Volume 8, Issue 11
November 2025

Edmond Genealogical Society Newsletter

www.edmondgensoc.org
www.facebook.com/EdmondGenSoc

Monday, November 17, 2025 Meeting

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS OF OUR ANCESTORS

Presented by EGS President Jan Beattie

We have many tried-and-true Christmas traditions in the United States: decorating the Christmas tree, baking holiday cookies, and keeping up with the Elf on the Shelf. However, have you ever wondered about how our ancestors might have celebrated Christmas?

Our November17th program will be presented by EGS President, Jan Beattie. Come discover if your family still celebrates any of the old traditions that your ancestors did.

Jan Beattie is retired from the medical field and finally has time for her genealogy hobby. She is involved with many genealogy and lineage-based societies and loves to share her knowledge with others.

15700 N. Pennsylvania

EDMOND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING LOCATION

EGS monthly meetings are held at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 15700 N. Pennsylvania, unless otherwise announced.

Entrance is at BOTH the east and south doors for all attendees. The SOUTH door is handicapped accessible, much easier for those of us who have difficulty with stairs.

EGS meets on the third Monday evening of each month, except December.
Meetings begin at 6:30 pm and last approximately one hour.

BIG CHANGES COMING IN 2026!

Starting in January 2026, our monthly EGS meetings will begin at 2:00 pm, instead of 6:30 pm!
Meetings will still be on the third Monday of every month, and (for the time being) at the same location (LDS Church at 15700 N. Pennsylvania).

We continue looking for a new meeting location more centrally located in Edmond, and will let all our members know as soon as we secure a new meeting place.

LOOK

REMEMBER: There is NO EGS meeting in December.
HAPPY HOLIDAYS to all our members and their families!

Genealogy Tip of the Month

DID ELLIS ISLAND REALLY CHANGE YOUR ANCESTOR'S NAME?

Credit: Ancestralfindings.com

Family stories have a way of becoming family legends, and one of the most common you'll hear in genealogical circles is: *"Our ancestor came through Ellis iIsland and the clerks changed the family name because they couldn't spell it."* Imagine the scene --- ships crowding New York harbor, weary travelers clutching suitcases, and an impatient official scribbling down a "new" surname that forever altered the family's story.

But here's the reality: ***Ellis Island clerks did not change names.***

Ellis Island opened in 1892 as the main federal immigration station in New York harbor and processed over 12 million immigrants before closing in 1954. The job of clerks was not to create new names but to verify information already collected. Before boarding a ship in Europe, immigrants gave their names, ages and other details to shipping agents, who created the ship's passenger manifest. By the time passengers reached Ellis Island those manifests were the official record. Clerks at Ellis Island simply checked the new arrivals against these lists. If anything didn't match, it raised suspicion, not opportunity for creative spelling.

So if clerks weren't changing spelling, where did the idea come from?

1. Immigrants changed their names later. Once settled in the U.S., many people simplified or Anglicized their names to fit in, find jobs, or avoid discrimination. "Schmidt" became "Smith," Giovanni" became "John."
2. Language differences caused confusion. A surname written in Cyrillic or Polish orthography rarely matched neatly with English spelling.
3. Clerical variations were common. Even before Ellis Island, clerks wrote names phonetically. If your great-grandfather said his name with a thick accent, the spelling might shift from one record to the next without anyone "changing" it on purpose.
4. The myth of Ellis Island is a neat explanation. Families trying to explain why Grandpa was born "Ivanov" but died "Evans" found the Ellis Island story a tidy scapegoat.

If you're researching your family tree, don't waste time blaming Ellis Island. Instead look in the following places:

- Naturalization records: immigrants sometimes filed for a formal name change when becoming citizens. Court recorded both the old and new names.
- Employment records: employers sometimes "simplified" names for paperwork or to avoid bias.
- School & church records: teachers & clergy often wrote names as they understood them, leading to gradual shifts.
- Everyday use: the most common explanation --- families simply started using a new version of their name in daily life.

