



## Arkansas Genealogical Society

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## AGS Ezine

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George Mitchell, list manager

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### JOIN US!

If you are not a member,  
this is your official  
invitation to join AGS.

[AGS Membership Application](#)

If you are a member,  
look at the back of your  
*Arkansas Family Historian*.  
Your membership expires  
on the date printed under  
your name.

It may be time to renew  
your AGS membership dues!

As I write this, the 50th Anniversary Fall Seminar celebration of the Arkansas Genealogical Society is history. As a veteran of many genealogical seminars, a majority of them AGS seminars, I was surprised at the degree of excitement I felt leading up to the conference and now I am feeling energized by the experience and memory of it.

Not being a native Arkansan or southerner, I learn and research via the southern families of my daughter-in-law and grandchildren. This, as well as my physical distance from my own roots and relevant resources, has taught me the importance of local, county, and state societies in preserving records, publishing journals, creating indexes, and sharing information in hard copy, CD, and online formats.

So while not being in on the beginnings of this society in 1962, I certainly appreciate and applaud those who gathered together and took the steps to create it. This society has provided seminars, published a journal, and promoted genealogical research, record preservation, and access to records for fifty years. This is no small achievement. It is through societies like AGS that we share the world-wide genealogy resurgence, support our national and state archives, learn from experienced speakers with great knowledge, publish books containing important research information, and create research guides, helps, indexes, transcripts, and cemetery surveys. It is by joining together that we create the force to make sure that original records are cherished and protected while being open to our use.

The societies you support at home or abroad will support you and your research in many ways, while supporting the issues and events that enable us to be genealogists.

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## Tidbits –

You have all heard by now that Ancestry.com has agreed to be acquired by a group led by a private European equity firm named Permira Funds in a cash deal valued at \$1.6 billion. Ancestry.com and Permira say there are no anticipated changes in its operating structure with the deal. The company will remain based in Provo, Utah, with a presence in London, Dublin, and San Francisco. It will continue to focus on investing in content, technology, and user experience, plus expanding product offerings in areas like DNA, building the Ancestry brand, and the family history catalog. Permira hopes to increase the value of the company by expanding its business in western Europe.

Major stockholders will make a lot of money. Apparently some will be selling some of their stock and keeping some of their stock, as will an equity company which owns 30% of Ancestry's stock.

As researchers, we can only hope that nothing will happen to upset this apple cart, because the 10 billion records added to the company's database site have become a way of life for many of us.

## Coming Events

November 1, 2012

**The Camden Expedition and It's Role in the Red River Campaign**, Dr. Gary Joiner of LSU at South Arkansas Community College, Camden, Arkansas, 6:30 pm. For information call 870.862.8131.

November 3-4, 2012

**Civil War Weekend**, Historic Washington State Park, 9 am to 5 pm. November 4, 2-3 pm, program by Dr. Jamie C. Brandon, *Merchants on the Cotton Frontier: the Archeology of Block 6*. For information go to [www.HistoricWashingtonStatePark.com](http://www.HistoricWashingtonStatePark.com)

November 6, 2012

**Making Sense of the Civil War: War and Freedom**, Pine Bluff/Jefferson County Public Library, 5:30 pm. Dr. William Shea, Civil War historian, will lead the discussion; sponsored by the Arkansas Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission; FREE and open to the public; to register phone 870.534.4802.

November 7, 2012

**Scenic Arkansas**, Saline County Public Library, Benton, Arkansas, 6:30 pm, a slide show by Tim Ernst. For information email [Steve.Purdue@Saline.lib.ar.us](mailto:Steve.Purdue@Saline.lib.ar.us) or call 778.4766.

November 17, 2012

**Prelude to Prairie Grove, Fall/Winter 1862**, Old State House Museum, Little Rock, Arkansas, living history, 10-4, [www.OldStateHouse.com](http://www.OldStateHouse.com)

## Coming Events continued

November 17, 2012

**Cemetery Information Fair**, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 310 W. 17th Street, Little Rock, Arkansas, noon to 4 pm; booths will be manned by people sharing information on aspects of cemetery preservation and research; sponsored by Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. For information email [Holly@arkansasheritage.org](mailto:Holly@arkansasheritage.org)

November 27, 2012

**Arkansas at Shiloh**, by Dr. Bill Gurley, at Civil War Roundtable, Second Presbyterian Church, 600 Pleasant Valley Drive at I-430 and Cantrell Road, Little Rock, Arkansas, 7:00 pm.

