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Elihu Midgley, Walking with Ancestors, 2024

By Dusty Moller

Hello, I'm Dusty Moller, member of the Eastern Washington Genealogy Society. My task today is to act, in the first person, as an avatar, like an incarnation, embodiment, or manifestation of a person or idea. That person is Eli Midgley.

Hi, I'm Elihu Midgley, known by family and friends as Eli.

My parents immigrated to the United States, settling in Worcester, Massachusetts and becoming naturalized citizens in 1874. Why there? Jobs. Worcester is credited as the birthplace of Industrial Revolution in America largely due to the Blackstone River which ran from Worcester to Providence, Rhode Island. Dropping about ten feet per mile, the river provided the waterpower for scores of factories and mills, providing employment for scores of workers.

You could see on a map that the Blackstone River flows East Southeast all the way from Worcester to the Atlantic Ocean. And, while the factories in Worcester used the river for powering their mills, the river was developed into a canal all the way to the Atlantic Ocean.

Well, the folks in Boston, due East of Worcester, didn't want to let that opportunity go, so they built a railroad, often just aside the canal, and cut the travel time for goods from Worcester to the ports by two days to just a few hours. The economic theme rode high in that era!

Enter the nature of American economics ... Southerners didn't have the "waterpower" or the ability to take advantage of the flow of European labor to America. Yes, but, the Southern tidal and adjacent lands were great for growing cotton and rice—if and only if, you had cheap labor. Enter slaves! All you had to do was buy 'em, feed 'em, and work 'em.

Well, fast forward to the War Between the States, or the War Against Northern Aggression, the Second American Revolution, the Lost Cause, the War of the Rebellion, the Brothers' War, and the Late Unpleasantness.

My oldest brother, Alfred, and my idol, was the first Midgley to muster into the Northern Army—as a lieutenant in the infantry. Musters were neighborhood events as the recruitment was local. He had been one of the founders of the local "Wide Awake" club. "Wide Awakes" formed in every county in the North, acting as a paramilitary group—mainly interested in the messages delivered by the newly formed Republican Party,

and, their candidate in the 1860 election—**Abraham Lincoln**. At the time of that election, an estimated 500,000 young men marched for Lincoln. When a muster was held, you can be sure that the Wide Awakes were among the first to enlist.

We sent Arthur off with a great farewell. I didn't muster as I was working as a Machinist and was encouraged to stay on the job- like a deferral. My employer made parts and pieces for the Federal Arsenal at Springfield—just 50 miles to the East.

In May of 1864, the notice that Alfred was a casualty of an engagement called "The Wilderness" hit me very hard. The Union won the Battle of the Wilderness and then the larger event, The Wilderness Campaign. The casualties were around 13,500 Union soldiers and 10,000 Confederate soldiers in this one battle. When the canvas shroud bearing Alfred's body came back to Worcester, he was missing his leg. The dispatch, or recounting of the battle, was very little compensation for the loss of my brother

with the wounded, the dying, and the dead. When the regiment on the right of the Tenth broke, the skirmishers, who had been caught between the lines of battles, endeavored to get back to our line ; a large proportion succeeded, but several, among them the gallant **Midgley**, received mortal wounds while endeavoring to get to their proper position in the line. **Midgley** was shot through the knee, and the bone was terribly shattered, rendering amputation necessary. All this time not an enemy could be seen. Perfectly covered by the woods and abattis, we could only fire at the direction of the flashes of light, and puffs of smoke from their rifles, while our men could undoubtedly be very distinctly seen by them. The Thirty-seventh was quickly advanced to the position vacated by the Second, and became at once engaged, partially drawing the fire that had been concentrated on the Tenth. The Tenth stood this terrible ordeal of fire until they had expended all their ammunition, and were then promptly relieved by the Seventh, under command of the gallant Lieutenant-Colonel Harlow.

When Alfred came home, I soon mustered into service with the rest of my locals and since a lot of us worked in the factories that made parts for cannons, we were put to the task as Company B, 2d Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. It was late on in the War Between the States and I didn't see action—only duty at stations that saw the northward travel of those that did and those that were sent home as Alfred was ... gallant but deceased.

I mustered out of the army on September 3, 1865 and returned to my factory job. However, when I got back to Worcester, my wife Alice said, "You're different, Eli. What is wrong?"

I knew that losing Alfred and seeing all those wounded men with missing limbs and, knowing that possibly I had helped make the machines that killed them, sent me into a fierce depression. My regimental surgeon told me that I had Civil War Trauma Syndrome. Like today's shell shock but worse. What bothered me most, though, was the thought that, someday, Alfred died because I or someone like me made the Napoleon 12 pounder cannon that took his life. Indeed, the cannons produced in Springfield were so much better than similar stock made by the Greycoats that, whenever the South captured Northern cannons, they scrapped theirs and used the superior Northern pieces.

