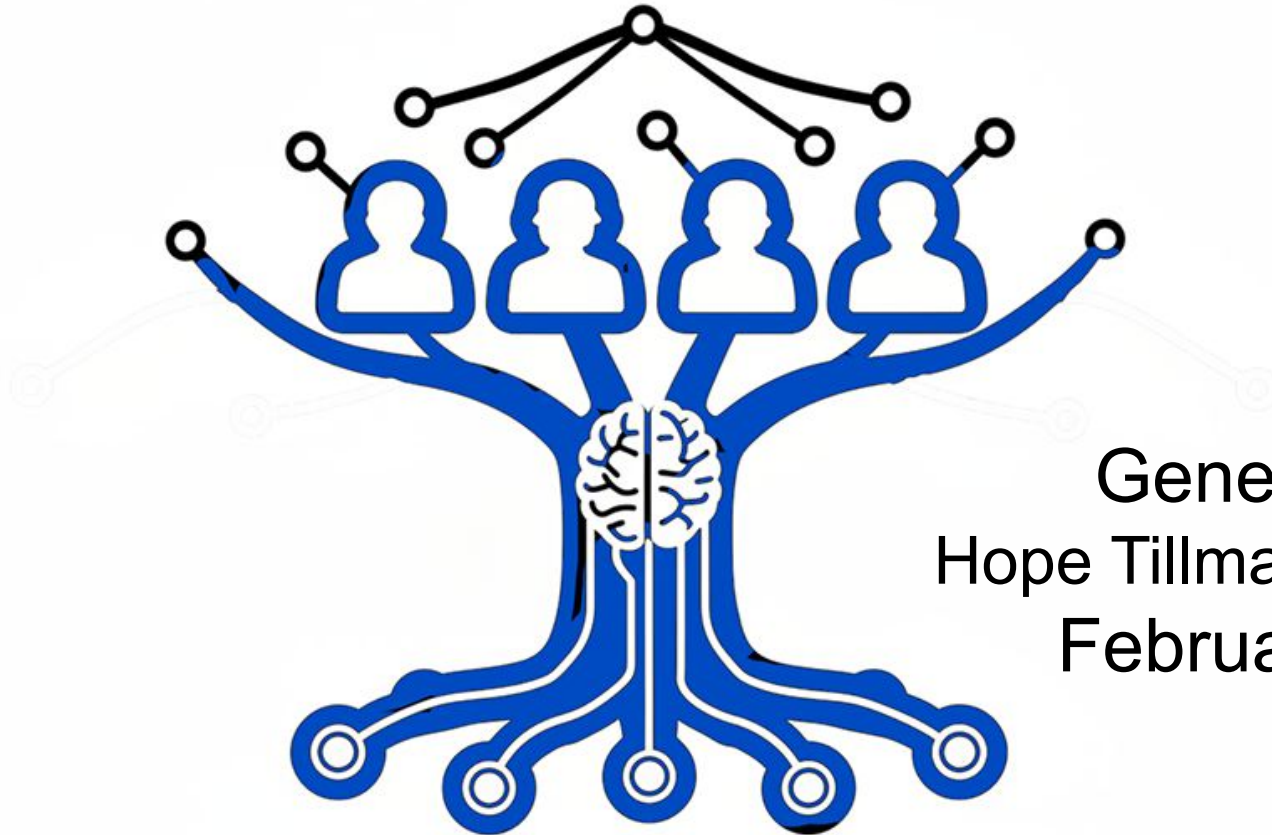


AI Uses of Genealogy



Genealogy Club
Hope Tillman and Walt Howe
February 13, 2026

What is AI in Genealogy?

- General AI tools (for instance, ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini)
- Platform-specific AI
 - Ancestry hints, FamilySearch indexing, MyHeritage tools
- Key capabilities:
 - Suggestions, Transcription, Research assistance

Treat AI as a research assistant, not a substitute for evidence-based genealogical methodology.

What to Do

- Brainstorm record types and repositories
- Suggest jurisdictions and time periods
- Generate research checklists

Example: “I’m a professional genealogist looking at the Howe ancestors living in Roxbury, Massachusetts in the 1600’s. What church and tax records should I be sure to look at?”

Ancestry



- Tree-hints are AI-driven suggestions - clue:
- Ancestry trains machine learning models on millions of simulated and real historical documents
- The AI reads every field—not just names, but ages, occupations, relationships, and addresses—using a “confidence score framework” that blends automated predictions with human volunteer review for accuracy.



Family Search

Indexing

- Historical records are digitized, then images are transcribed by AI handwriting/OCR models into machine-readable text.
- This machine-generated text forms a computer-assisted index that can be searched and refined instead of starting from a blank image.
- The AI is being trained to handle more languages and older handwriting styles so more global record sets can be indexed.

