



Imperial Polk Genealogical Society

Fall 2025 Newsletter



Join us at 1 p.m. Sat. Nov. 8 at the
Lakeland History & Culture Center
at the Lakeland Public Library. Or
by Zoom link from news@ipgs.org.

November 8 program Stroll Through Polk Cemeteries

by Neil Brown

vice-president and program chair

Your opportunity for documenting final resting places at the request of caring researchers is the topic of our November program. Or you can be a supportive collaborator.

Earlier this year IPGS voted to team up with Find A Grave to provide gravestone photos for those asking for such photos from our 113 Polk County cemeteries.

They range in size from four graves at Bok Tower Gardens to the 28,856 graves at Oak Hill Burial Park in Lakeland.

It could seem a simple task to locate the grave and take the photo to be uploaded to the website. Upon investigation, it turns out to be a much more complicated and difficult task.

We deal with poor cemetery conditions, sketchy grave location data and incomplete records. Some cemetery keepers are more cooperative than others.

Records vary from complete cemetery maps and locators to hand drawn sketches to no records at all. Come join the challenge!



IPGS member Virginia Okie describes how her research of distant cousins led to receiving a Civil War-era letter written by her great-grandfather.



Save the date: **Holiday Luncheon December 13**



The holidays are a time for gathering with family, but for genealogists, it's a great time to gather with our research family! This will be a fun, casual time to bring a guest. At our annual holiday luncheon, we'll trade our research tools for festive fare and our favorite family tales.

*See the flier
attached to this
newsletter to make
your reservation.*

We invite you to come prepared to share a memorable family story or holiday tradition that you've uncovered in your history—perhaps an old family letter, a favorite recipe card, or a treasured inherited trinket. Expect door prizes!

Officers' election in November

Please plan to cast your vote in our 2026-27 officer election at the Nov. 8 IPGS meeting. The slate is as follows:

President	Lynn Hice
Vice Pres.	Neil Brown
Past Pres.	Gale Pinkston
Secretary	(open)

Treasurer	Jim Bowers
Trustee	Steve Schultz

Nominations may be made from the floor. Please alert nominations chair Marcia Ford at marciaford@hotmail.com if you would like to serve our group as recording secretary.

Lynn Hice: **Introducing the presidential nominee**

by Lynn Hice, secretary

I worked as a medical technologist for 42 years. In 2004 a co-worker, an accomplished genealogist, introduced me to genealogy with census records of my grandparents and their children. I was hooked. That is when I retired and my husband and I, along with 2 dogs, used much of our travel time in our motor home, digging for my roots.



About 10 years ago I decided to slow down, sell the motorhome and joined IPGS, still digging. During the pandemic, when we were meeting virtually on zoom, I volunteered to take the minutes for the business meeting. Two years later I was elected to the office of secretary where I served another 2 years.

Going forward I would like to see the chapter return to the vim and vigor of the pre-pandemic years. To do that we need to increase our numbers, get everyone involved, find a sustainable source of revenue and be able to reach out to each of you, and help satisfy each of your needs and curiosities. I'm looking forward to better years ahead.

November Ancestry Forum: How to save time and effort with artificial intelligence tools

Join us for a discussion about software and uses of AI at the November 17 Ancestry Forum. The Forum is the IPGS version of a special interest group—with a variety of topics and an open invitation to participants.

Jim Bowers graciously hosts the forum's Zoom sessions the third Monday evening each month. These are friendly, 7 p.m. chats that feature 90

minutes of sharing discoveries and chuckles.



Host Jim

Jim says AI is "not to do the work, but to help *us* do *our* work."

Who should join? Anyone with an interest in family history. This forum is designed

as a public meeting place for discussion, learning, and idea exchange.

No need to register. Just show up. The Zoom link will be distributed to all current IPGS Members via email, or request one at news@ipgs.org.

Guests are welcome.

NOTE: After November, the Forum will skip December, and resume in 2026.



Do you have a sticky research challenge? Here's where to mine the wisdom of the group. We're interested. Or just share for fun. That's why we meet!



Soliciting your stories



If you have a story about a person or group that can be related to America's Civil War era, we want to hear about it. This will be the theme of the next IPGS Chronicles.