December 1 and 2, 2012

**Anniversary of the Battle of Prairie Grove**, Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park, Re-enactment and other events. For information call 479.846.2990 or email [holly.houser@arkansas.gov](mailto:holly.houser@arkansas.gov)

# Arkansas Genealogical Society 50th Anniversary Fall Seminar and Book Fair

## A Great Success

I wish every one of you could have been there. The AGS Fall Seminar held on October 26 and 27 was perhaps the best ever. A very friendly and enthusiastic crowd was present to enjoy interesting, informative, and entertaining programs. Audience participation was outstanding. The large selection of vendors and exhibits displayed new products and shared good information. New AGS T-shirts and sweatshirts with the 50th anniversary logo went like hot-cakes. Wonderful door prizes were distributed throughout the two days, including a years' subscription to world-wide Ancestry.com.

Friday evening began with the presentation of the colors by the Catholic High School Junior ROTC, followed by the pledge of allegiance and the singing of the National Anthem led by Brooke Ault, a runner-up Miss Arkansas. Russell Baker presented the first program, "The Blue and the Gray: Looking for Civil War Ancestors," a timely topic during this Civil War Sesquicentennial.



Russell Baker  
AGS President and  
seminar speaker.

The second program was a huge hit. In "Who Are Your People, Craig O'Niell?" the local TV



Craig O'Niell  
at AGS Seminar  
26 September 2012.

celebrity was presented with research conducted on his family by four AGS members, and he was visibly surprised by some of it and clearly enjoyed all of it. Russell Baker did an exemplary job of bringing all the research together in a slide program full of photos, documents, and other images that revealed the ancestors in a variety of categories such as occupation, religion, and military service. Afterwards Craig shared personal memories and experiences to express how he related to much of what he had seen and heard during the presentation. Much laughter was enjoyed by all.

The final Friday evening presentation was by Greg Boyd of Arphax Publications. In addition to their many family map books, Arphax is now unveiling a new subscription online product called HistoryGeo.com. With this product you will have online access to all the Arphax

## AGS Fall Seminar continued

books currently published plus additional books and other historic maps that they will be adding in the future. Check it out at <http://www.historygeo.com>.

Saturday lectures presented by guest lecturer Barbara Renick brought us all up-to-date on genealogy and technology. She addressed how computers and gadgets have changed and are continuing to change how we do genealogical research. Her second lecture showed us how to overcome idiosyncrasies of genealogy database sites, touching on Ancestry, FamilySearch, HeritageQuest, and Google among others. Barbara showed us why and how we should search differently to find what we want easier and more often. Her lecture on the FamilySearch catalog compared the two versions of the catalog and the eight different types of searches that can be used. And last but not least, Barbara showed us how to cite sources, write reports, and keep research logs by using the newest technology. All in all, these lectures were very rewarding in many ways.



Featured speaker Barbara Renick



Part of the audience at the AGS Conference

The 50th Anniversary celebration included an anniversary cake followed by the AGS annual meeting over which outgoing President Russell Baker presided. The membership voted to approve a by-laws change to allow the Board of Directors to decide the classes of membership. At the October board meeting it was agreed to change the classes of membership to one—individual—contingent on the membership approving the bylaws change. The membership also elected board members who have agreed to continue for another term and two new members: Brandon Ryan, a computer programmer, and Lauren Jarvis, an employee of the Arkansas History Commission. Former board members who were in attendance were recognized.

Whitney McLaughlin was awarded first prize in the AGS Family History Writing Contest for her article “William Alfonso Holt—Confederate Soldier,” published in the September 2011 issue of *The Arkansas Family Historian*.

**AGS Fall Seminar** continued

Data entry volunteers in the Arkansas Prior Birth Indexing Project who were present were recognized as well, including Sandy Caulk, Dianne Cooper, Ranellia Mann, Lynda Suffridge, Rebecca Wilson, and Brenda Veerhusen. They were presented Vol. 10 Prior Births CDs for their service.