While the Napoleon could shoot solid shot nearly a mile, its most insidious use was firing canisters of 25-27 separate balls, each about ½ inch up to 2 inches in diameter. Massed in a battery of six cannons, capable of being fired every 30 seconds, the Napoleon was a very effective weapon of both armies—slightly less than the number one killer of the Civil War--namely diarrhea and dysentery!

I lived with that and finally decided the only way to get over my malaise was to go as far as I could away from what got me into this mental pickle, to go as far North and West as I could go and still be in the United States **and** avoid the "Haters and Blamers". This latter group was dedicated to the cause of assigning blame for the Civil War. Shortly after the Reconstruction of the South began it became common to blame the Negroes; blame their enslavement as the war's cause. No way! The cause of the war was politics—the election of Abraham Lincoln and economics—the Gross Domestic Product of the entire South being just one-fourth of that of the single state of New York.

I chose to move as far to the northwest as possible and chose Washington. It had become a state in 1889, and I moved to the Spokane Valley area in 1908. I was able to purchase land and started a small orchard and supplemented my income by repairing farm equipment for my neighbors.

My death in 1916 was brought on by a heart attack and I took up permanent residence here in Pines Cemetery. My second wife, Jessie (my first, Alice passing in 1886) lived on our farm, now managed by my son Alfred. Alfred, named after my departed brother, was born in Worcester in 1888.

But slowly Jessie began to forget, well, not at first, she began to remember things wrong—wrong day, wrong people, wrong location. It grew too much for Alfred to run the

farm and be her caregiver. On the advice of the local Veteran's Service Office, he applied to the Washington Veterans hospital in Port Orchard, Washington, which provided care for eligible Civil War veterans and their spouses. Jessie Midgley died on January 30, 1923.

After her move to the Vets' Hospital, Alfred moved to Yakima and worked in the rapidly growing apple industry. His last move was to Montesano, Washington, where he passed in 1952.

So, here I am in Spokane Valley, my parents rest in Worcester, near my first wife and my brother and my son and second mate repose in Yakima. In rest, we are indeed a house divided.

Thank you for your interest in Eli Midgley!

Key sources for Eli Midgley presentation:

<https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-civil-war/>

https://www.historicalpublicationsllc.com/artillerymanmagazine/a-withering-hail-of-iron-grape-and-canister-in-the-civil-war/article_58f2dde2-bce9-11ec-aa97-2bd81b667dc8.html

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/casualties-of-the-civil-war.html>

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<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Midgley-1094>

<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/2648495:7667>

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<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/97761413/alfred-w-midgley>

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-99Z5->

[MW8D?view=index&personArk=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AQLYY-GHYP&action=view](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-99Z5-MW8D?view=index&personArk=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AQLYY-GHYP&action=view)

<https://recording.spokanecounty.org/recorder/web/login.jsp>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/182598265/jessie-midgley#view-photo=230195215>



James & Dora Russell

Susan Snodderley, May 2024, Walking with Ancestors Story

James Lee Russell has one of the most unique gravestones in Pines Cemetery. It resembles a sawed-off tree and was provided for his grave by the Woodmen of the World society. Their early headstones were known as “Woodmen markers or Woodmen monuments”. These markers were designed to be easily recognizable, unique, and were typically made of limestone or marble.



Woodmen of the World, one of the first fraternal benefit societies in the United States, was organized in 1890 by Joseph Cullen Root. Among its social and fraternal benefits, W.O.W. provided life insurance. Root first established Modern Woodmen of America in 1883. A lady's auxiliary, the Royal Neighbors of America, was established in 1888. In 1890, Root resigned from Modern Woodmen of America, and then he organized Woodmen of the World. Over 45,000 W.O.W. grave markers have been erected nationally. **Dum Tacet Clamat** “though silent he speaks” The symbols seen on Woodmen grave markers are, the axe, wedge and maul (a.k.a., beetle, sledge), a sawn log, and of course, a stump. 1,2

James L. Russell died from a fall into a deep well, suffering a skull fracture, broken arms and legs, according to his death certificate. He left behind Dora E. (Ritter) Russell, his wife, and daughters, Bertha May, age 18 years; Myrtle Ivy, 17 years; Rae Georgia, 13 years; and son, James Herbert, 3 years.

