

WELCOME TO THE AI SIG

Our Mission

The AI Special Interest Group empowers NWSGS members to confidently integrate artificial intelligence into their genealogical practice through collaborative exploration and shared learning. We investigate both general-purpose AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, Perplexity) and genealogy-focused applications (Transkribus, FamilySearch Labs), discovering practical ways to accelerate research, overcome challenges, and preserve family histories. Grounded in ethical AI use and traditional genealogical standards, we build expertise together - making emerging technology accessible to all while ensuring our research remains accurate, documented, and verifiable.

How We Work

- **Monthly meetings:** First Wednesday at 4:00 PM CT
- **Format:** Zoom: Live demos, hands-on practice, group discussion
- **Philosophy:** Collaborative learning—we explore together

AI OVERVIEW: THE ESSENTIALS

What is AI?

Artificial Intelligence tools understand and generate human language—like a research assistant who's read millions of documents.

Key Difference from Search:

- **Google:** Finds existing web pages
- **AI:** Creates new text based on patterns learned from training data
- **Why it matters:** AI can analyze unique situations but can also invent plausible-sounding "facts"

Four Core Uses in Genealogy

1. SUMMARIZE - Condense lengthy content into digestible overviews

- *Example:* Long Wikipedia article about a location → Brief genealogy-focused summary
- *When to use:* Research guides, family histories, county histories, long articles

2. EXTRACT - Pull structured information from unstructured text

- *Example:* Obituary → Organized list of names, dates, places, relationships
- *When to use:* Converting narrative documents into analyzable data

3. GENERATE - Create new content based on information you provide

- *Example:* Research problem → Suggested next steps and resources
- *When to use:* When stuck, need ideas, want to organize scattered facts
-  *Always verify AI's suggestions*

4. TRANSLATE/TRANSCRIBE - Convert foreign languages or difficult handwriting

- *Example:* German birth record → English translation with key facts
- *When to use:* Foreign language records, difficult handwriting
- *Tools:* ChatGPT, Claude, Google Translate, DeepL, Transkribus

AI Strengths

- ✓ Summarize lengthy documents quickly
- ✓ Translate foreign language records
- ✓ Suggest research strategies
- ✓ Organize complex data
- ✓ Help with difficult handwriting
- ✓ Create timelines and narratives

Critical Limitations

-  **Can hallucinate** - Invents plausible-sounding "facts"
-  **Carries training biases** - Reflects biases in source data
-  **Can't access private databases** - No login to Ancestry/FamilySearch
-  **Needs verification** - Always check against original sources

Golden Rule: AI is your research assistant, not a replacement for your expertise.

Ethical Use Checklist

- ✓ Always verify AI suggestions with original sources
- ✓ Be transparent about using AI assistance
- ✓ Don't claim AI content as your original analysis

- ✓ Respect privacy (yours and others')
- ✓ Maintain genealogical standards: documentation, citation, proof

See [Coalition for Responsible AI in Genealogy](#) for more information

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

Your Top Interests

- **Foreign language records** (German, Polish, Italian)
- **Difficult handwriting transcription**
- **Brick wall research strategies**
- **Document analysis and organization**

Your Main Concerns

- **Privacy:** What happens to uploaded documents? How to protect sensitive info?
- **Accuracy:** How to spot hallucinations? Best verification practices?
- **Getting started:** Which tool first? Is the learning curve steep?
- **Ethics:** Maintaining genealogical standards while using AI

Tools You Want to Explore

ChatGPT • Transkribus • Translation tools • FamilySearch AI • Claude

How You Prefer to Learn

- ✓ Live demonstrations with real genealogy documents
- ✓ Hands-on practice during meetings
- ✓ Step-by-step guides with screenshots
- ✓ Member sharing and discussion
- ✓ Practical takeaways to try immediately

TRY IT YOURSELF: SAMPLE PROMPTS

Getting Started Quick Win

1. Go to <https://chat.openai.com> (free account)
2. Copy a genealogy document (census, obituary, etc.)
3. Use this prompt:

Please analyze this [type of document] and:

1. Summarize the key genealogical facts
2. Identify all names, dates, and places
3. Suggest what I should research next

[Paste your document text]

Ready-to-Use Prompts

For Obituaries:

Extract all genealogical information from this obituary including: full names, relationships, birth/death dates and places, marriage dates, children, siblings, and other family connections. Organize the information clearly.

[Paste obituary]

For Census Records:

Create a table from this census record with columns for: Name, Age, Relationship to Head, Birthplace, Occupation, and other relevant details.

[Paste census transcription]

For Translation:

Translate this [language] record to English, then identify all names, dates, places, and relationships mentioned.