Toward the end of the meeting, outgoing AGS president Russell Baker turned the gavel over to incoming president George Mitchell of Pine Bluff. George asked the audience to recognize three long-time board members, Wenzil Clark, Lynda Suffridge, and Russell Baker, who together represent over 100 years of service to the Arkansas Genealogical Society.



**Wenzil Clark, long time AGS board member**



**Catherine Hickerson and Tommy Carter at the AGS bookstore in the vendor room**



**Craig O'Neill in the audience during the presentation of his ancestry**

## From the Arkansas History List Serve:

### Women of the Southwest Frontier: From Settlement to Suffrage

The 5th Annual Fort Smith History Conference to be held January 26, 2013 at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith is an interpretive and scholarly program which will highlight the significance of women in the region.

Papers, displays, and living history presentations will be considered on topics, including the contribution of women, their life ways, contact and interaction, the landscape, slavery, war, legislation, funeral customs, dress, suffrage, employment, childbirth and rearing, pedagogy, and any other subject connected to women on the Arkansas frontier or in Indian Territory. The conference committee is also accepting proposals for guided off-site trips for Friday, January 25, 2013.

Please send abstracts of one or two paragraphs to [martha.siler@uafs.edu](mailto:martha.siler@uafs.edu) before December 1, 2012. All accepted will be notified by the committee before December 15, 2012.

Those accepted may choose to submit printed copies of their presentations for consideration for publication in *The Journal* of the Fort Smith Historical Society.

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<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hlstorytellers/10150121766205510>

## Know Your Records: Using the records of the National Archives

Our major national public research institution remains a puzzle to many researchers—what does it hold? Can I research there? How? For the last few years the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration has been increasing its outreach to genealogical researchers. Part of their outreach is the *Know Your Records* lectures that are held weekly on Tuesdays at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, and Thursdays at the College Park building. That’s all well and good if you live in the area, but what about those of us who are too far away to attend?

Many of the lectures are now available in the form of informative instructional videos via YouTube and your own computer. Go to <http://archives.gov/dc-metro/know-your-records>, and click on ‘Know Your Records Videos’ on the right. This will take you to *Know Your Records* on NARA’s YouTube channel.

There are currently sixteen courses online and they range in length from about twelve minutes to over an hour. Their topics range from commonly used records to the more advanced or esoteric. Titles include *Introduction to Genealogy—Census Records*, *Introduction to Genealogy—Immigration Records at the National Archives*, and *Introduction to Genealogy—Military Research at the National Archives* which includes three parts: *Volunteer Service*, *Regular Service* and *Pension Records*. Other interesting titles are *Let No Man Put Asunder: Freedmen’s Bureau Marriage Records* and *Passport Applications 1795-1925*. More advanced researchers may want to look at *Public Lands and Claims in the American State Papers 1789-1837* or *Documenting Death in the Civil War*.

These videos allow you to learn about many records held by the National Archives, how and why the records were created, what guides may exist to help you use them, how the records vary in form over time, what information they contain, where they are held and how to access them.

Explore the National Archives website at <http://archives.gov> to see what else may interest you there or help your research.

## **Georgia Archives and History will remain open for now**

According to their October 18 press release, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and Secretary of State Brian Kemp announced that the state would restore \$125,000 of a \$733,000 cut to Kemp's budget to keep the Georgia State Archives open to researchers two days a week without an appointment for the rest of the fiscal year.

The restored funding will allow the archives to remain open to the public through June 30 of next year. The plan is to transfer Georgia Archives to the University System of Georgia on 1 July 2013, if it receives the approval of the General Assembly. The proposed transfer will include appropriations required for operation and assets of the Georgia Archives and the University System will provide additional staff at that time. Apparently the Governor and Secretary expect consolidation to result in cost saving and the ability of the archives to maintain its current access hours.

The Friends of Georgia Archives and History website indicates they are delighted with the transfer to the University System and express gratitude that the archives is not closing completely. They worry that of the seven people already laid off, only a few will return. They also feel that the proposed cash restoration is not enough, with more than 5 million dollars needed to put the archives back where it was and open five days a week. They suggest all genealogists should continue to monitor this situation carefully and be prepared for another letter-writing campaign.

Supporters of the archives, the Federation of Genealogical Societies, and The National Genealogical Society were instrumental last month in alerting researchers to the proposed closing, and in fact, mustered a great many emails, letters, and petitions that probably altered the projected conclusion of the issue.