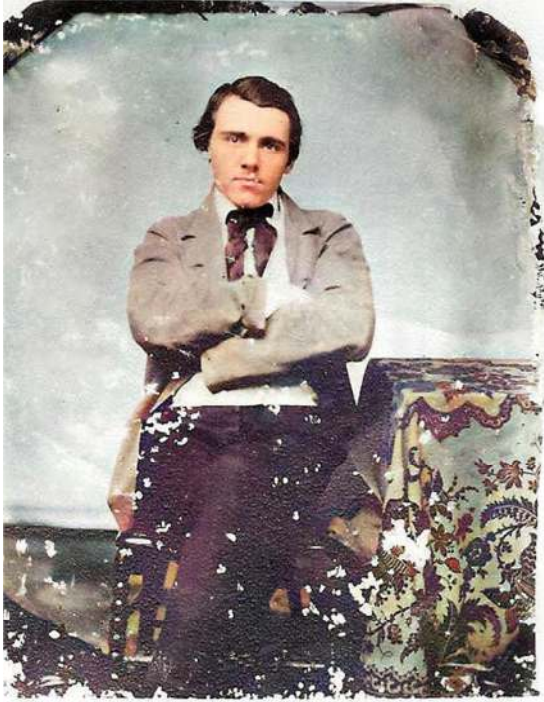
James was born on 12 March 1866 in Arkansas to William J. Russell (born April 1836 in Tennessee) and Sarah, his wife, (born about 1840 in Kentucky). They were on the 1870 Census with their three children, Ida, James and Catharine. By the 1880 Census, Williams' first wife is missing and he is married to Martha A. She seems to have brought children into the marriage, but they are listed under the last name Russell. William was a farmer or farm laborer, but James moved to Jasper County, Missouri, and worked in the mines in that area. He met Dora Edith Ritter and they were married on April 27, 1890, in Jasper Co, Missouri.

Dora E Ritter was the youngest daughter of John Ritter (born April 1841 in Porter Co, IN. died 03 Jun 1922 in Joplin, Jasper Co, MO) and Sabra E Daniels Ritter (born 25 Sept 1847 in Porter County and died on 27 Nov 1906 Joplin, Jasper County Missouri). John and Sabra were married in Nebraska and with two sons, born in Indiana, they first returned to Nebraska, and then moved to Kansas. They were living in Jefferson County, Kansas, in the 1875 Kansas State Census. They moved to Jasper County, Missouri, and in 1878 and her parents divorced. In the 1880 Census, and all subsequent censuses, Dora is listed as born in Kansas. She is living with her mother in 1880 and her mother's new husband, Cyrus Kidder (a miner) in Cherokee County, Kansas. Her father has a new wife in the 1880 census.

James and Dora's daughters were all born in Jasper County. James Herbert Russell, their son, was born in Burke, Shoshone County, Idaho on, Dec 28, 1906. By the time James died in 1909, the family was living in Opportunity, Spokane County, Washington. After James' death, Dora ran the family ranch near Opportunity. Dora never remarried, lived on the ranch and died Sept 06, 1961, in Spokane. She is buried next to James in the Pines Cemetery.

Dora's grandfather, Warren Daniels, was born in about 1818 in Vermont, according to the censuses. As far as I found, his line dead-ended there; I found no record of his birth. His first wife, Sabra's mother, was Caroline G Spencer. She was born in Tiffin, Seneca County, Ohio on Sept 10, 1820. She and Warren were divorced, or he left her, before 1859. They had a child born in Kansas in 1854, but then in the 1860 census he was married to Nancy Whitton, age 15 years, and was living in Minnesota. They were married on 14 April 1859 when she was 14 and he was 41. He got drunk and tried to run some rapids on a raft in a local river and drowned on the 23 of Sept 1867. Caroline died in Hobart, Lake County, Indiana, on 04 May 1871. On the 1870 census she was living with her youngest daughter, Emily, 16, and was listed as a tailoress. Her father, Abraham Spencer, was born in New York on March 20, 1792, and died on 1 Oct 1853 in Hobart, Lake County, Indiana. His wife was Diadema Crippen, born on 11 Sept 1794 and died April 23, 1851 in Hobart. They were married in 1812 Cayuga Co., NY. His father, Abner Spencer, was from Haddam, Middlesex County, Connecticut.





GEORGE A. WHEATON

A UNION SOLDIER'S ROMANCE IN SEARCH OF A REBEL'S BRIDE

Written by George Andrew Wheaton about
his own experience
during the Civil War,
submitted by great-granddaughter, Janice
Moerschel,
with thanks to cousin Jeff Garfield who
shared it with me

Along with the monotony of life in the tented field, the weary hours on picket duty – the tedious march – the tiresome drill – the skirmish and the fierce and deadly battle, the soldier of his country had here and there a romance to cheer him up and brighten the way.

It was late in the Spring of '64 just before the siege of Atlanta and General

Sherman's famous march from Atlanta to the Sea. The writer was at general headquarters, at that time in Nashville, Tennessee, under Major Kendrick, a loyal Union man, prosperous and influential in society, who had a son about twenty years of age who had enlisted in the Rebel Army, much to the discomfort of his parents. But this was not all – the giddy youth had just prior to his enlistment wed a plain country lass down in Georgia. This was most mortifying as they feared he had been very indiscreet, indeed wholly unmindful of his lineage and aristocratic family – they thought they should have had an opportunity to pass upon his selection of a wife.

Soon after he had entered the Rebel service he was, in some engagement, captured by the Union force and imprisoned at Camp Chase. Major Kendrick, claiming to be especially loyal and being in position of influence, sought and obtained the son's release on condition that he vouch for his loyalty henceforth and the lad bound himself by oath to future loyalty to the Union.