Real Life Examples

- A Hungarian named "Janos Kovacs" appears on his ship manifest exactly as written. Ten years later in Detroit, he's "John Kovach" on the census.
- My husband's great-grandfather, Biase Gentilo, arrived from Italy in 1885. When his children began school in Colorado, the school teacher changed their last name to "Gendill" to sound "*more American."* And Biase became William Gendill.

Research Tips for Tracing Name Changes

- Start with the passenger manifest. Many are available on sites like Ancestry, FamilySearch and EllisIsland.org. These documents show the name as it was recorded at point of departure.
- Track naturalization papers. These can reveal both old and mew identities.
- Look at census records and city directories. These often capture when someone began using a new spelling or shortened version.
- Search variant spellings. Think phonetically. "Kwiatkowski" might appear as "Kwitkoski," or even "Quitkoski."

Ellis Island didn't change names – people did. Families chose to reschape their identities, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes strategically. They shortened names for business success, switched spellings to match their neighbors, or translated surnames into English. These were acts of survival, adaptation, and sometimes pride.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS and EVENTS

Nov. 15 **10:00 am**	**OHCE Genealogy Group** ***"Ancestry.com – It's More Than the Tree,"*** Presented by Emily Hedinger. Held at OSU Extension, 2500 NE 63rd St., OKC For more info go to **ohcegenealogy.com**
Dec. 1 **6:00 pm –** **7:30 pm**	**Oklahoma Genealogical Society** ***"DNA Case Study Through Two States & the Cherokee Nation,"*** Presented by Kate Penney Howard. Held at the Oklahoma History Center, 800 Nazih Zuhdi Dr., In person or via webinar. To register or for more info go to **okgensoc.org**
Dec. 6 **10 am –** **4:00 pm**	**Oklahoma Historical Society** ***"Guthrie's Distinctive Homes Tour & Wassail."*** Held at the Oklahoma Territorial Museum and Carnegie Library, 406 E. Oklahoma Ave., Guthrie. Tickets $20 For more information call 405-394-1947 or go to **okhistory.org** or email info.gtcf@gmail.com
Dec. 10, 11 **& 12** **10 am–5 pm**	**Oklahoma Historical Society** ***"Museum Store Annual Holiday Sale"*** Held at the Oklahoma History Center, 800 Nazih Zuhdi Dr., OKC For more info go to **okhistory.org**

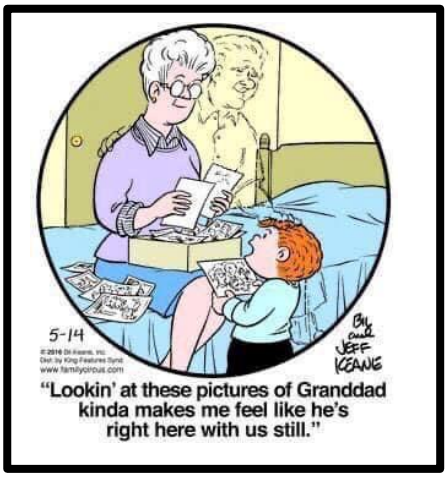
RECURRING MEETINGS

Logan County Genealogical Society meets the 3rd Saturday at 1:00 pm at the Oklahoma Territorial Museum in Guthrie. For more information visit: **www.sites.rootsweb.com/~oklcgs/** or contact Nelda Brown at LCGS1419@gmail.com

The Central Oklahoma Chapter of AHSGR – American Historical Society of Germans from Russia has meetings on the 3rd Sat. of each month. Visit **www.ahsgr.org/?CentralOklahoma** for more information.

DUES DEADLINE

If you haven't already paid your annual dues, you will no longer continue to receive the monthly newsletter and other notifications.
Still only $20 for individual or $30 PER couple.
Your dues help cover the cost of monthly speakers, handouts, brochures, refreshments, etc.
You may pay at this month's meeting or mail your check to
EGS, c/o Edmond History Museum,
431 S. Boulevard, Edmond, OK 73013



HAVE YOU ADDED YOUR FAMILY NAMES TO THE SURNAME PROJECT?