[Paste foreign text]

For Research Planning:

Based on what I know about [ancestor], suggest 5 specific next steps for my research, including which records to search and where to find them. Here's what I know:

[List known facts]

For Brick Walls:

I'm stuck researching [ancestor]. Here's what I know: [list facts]. Here's what I've already searched: [list sources].

What should I try next?

For Timelines:

Create a chronological timeline of [person]'s life based on these facts:

[List all known facts in any order]

Tips for Better Results

Be specific: Not "tell me about this" but "extract names, dates, and places from this marriage record"

Give context: "This is a 1900 census from Chicago. Please..."

Specify format: "Create a bullet list" or "organize in a table"

Don't be afraid to rephrase: If results are odd, try asking differently

Always verify: Check AI output against your original sources

ESSENTIAL AI TOOLS FOR GENEALOGY

ChatGPT (OpenAI)

URL: <https://chat.openai.com>

Use for: Document analysis, translation, research planning, writing

Cost: Free tier available; Plus \$20/month

Privacy: Settings → Data Controls → disable training

Best for: Getting started—most versatile

Claude (Anthropic)

URL: <https://claude.ai>

Use for: Long document analysis, research planning, writing

Cost: Free tier; Pro \$20/month

Best for: Lengthy historical documents

Transkribus

URL: <https://www.transkribus.org>

Use for: Handwritten document transcription

Cost: Free tier (limited); paid credits available

Best for: German script, difficult handwriting

MyHeritage Photo Enhancer

URL: <https://www.myheritage.com/photo-enhancer>

Use for: Colorize, enhance, restore old photos

Cost: Free credits; subscription for more

Best for: Photo restoration projects

FamilySearch Full-Text Search

URL: <https://www.familysearch.org> (look for "Full-Text Search" badge)

Use for: AI-powered record searching

Cost: Completely free

Best for: Accessible to everyone, no privacy concerns

Also Worth Exploring

- **Google Translate:** <https://translate.google.com> (free, quick)
- **DeepL:** <https://www.deepl.com> (free tier, accurate for European languages)
- **Gemini:** <https://gemini.google.com> (free, analyzes images)
- **Copilot:** <https://copilot.microsoft.com> (free with Microsoft account)
- **Perplexity:** <https://www.perplexity.ai> (free, provides citations)

PRIVACY & SECURITY BASICS

Protecting Your Data

In ChatGPT:

- Settings → Data Controls → Toggle off "Improve the model for everyone"
- Use "Temporary chat" for sensitive documents

In Claude:

- Settings → Privacy → Disable chat history

General Best Practices: ✓ Remove living people's names before uploading

✓ Don't upload SSNs, financial info, or highly sensitive data

✓ When in doubt, paraphrase instead of uploading images

✓ Review privacy settings in every tool you use

✓ Remember: "deleted" chats may exist in backups

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Next Meeting: February 4, 4:00 PM CT

Topic: Live Prompt Tuning: One Question, Five Better Answers

Tried ChatGPT and got weird results? Learn why—and how to fix it! We'll improve prompts together as a group, showing how small wording changes create dramatically better answers.

You'll learn:

- The 4 elements of effective prompts
- How to turn vague questions into powerful ones
- Live demonstrations: watch prompts improve in real-time
- Common mistakes and quick fixes

What makes this special:

- Interactive—WE improve prompts together
- No account needed—watch and learn techniques you can use tonight
- Works across ALL AI tools, not just ChatGPT
- Perfect for all levels—beginners to advanced

Bring:

- Your curiosity and questions
- Ideas for prompts you want to improve

Potential Future Topics (Based on Your Input)

- AI for Translation & Handwriting Transcription
- Using AI for Research Strategy & Brick Walls
- Comparing AI Tools: Which One When?

GET STARTED TODAY

Your Action Plan

1. **Tonight:** Try the "Quick Win" prompt with ChatGPT
2. **This week:** Experiment with 2-3 sample prompts
3. **This month:** Note questions for February's meeting
4. **Share:** Post discoveries on the NWSGS forum

Need Help?

- **Recordings:** <https://nwsgenealogy.org/sig-meeting-video-archive/>
- **Handouts:** <https://nwsgenealogy.org/sig-meetings-handouts/>
- **Forum:** Ask questions, share discoveries
- **Monthly meetings:** Bring questions and get real-time help

Remember:

- ✓ You can't break it—experiment freely
- ✓ Weird answers? Rephrase and try again
- ✓ Always verify AI suggestions
- ✓ We're learning together
- ✓ Questions are always welcome

AI is a tool, not a replacement. You are the genealogist. AI is your assistant.

Questions? Discoveries? ai_sig@nwsgs.org See you at the next meeting!

This handout generated with AI help and human oversight.

Howard Cameron and Janet Blake