We were at that time boarding with Mrs. Barnard, the Major's sister. She had a son who was about the age of young Kendrick and his chum and when the Rebel soldier lad got home from Camp Chase, Barnard told K that I was about to go to the Front. Young K, the Rebel soldier, was very sad of heart after his liberation – his mind much on the Georgia bride way down in Dixey and, for his life, he dare not go for her. For if caught, he would be shot as a traitor to the Rebel flag. He surmised I might serve him and besought me, by all that was good, when we reached the Front to seek out his loved

one and restore her to him. We argued the impossibility of accomplishing his wish when our Union lines were not as far South as the home of the bride but he thought the Union lines might speedily advance and then my opportunity would appear. Finally, at his very earnest solicitation and pleading, we undertook the mission of hunting his Georgia bride.

When we reached the front of our Army lines near Dalton, Georgia, we learned the lady he was seeking was 11 miles beyond, within the Rebel lines, but having undertaken the task of getting her we were not dismayed. Donning citizen's garb and with necessary passes from headquarters, we proceeded into Dixey with every sense awake to the danger of the enterprise.

We had not gone far when, to our consternation, we saw a Rebel Cavalry squad coming down the road – we immediately disappeared in the thicket and hid until the clatter of the horses' hooves sounded far away. Later we saw other armed Rebels in the distance and were careful not to make ourselves conspicuous until they were well out of sight. Cautiously plodding on over rough roads and fields, we at last reached the home of the bride.

After carefully scrutinizing the premises we approached the house, knocked at the door, and the mother of the bride responded. She was not the one we particularly wanted to see. We inquired for Mrs. Kendrick – the mother retired and sent the daughter, the bride, to the door. On her appearance we were in no haste whatever to divulge our errand. We requested of her a drink of water which she speedily brought, we took ample time to empty the goblet, meantime carefully scrutinizing the giver. At last we made inquiry for her husband – she could not tell just where he was. Finally, I told her I'd seen him and immediately her eyes were open wide. I handed her a letter from her husband directing her to come with me to him.

We were invited into the house but had not been long therein until at a spring at the foot of a hill near the home a troop of Rebel Cavalry appeared. The bride with great haste stuck us in an old closet and locked us in with an old broom wardrobe – generally we were in as close quarters there as ever in our lives and the soldiers would be at the house – perhaps they were really in my pursuit. I just had to wait my release – would the bride give me away? We thought not. The Rebel Cavalrymen came up to the house, prowled about but without suspicion, as far as we know, of my being there. At last the soldiers left and I was released with a merry laugh from the bride at my discomfort.

At night there was a consultation, the bride with her parents, and at last they called me in and informed me their daughter would not go one step with a strange Union soldier, etc. At this the bride just stood up and stamped, declaring she'd go anyway with me at

her husband's request. The parents were appalled. Said she could not go. There was no way to convey her trunk as they had an animal in the pasture but no vehicle. We said if you have no carriage or wagon, who has? They replied that there was an old Rebel down the road a mile or so who had the required conveyance. "All right," we said, "We'll go and get it in the morning." They said, "He'll not let it go." We said, "He will."

In the morning we took a shot gun and proceeded to the old Rebel who had the buggy. On meeting him he said he could not think of loaning his vehicle to such a hazardous enterprise. At last we told him we'd just take it anyway and, if he was quiet about it, he'd get it back. Otherwise he'd never see it again. We took the buggy and the bride went to the field and captured and harnessed the mare, and I supposed we were ready to go. But here the mother set up she had to go along to see her daughter off and bring back the mare and buggy. We were crestfallen but submitted to fate and the mother and bride occupied the only seat; the bride's trunk was fastened behind, and we marched in the rear.

On arrival at the Union line we produced the necessary pass for the admission of the bride and myself. The mother took her affectionate adieu of the daughter and proceeded on her journey homeward and we suppose the buggy reached again its Rebel owner. We took the bride to the hotel in Chattanooga and the next morning wired the husband of our coming – he was at the depot to greet us on our arrival and we were much impressed over the joy of the young couple to be again together.

The family of the young man made the best of the situation and at once bedecked the young woman with fine clothes in lieu of her primitive garb. And in a short time made a great party to which many were invited to greet the bridal couple. We were of the invited guests and when we met at the party the lady we escorted from Georgia, we would hardly have known her as she was so adorned in silk satin and ribbons. She said to us on the side, "If you ever come our way Sir, the latch string will be out" and we were fully rewarded for our risky adventure.

About George Andrew Wheaton. He was born at Chester, Connecticut, on 20 Sep 1837. His parents, George Wheaton and Mehetable Webb Story, moved to Minnesota in about 1854. Meanwhile, at about that time, George was employed at his uncle Noah Wheaton's sash and blind store in New York City. By 1861, George was managing his Uncle's store in Charleston, South Carolina, where he witnessed the bombardment of Fort Sumter, marking the start of the Civil War. On the 5th of June, he left Charleston and headed back to Minnesota where he joined the 2nd Minnesota, Company D, at Fort Snelling on the 27th of June. His service in the Civil War included action at: Pittsburg Landing (Shiloh) and Chickamauga, battles which were pivotal in the Union's fight against the Confederacy.