A review of all reports of this situation leaves the feeling that no one thinks the Archives is out of the woods yet.

## From the Ancestry Insider: Result Ranking on Ancestry.com

Ed.: In August 'The Ancestry Insider' posted this helpful article about a talk he heard at the BYU Conference earlier that month. I found the topic illuminating but have not had room in the Ezine to pass it along to you until now. It is rather long, but well worth reading. It may change the way you search on Ancestry.com

### [Echo King: Result Ranking Unveiled](#)

Posted: 14 Aug 2012 11:05 PM PDT

Echo King presented "Searching [Ancestry.com](#)" at the 2012 [BYU Conference on Family History and Genealogy](#). King is director content product manager for Ancestry.

### Relevance Ranking

"The way that we rank things [determines] the order in which we display things," said King about how Ancestry decides the order of search results. Ancestry uses a system called *relevance ranking* to guess which results are most relevant to your search and display them first. As you proceed down the list, less and less relevant results are displayed.

"Behind the scenes we are doing all this scoring of different fields," she said. "Different fields contribute differently." A match on the last name is considered more important and is given a higher score than a match on given name. Date and place matches come next. Matches in other fields come last.

Scores are affected by partial matches. A misspelled name has a lower score. Estimated dates score lower. Anything inside a date range scores the same. For example, 1966 +/-1 gives the same score to 1965, 1966, and 1967.

There is a weakness in Ancestry's ability to guess which results are the ones you are interested in. "The more fields that are indexed in a collection, the higher the score. That is not always a good thing," said King. "That is why censuses are almost always at the top of the list." City directories have very few fields, sometimes just first name, last

## From the Ancestry Insider continued

name, and location. Lots of results with partial matches can show up higher than an exact match in a city directory, which has few fields.

Consequently, “don’t assume that you can do one search and find every record about a person,” King said. Consider two different search strategies. One is to start by specifying just basic information about an ancestor. Then iteratively add more information and examine the results. The other strategy is to start with everything you know about an ancestor and iteratively remove information. In either case, search specific collections where you feel your ancestor should appear.

There is another weakness you may encounter. “The drop down list [of locations] is not perfect. We’re working on improving that,” she said. If the location does not appear, she suggested putting the name in the keywords field. I always use the location field, since it allows entry of locations not in the list.

If you don’t want Ancestry ranking the results of your searches, the feature can be disabled by changing the view setting above the first result. Change the view from “Sorted by relevance” to “Summarized by Category.”

Ancestry has corrected a weakness you may have experienced in the past. Results outside a person’s lifespan are filtered. Results are filtered out that occur more than five years prior to birth or two years after death. If only the birth or only the death is specified, the person is assumed to have lived for 100 years.

Ancestry has fixed another weakness you may encounter: receiving results for the wrong country. Use the *Collection Priority* feature to limit results to a particular country. This setting is remembered and must be explicitly changed as desired.

## Search Types

“There are lots of different ways to search the records,” said King.

## From the Ancestry Insider continued

*Global search* searches all collections. Global search is performed from the home page or from the search page.

*Category search* searches a group of collections that have a common theme such as all immigration records or all U.S. census records. “Why would you want to search on a category?” she asked. “Because you get fields that are specific to a category of records.” For example, a category search of immigration records allows searching by the name of a ship. If a field is not present, use the keyword field. I’ve used this to get all the names on a single page of a census. There are two ways to locate a search category. Hover over the search menu. Or click search and pick from the list of categories along the right-hand side of the page.

*Collection search* searches a single record collection. “I often use collection specific searches as well,” said King.

### Other Points

You can use a wildcard anywhere in a name, even at the beginning, but you must have at least three letters.

“It can take up to 45 days for [a correction] to show up in the search [index].”

If a census household has a mother-in-law with a different surname than the household head, Ancestry might add an alternate name for the wife because they think they know the wife’s maiden name.

To print a record, don’t use the browser print. Click on print just above the image.

Searching newspapers takes a different strategy because newspapers are indexed using [OCR](#).

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## **Administrative Stuff**

**Contributions:** If you have news for the Ezine, send it! [susanb1996@aol.com](mailto:susanb1996@aol.com) –Thanks!

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