**
<https://genealogybargains.com/genealogy-cheat-sheets/>

Sense of Purpose

- **10 Ways to Jumpstart Your Genealogy**
<https://genealogybargains.com/syllabus-jumpstart>

Evidence Evaluation

- **Evidence Explained Website**
<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/>
- **The Genealogical Proof Standard**
<https://bcgcertification.org/ethics-standards/>

Source Citations

- **Evidence Explained Website**
<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/>

Writing Skills

- **BCG Resources on Key Skills**
<https://bcgcertification.org/learning/skills/>

Genealogy Research Toolbox

- **Cyndi’s List**
<https://www.cyndislist.com>
- **FamilySearch Digital Library**
<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>
- **Genealogy Research Toolbox**
<http://genealogytoolbox.weebly.com>
- **Google Books**
<https://books.google.com>
- **Wolfram-Alpha**
<https://www.wolframalpha.com>

Organization Skills

- **Genealogy Research Log – Microsoft Excel**
<https://genealogybargains.com/genreslog>
- **Trello**
<https://trello.com>

Tech Skills

- **RootsTech**
<https://www.rootstech.org>

Sense of Fun

- **10 Ways to Jumpstart Your Genealogy**
<https://genealogybargains.com/syllabus-jumpstart>