He married Grace Minerva Walcott at her family's home in St. Peter, Minnesota on 11 May 1869. He and Grace had five children together. He was a master carpenter who built some of the old buildings in Minneapolis. He died on 1 Feb 1915 of pneumonia at the age of 77. During the post-war years, he was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic and attended reunions in the Minneapolis area. He was a founding member of the Plymouth Congregational Church and active in the First Congregational Church (both churches located in Minneapolis, Minnesota). George is buried at the Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

About Kendrick. Unfortunately, George did not provide any first names in his story, so we are left to guess about the identities of the Confederate soldier and his father, the Union Major. I did some research and was unable to make the connections I hoped. I discovered two "Frank Kendrick" soldiers (one in Confederate Cavalry and one in Confederate Infantry). Both held as POWs. One married (at right time and place) Lunartha J. Williams at Dalton, Georgia, was held at Camp Chase and released. However, I made no connection to this man having a Union Army Major as his father and have been unable to firmly identify that man.



AI and Genealogy: Trouble Ahead?

Thomas MacEntee, of Genealogy Bargains

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While AI (artificial intelligence) might be the current “hot” buzz word, the fact is that many genealogy vendors and even genealogists have already been using this technology for years. The AI industry is at a crossroads and within the next five years, it will permeate almost every aspect of business and society. Learn how AI is currently being used to improve the genealogy experience, and whether or not you should seek out other uses of artificial intelligence for your own genealogy research.

What is Artificial Intelligence and Why Should I Be Concerned?

AI stands for Artificial Intelligence and represents computer-based systems that can “mimic” human intelligence. The goal is to have these systems perform human tasks.

A task could be as simple as entering a customer service-related question on a company’s website and having AI generate a response. It might appear simple - a looks up of a response posted to the chat panel. However, AI-based systems might prompt you with more questions in order to generate the most helpful answer. The system could capture your questions and “learn” more about the way you use the product in order to better respond in the future.

Another example: you could ask **ChatGPT** - one of more popular AI platforms - to compose a poem about genealogy. And taking it one step further, you could add “in the style of” Shakespeare, Keats, Robert Frost, Maya Angelou, etc.

The most discussed features of artificial intelligence are “deep learning” and “generative AI.” Deep learning mimics the human brain in that it looks for patterns using vast amounts of information to interpret photos, audio, and text. Generative AI actually “generates” new photos, audio, and text, based on information provided by the user, and again, uses its own database of “training data” to understand patterns and generate output that matches the user’s query.

AI Platforms

While genealogy vendors such as MyHeritage are incorporating artificial intelligence into the features they provide to users, there are some popular AI platforms open to the public that you might want to consider using.

- **ChatGPT:** Meaning “Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer,” ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com/>) is the most popular publicly-accessible artificial intelligence platform.
- **Copilot:** Copilot (<https://copilot.microsoft.com>) is an AI-powered intelligent assistant that helps you get answers and inspirations from across the web, supports creativity and collaboration, and helps you focus on the task at hand.
- **Gemini:** Developed by Google, **Gemini** (<https://gemini.google.com/>) formerly known as Bard, describes itself as “a family of AI models developed by Google's AI research labs DeepMind and Google Research. Gemini is Google's largest and most flexible AI model, able to run on data centers and mobile devices.”
- **Perplexity:** A relative newcomer in the world of AI platforms, Perplexity (<https://www.perplexity.ai/>) presents a curated list of sources when answering user queries.

AI and Genealogy

Current uses of AI by Genealogy Vendors and others

Believe it or not, genealogists have already benefited from artificial intelligence whether it is just spelling and grammar check in Microsoft Word when writing a family story or genealogical report ... to ... searching for family in the 1950 United States Census which was indexed using artificial intelligence’s ability to decipher handwriting.

- **Family photos:** MyHeritage has been offering a variety of photo enhancement tools over the past three years including ways to colorize images and make them clearer. In addition there are tools that can “animate” an ancestor based on a photo and even help determine the date of an image based on characteristics such as fashion styles, hair styles, and more. The new Reimagine tool announced recently offers all these tools in an easy-to-use app.
- **Transcription:** The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in conjunction with Ancestry and FamilySearch used artificial intelligence to index the 1950 US Census population schedules released in April 2022. Entries made by enumerators were scanned and transcribed then released for use at a much faster rate than what was accomplished with manual indexing performed for the 1940 US Census release in 2012. For the 1950 US Census, users were encouraged to review the transcriptions and submit corrections as part of a community effort by genealogists and other researchers.
- **Searching for and suggesting records:** Ancestry and other genealogy platforms have been listing “related” or “suggested” records in the sidebar of the webpage when a user is viewing a record as part of a search. In addition “hints” will often pop up suggesting records and family trees that a researcher might want to review due to similarities in data.
- **DNA matches:** With over 30 million people having used personal DNA testing kits, 23andMe, AncestryDNA, FamilyTreeDNA, and MyHeritage all leverage AI to find connections between testers based on shared DNA data. Given the sheer amount of information involved, these match results are only possible with artificial intelligence.