This project will help you and fellow members who may be researching the same family lines or have a research dilemma. This is your opportunity to pay it forward to everyone in our great genealogical society!

If you haven't already done so, (***or if you would like to add more of your family surnames***), please fill out a sheet listing the family surnames you are researching and their locations, dates and other pertinent information. Such as: "Jenkins in Asheville, North Carolina in the 1800's." ***VOLUNTEERS ARE INDEXING THIS INFORMATION AND IT WILL SOON BE POSTED ON OUR WEBSITE!!***

A BLANK FORM IS INCLUDED AS THE LAST PAGE OF THIS NEWSLETTER.

Use as many sheets as you need. **Please return them to any board member at our meetings, or mail to:**

EGS, c/o Edmond History Museum, 431 S. Boulevard, Edmond, OK 73013

Genealogical Library at
Edmond History Museum

EGS BOARD MEMBERS 2024-2025
Standing, left to right: Joyce Gendill, Karen Blagg, Jay Cress, Sara Memmott, Jan Beattie
Seated, left to right: Iris May, Edie May Parmeter, Libby Holshouser

EDMOND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
Officers 2024-2025

Jan Beattie: President

Iris May: 1st Vice President/Programs and Publicity Chairman

Karen Blagg: Treasurer

Sara Memmott: Past President, Museum Liaison/ Genealogical Library and Research Center Chairman and Recording/ Corresponding Secretary

Libby Holshouser: Hospitality Chairman

Edie May Parmeter: Surnames Project Chairman and Membership Committee

Jay Cress: Webmaster

Joyce Gendill: Newsletter

In case you missed last month's meeting

WHAT AI (Artificial Intelligence) CAN and CAN'T DO

Presented on Video by Professional Genealogist Lisa Lisson
with special thanks for AV setup and additional information from EGS Webmaster Jay Cress

First, always think of AI as an "assistant" to help, but it does not replace your own research skills.

AI CAN:

- Analyze patterns and connections
- Brainstorm new theories
- Connect clues
- Analyze DNA data & matches
- Create detailed timelines & location & events for ancestors
- Create a Genealogy Research Plan for you
- Tackle brick walls (when you ask for other ideas & sources)
- Find social history
- Help you write family stories
- Save time

AI CANNOT:

- Cannot access records from subscription sites
- May not have a current knowledge
- Can make mistakes –verify! Ask AI for source citations!
- Cannot replace YOU

HOW TO USE AI:

The most popular AI platforms are: (*most are free, some charge a fee*)

- ChatGPT.com
- Gemini.google.*com (most popular for genealogy. Start with the free version)*
- Claude.ai
- CoPilot.microsoft.com
- Perplexity.ai

At the prompt, type a specific query. **The more detailed you are, the better results you will get. Such as**:

"My great-grandfather Alfred J. Jenkins lived in Buncombe County, North Carolina in 1850. The census shows he was a farmer. What crops might he have grown?"

Or: *"I'm trying to find the father of my great-grandfather Alfred J. Jenkins who was born in in Buncombe County, NC in 1830. Create a research plan for me."*

Or: *"What church records are available for Independence County, Arkansas in 1870?"* When you get a response, you can follow up with*: "Are there any written histories of these particular churches?"*

Or: *Where would I find deeds & land records for Buncombe County, NC in 1870?"*

ALWAYS VERIFY ANY FACTS AI GIVES YOU!

Jay Cress recommends this blog for learning about AI Genealogy:
geneamusings.com

THE FOLLOWING IS THE SURNAME PROJECT FORM

(See info on Page 3 of this newsletter). **Please fill out the form and return it to any board member at our meetings, or mail to: EGS, c/o Edmond History Museum, 431 S. Boulevard, Edmond, OK 73034**

Edmond Genealogical Society

SURNAME PROJECT

Date: _____

Name of Researcher: _____

Email Address: _____ Phone # (optional)_____

Name(s) you are researching (last name first)	Location(s) (e.g. country, state, county, city)	Comments (e.g. dates)
Return to any EGS Board Member	***or mail to: EGS c/o Edmond History Museum***	***431 S. Boulevard Edmond, OK 73034***