Too often we think about writing up one of our favorite tales—and it stops there. The Chronicles debuted this year as both an outlet and an impetus to finish the task. Get those juices flowing, and submit to your favorite editor 😊 at marciaford@hotmail.com.

Opportunity knocks!

Volunteer at the history center

The Polk County Historical and Genealogical Library is seeking volunteers in welcoming and assisting library patrons and visitors.

Volunteers will collaborate directly with the Research and Genealogy Historian and the Archival Specialist. Library assistants will greet visitors, answer phone calls, and assist library patrons in locating materials.

Additionally, volunteers will receive research inquiries assigned by the Historian and will aid in researching and compiling information.

If you are interested, please reach out to Shannon Graham: shannongraham@polk-county.net



Photo courtesy of the Polk County Historical and Genealogical Library

Creating an Ancestor Sketch

Thomas MacEntee, of Genealogy Bargains

<https://genealogybargains.com>

hidefgen@gmail.com

Most genealogists never complete that family history book based on their research. Consider a different approach: producing short, 3-5 page “sketches” about an ancestor. Once a few of these sketches are done, compile them into one comprehensive book.

Basic Elements of an Ancestor Sketch

- Here’s a “cheat sheet” to get you started. <https://genealogybargains.com/cs-familystoryFREE> . A sample starter is linked in Resources below. Consider the following elements:
 - **Cover or title page:** List the name of the ancestor, a descriptive subtitle with birth and death dates, and, if possible, a photo.
 - **Brief life summary:** Create a narrative based on the facts uncovered about the ancestor. Superior writing skills are not required; numerous online tools can generate a summary based on facts.
 - **Timeline of important life events:** Arrange facts in chronological order. Many genealogy platforms, such as Ancestry, offer this feature. Utilize online tools to create a timeline from an uploaded list of facts.
 - **Photos:** Include photos of the ancestor, if available, with descriptive captions. Otherwise, use images of significant places related to the ancestor’s life.

Also consider including a family tree, family stories that offer details about the people and places involved, narration about the ancestor’s surroundings and affiliations, and links for others to find printed or digital copies.

Importing Genealogy Research Information

Some software offers options to export parts of an ancestor’s profile. Platforms like MyHeritage and software like Legacy Family Tree offer book creation features. It may not take too much work to make formatting adjustments to copy and paste elements you want to add from other sources. Use free AI programs, such as ChatGPT, to generate content based on provided facts.

Source Citations, Copyrighted Material, and Credits

- **Source citations:** Consider using endnotes instead of footnotes.
- **Copyrighted material:** Avoid using copyrighted images or text without permission.
- **Credits:** Acknowledge assistance from others and include a copyright statement, e.g., “© [YEAR], copyright [AUTHOR NAME]. All rights reserved.”

Tips, Tricks, and Tools

Use these tips, tricks, and tools to save time when creating an ancestor sketch and to add a personal style to the finished product.

- **Create a template:** Develop a consistent template that you can reuse.
- **Try graphic software:** Use platforms like Canva or Adobe InDesign for creative layout.
- **Use artificial intelligence:** AI tools like ChatGPT can generate graphics, timelines, and social history content, and rewrite text in various styles.
 - Have AI generate graphics to use for a title page. Use prompts like “Create image of life in New York City in 1700” for a specific location and time period.
 - Use the prompt “Create timeline” and then paste in a list of facts.
 - Generate social history content using a prompt like “Tell me about life in New York City in 1920” or “Social history for San Antonio, Texas in the 1890s.”
 - Tell AI “Rewrite;” then paste the text with direction like “style engaging.”
- **Self-publish in print and digital formats:** Leverage self-publishing platforms like Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing or Lulu.com to produce the ancestor sketches in print, PDF, and digital formats.

Resources

- **Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing**
<https://kdp.amazon.com/>
- **ChatGPT**
<https://chat.openai.com/>
- **Copyright Services: Copyright Term and the Public Domain**
<https://guides.library.cornell.edu/copyright/publicdomain>
- **FORM Family Story Sample - Death of Anna Austin**
<https://genealogybargains.com/form-familystory-sample>
- **Weebly**
<https://www.weebly.com>