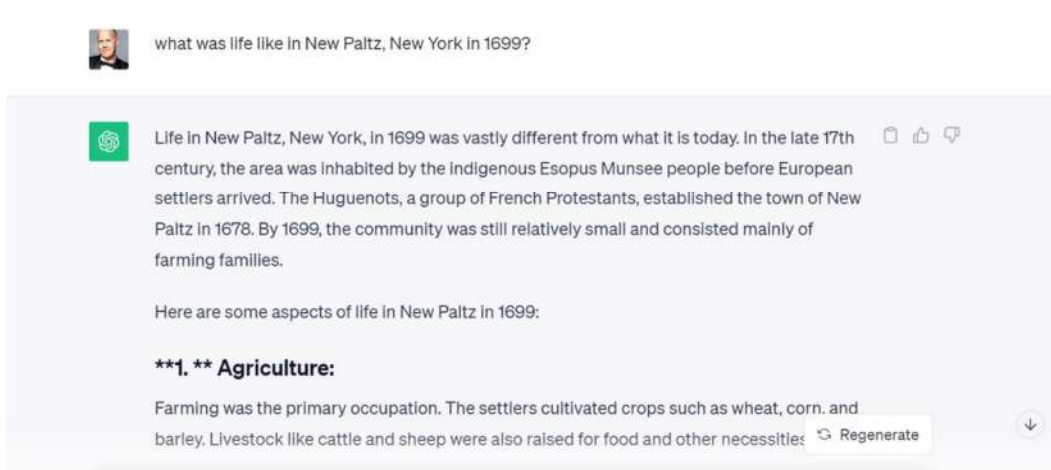
Examples

Here are a few examples of how you can use the major AI platforms when searching for ancestors.

Social history

Hugo Freer, my 9th great-grandfather, settled in New Paltz, New York along with other Huguenot settlers about 1675. His house - the Freer-Low House - built in 1699 is still standing. Wanting to know more about how Freer lived, I used this query at ChatGPT:
What was life like in New Paltz, New York in 1699?

The results:



Source: "What was life like in New Paltz, New York in 1699?" prompt. ChatGPT, ChatGPT 3.5 version, OpenAI, 1 October 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>.

The information provided is extensive but also rather generic for any location on the East Coast of the United States. In addition, the section on housing states the use of wooden buildings with thatched roofs, when in fact New Paltz was known for its early homes built using stones excavated from the fields.

Record sets

My 3rd great-grandfather Gustave Henneberg arrived in New York from Germany about 1881. I posed the following query at Perplexity in order to determine which records I should use for research purposes: **What records can I use to locate an ancestor who arrived in New York City in 1881?**

The results:



Source: "What records can I use to locate an ancestor who arrived in New York City in 1881?" prompt. Perplexity, version 1.0.21, Perplexity, 13 October 2023, <https://www.perplexity.ai/>.

Perplexity bills itself as different from ChatGPT and Gemini in that it curates sources which are presented at the top of the generated content.

Transcription

Robert Austin was the brother of my great-grandfather John Ralph Austin (1896-1976). Robert drowned in 1924 at Long Beach, New York while trying to rescue a child. I uploaded a newspaper article about the incident to Gemini and in the query prompt entered: **Transcribe**

The results:

Gemini Advanced ▾



transcribe verbatim

DROWNED AT LONG BEACH
Robert Austin, Formerly of Lowville,
Loses Life on Labor Day
While Bathing.
Robert Austin, 30, son of Mr. and
Mrs. William D. Austin, formerly of
Lowville, was drowned at Long Beach,
L. I. Monday, but the particulars of
the accident are at hand. The Austin
family removed from the village to
New York several years ago. Robert
Austin was born here October 15,
1894. At the time of his death he held
the responsible position of office
manager for the D. W. Griffith Motion
Picture Corporation, being in charge
of the New York office. He was mar-
ried about two years ago. Besides his
wife and parents he leaves four broth-
ers, Stanley, Harry, Ralph and Law-
ton, all of New York city.

Show drafts ▾ 🔊



Sure, here is the verbatim transcription of the newspaper article in the image:

DROWNED AT LONG BEACH

Robert Austin, Formerly of Lowville,

Source: Uploaded article "Drowned at Long Beach" with the query "Transcribe verbatim". Gemini, Gemini Advanced version, Google, 8 Feb 2024, <https://gemini.google.com/>.

Gemini Advanced did a great job despite the article image having some clarity issues!

Relationships

During my genealogy research, I've located a person to whom I'm related via a maternal great-grandmother. The document I am using for research states that the person was my great-grandmother's niece. Using Gemini Advanced, I want to determine how I am related to this person. **How am I related to my great-grandmother's niece?**

The results:

Gemini Advanced ▾



how am I related to my great-grandmother's niece?

Show drafts ▾



Your great-grandmother's niece is your first cousin, twice removed. Here's the breakdown:

- **Your great-grandmother's niece:** This person shares your great-grandparents as their grandparents.
- **First cousin:** This indicates you are in the same generation, descended from the same great-grandparents.
- **Twice removed:** This means there are two generations of difference between you. You are descended from your great-grandparents, while your great-grandmother's niece is descended from their sibling.

Source: "How am I related to my great-grandmother's niece?". Gemini, Gemini Advanced version, Google, 8 February 2024, <https://gemini.google.com/>.

Copyright and AI

There are several issues involving artificial intelligence and intellectual property that should concern you. Some of these issues have already been discussed and decided by agencies and courts. Many of them, however, have not been resolved.

The two main issues are:

- **AI-generated content:** Can content that is created by artificial intelligence based on your query be copyrighted? What if you ask Gemini to generate an image of what your 5th great-grandfather who fought in the Revolutionary War might look like? And the query was based on your research information as to his physical description taken from letters or diaries? Who owns the resulting image?

Currently, lower courts have stated that AI-generated content cannot be copyrighted since there is no human author. Much like the case of the "Macaque monkey selfie" where a monkey took a selfie photograph using equipment set up by a British photographer, there is no "consent" involved. Animals cannot give consent or enter into a legal agreement so it was determined that the resulting image was copyright free. The courts are using the same method to determine who owns that ancestor photo you generated using artificial intelligence.

- **Source or reference content:** Which leads to the next copyright issue of how AI platforms are gathering their reference information used to generate content. When asking ChatGPT to generate a sonnet about genealogy in the style of Shakespeare, the algorithm must have Shakespeare's sonnets in order to understand his writing style and create the genealogy sonnet.

In this case, all of Shakespeare's works are in the public domain according to United States copyright laws. But what about an author such as Tom Clancy or Stephen King whose works are still under copyright? And what about AI-generated images or even recordings based on a celebrity's image and voice? Most platforms are not transparent as to what reference content is being used and how it was acquired. This becomes an ethical issue and only furthers general fears about artificial intelligence.

AI and Source Citations

Those new to genealogy and family history soon learn the importance of source citations in proving relationships as well as facts about an ancestor. Usually source citations document how we find and use records such as census population schedules, death certificates, and even letters or diaries.

For the most part, you won't find records when making queries on an AI platform. But you may find information that serves as a clue for further research or, more likely, as social history about how an ancestor lived. In these situations, a method of citing AI-generated content is needed.

Citing sources need not be intimidating or time consuming. Stick to the basics: the information found, how it was found, information about where it was found, and locator data so another researcher can find the information.

For artificial intelligence content, here's the formula you might consider using as proposed by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA):

"[QUERY]" prompt. [NAME OF AI PLATFORM], [DATE OR VERSION OF PLATFORM], [NAME OF AI COMPANY], [DATE OF QUERY], [PLATFORM URL]

So, if I asked ChatGPT to determine the value of my great-grandfather's home in the 1930 US Census listed as \$80,000 in 2024 dollars, here is the source citation I would use:

"Value of home in the 1930 US Census listed as \$80,000 in 2024 dollars" prompt. ChatGPT, ChatGPT 3.5 version, OpenAI, 1 October 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>.

Future Uses of AI for Genealogy

The concern over artificial intelligence in general, and specifically in family history research, is similar to the concern over social media almost 15 years ago. Remember when genealogists were worried about Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter)?

We are experiencing the “First Phase” of using artificial intelligence when it comes to genealogy and family history research. Five years from now we should be in “Second Phase” mode. What does this mean?

Remember when Netscape was THE BROWSER everyone used when the Internet became popular in the early 1990s? And MYSPACE was THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM? Well, the second phase apps - Google and Facebook respectively - are now the most popular. The second phase of a new technology usually brings vast improvements in terms of functionality, ease-of-use, and value.

Here’s a short list of what you can expect to see in the next five years:

- DNA triangulation tools that will quickly determine relationships on family trees.
- Conversion of handwriting into searchable text including older forms of English and German handwriting.
- Creation of source citations for a variety of records using specific formats such as MLA, Evidence Explained, and AP style.
- Discovering connections between F.A.N. club members using digitized historical newspapers content and other records.
- Identification of ancestors in old family photos based on “traits” such as facial features including connecting family members based on similar traits.
- Suggesting records for expanding genealogical searches including those records not yet digitized.

AI: The Good and the Bad

With all the “hype” about artificial intelligence, it can be difficult to figure out not only what is true about this technology, but also the benefits and drawbacks. Here is an explanation of the elements of AI that have impacted or will impact how we search for ancestors.

The Good

There seem to be endless possibilities for using artificial intelligence when searching for ancestors. This makes for an exciting time to be doing genealogy.

- **Analyzing vast amounts of data:** Yes there is a lot of information available online for genealogy research, but humans cannot possibly analyze that information as quickly as artificial intelligence. This allows for discovering new connections between data points and better understanding migration patterns and motivations, F.A.N. club relationships, the impact of social history on our ancestors, and more. What is not obvious immediately to our human minds can be quickly determined by using artificial intelligence.
- **Block chaining:** I've long been an advocate of using block chaining for genealogy data, especially DNA data. Block chaining involves tagging data with specific information including ownership, and tracking its use by others. The chain of use is kept in a public "ledger" and the owner can better understand who is using that data and why.
- **Translation and transcription:** As already demonstrated with the release of the 1950 US Census images, AI promises to make the transcription and translation of record images faster and easier. I recently uploaded a newspaper clipping from a historical newspaper that has not yet been digitized, and the AI platform did an amazing job in transcribing the content.
- **Timelines and mapping:** For those genealogists who want to fill in the "dash" between an ancestor's birth date and death date, artificial intelligence can help build complex timelines as well as "map" event dates to locations for a better understanding of how our ancestors lived.

The Bad

While many see artificial intelligence as a panacea that can cure many problems that come with genealogical research, AI can also be a Pandora's box filled with its own set of problems.

- **Lack of transparency:** One of the biggest issues for users of AI is the inability of the user to determine the source of the reference material used when generating content. Another issue: recognizing AI-generated content. Most users do not add source citations to AI-generated content or watermarks to AI-generated images.

- **Bias:** Studies have proven that many AI platforms can be biased, especially since content used as reference material is supplied by humans. The same biases we see in terms of race, gender, and age are easily replicated by artificial intelligence. Recent examples have included a bias towards generating white or caucasian faces rather than people of color when creating certain images.
- **Copyright:** Many copyright and intellectual property issues related to AI have popped up in the past year. US courts have ruled that content created by artificial intelligence cannot be copyrighted. In addition, several content creators including authors and performers have sued major AI platforms such as ChatGPT and Gemini for scraping copyright protected content from the internet to help create AI-generated content.
- **False information:** As platforms using AI gather information, who or what is determining what is true and what is false? A recent example of a law firm submitting a legal filing created by artificial intelligence - resulting in a list of fictitious court cases to support legal arguments - demonstrates the problem. This is another reason that “human review” is often required before relying upon AI-generated content.
- **Privacy violations:** Artificial intelligence can quickly collect data entered at genealogy platforms when performing research and creating family trees. In addition, users are tracked as to searches performed and this data is analyzed to create new features and products. More importantly, DNA data is captured and despite privacy policies that ensure the use of only metadata, recent computer hacks at vendors such as 23andMe have caused a steep decline in the number of people using personal DNA test kits.
- **High costs:** While not often discussed, deploying artificial intelligence can be expensive for vendors, resulting in higher prices for the genealogy consumer. The machines and servers used for AI processes require more powerful chips as well as simply just more power to run. Besides an increase in costs, there are environmental and climate impact costs through the need for more energy to power AI computers.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is seen as powerful but also as something to be feared. It isn't much different than how our earliest ancestors reacted to the discovery of fire. That new technology had great benefits and advanced progress in many areas of human life. But fire also brought new dangers and uses that might not have been anticipated.

The best way to cut through the current hype and misinformation around AI is to stay informed. Learn from other genealogists how they are using artificial intelligence to improve their genealogy research.

Whether you decide to take a full plunge or just dip your toe in the AI pond, you'll discover amazing possibilities and ways to take your search for your roots to the next level.

Resources

- ***AI & Genealogy: Harnessing the Power of Artificial Intelligence for Family History Research*** - MyHeritage Knowledgebase
<https://education.myheritage.com/article/ai-genealogy-harnessing-the-power-of-artificial-intelligence-for-family-history-research/?lcpt=article>
- **AI Record Finder** - MyHeritage
<https://www.myheritage.com/research/ai-record-finder/>
- **BanyanDNA**
<https://www.banyandna.com>
- **ChatGPT**
<https://chat.openai.com/>
- **CoPilot**
<https://copilot.microsoft.com/>
- **Disclosing Use of AI for Writing Assistance in Genealogy** - Family Locket
<https://familyloket.com/disclosing-use-of-ai-for-writing-assistance-in-genealogy/>
- **Gemini**
<https://gemini.google.com/>
- **Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence (AI)** - Facebook group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1255245945084761>
- **Genealogy Eyes** - ChatGPT
<https://chat.openai.com/g/g-gmlAn5mh6-genealogy-eyes>
- ***How do I cite generative AI in MLA style?*** - Modern Language Association of America
<https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/>
- ***Intersection of AI & Copyright*** - Copyright Clearance Center
<https://www.copyright.com/resource-library/insights/intersection-ai-copyright/>
- ***Introducing AI Biographer™: Create a Wikipedia-like Biography for Any Ancestor Using AI, Enriched with Historical Context*** - MyHeritage

<https://blog.myheritage.com/2023/12/introducing-ai-biographer-create-a-wikipedia-like-biography-for-any-ancestor-using-ai-enriched-with-historical-context/>

- **MyHeritage Photo Features: What They Are & How to Use Them** - MyHeritage
<https://education.myheritage.com/article/myheritage-photo-features/>
- **Perplexity**
<https://www.perplexity.ai/>

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