Why AI Matters for Genealogists - Research planning assistance

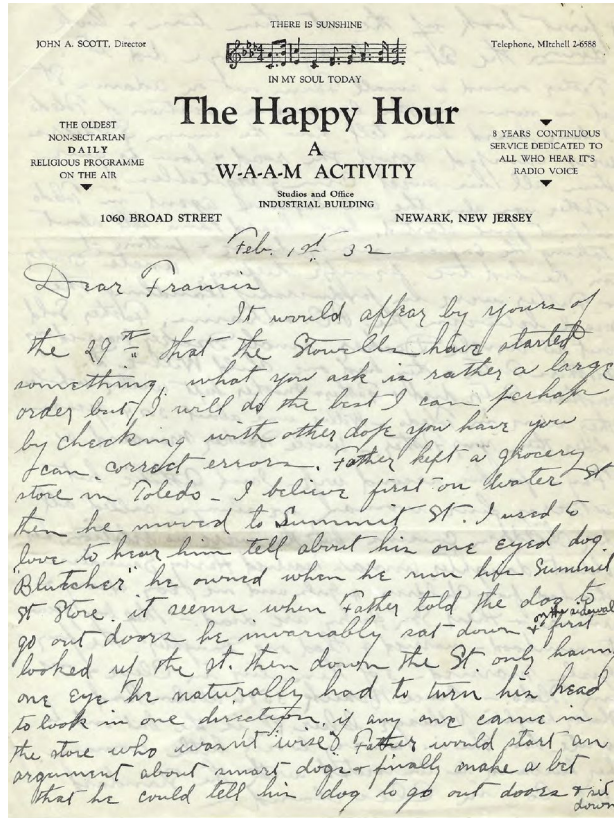
Chat GPT 5.1	Planning & checklists	“Act as expert genealogist: Plan research for Abraham Howe, Roxbury MA 1600s, gaps in parents.”	Structured data, Very strong at stepwise reasoning and turning your notes into ordered, cite-able plans and question lists.
Claude	Writing reports /stories	Rewrite this timeline into a narrative	Natural prose, preserves your voice
Gemini 3.0	Deep research synthesis & huge context	“You are my research assistant. Ingest this entire project file (timelines, maps, notes) and 1) surface possible research questions, 2) suggest gaps, 3) draft a multi-part plan.”	Handles very large inputs (up to ~1M tokens) and can reason across mixed formats—notes, PDFs, images, and code—making it useful for big, multi-source genealogy projects and AI-driven “deep research” summaries.
Perplexity	Research; Source location; Transcription	“Where to find 1820s Clearfield PA tax records?”; Upload image: “Transcribe this letter.	Strong web retrieval with inline citations, ideal for locating collections, guides, and finding aids, then cross-checking any AI-generated plan or hypothesis Cited links to archives, messy handwriting

Transcription & Data Extraction

- Transcribe handwritten documents
- Extract names/dates from obituaries and articles
- Create tables from unstructured text
- Transcribe old printed and typewritten documents
- Improve documents created with early OCR

Why AI Matters for Genealogists

Handwriting transcription and OCR



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Dear Francis,

It would appear by yours of the 29th that the Stowells have started something; what you ask is rather a large order but I will do the best I can, perhaps by checking with other dope you have you can correct errors. Father kept a grocery store in Toledo – I believe first on Water St. then he moved to Summit St. I used to love to hear him tell about his one-eyed dog “Blutcher” he owned when he run the Summit St. store. It seems when Father told the dog to go outdoors he invariably sat down on the sidewalk, first looked up the St. then down the St. Only having one eye he naturally had to turn his head to look in one direction. If anyone came in the store who wasn’t wise Father would start an argument about smart dogs & finally make a bet that he could tell his dog to go outdoors & sit down & first look up the St. then turn & look down the St. & the dog always did it.

Father owned a small farm out on Adams St.; it is now in the business section of Toledo. I have heard him tell how the Union soldiers were camped across the road & how he gave them all his sweet corn & vegetables.

Father was also the U.S. Express agent in Toledo when it first started, have heard him tell about taking the express money home & putting it in the bed-tick for safe keeping. Uncle Decker & Father were in partnership handling the mail between the P.O. & trains. Father

Gemini versus Perplexity (Gemini transcription on left and Perplexity on right)

Transcription: FNT-Diary1910 1.pdf

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- quite blow the mach - at least - zor as they appeal to me
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100

be busy & to feel that my work counts. Have four girls working for me now & we will soon be turning out a raft of stuff. Guess I've been half idle so long that I am enjoying the change. Only I would like to know how long it was to last.

Am in one of my usual states of being quite "interested" in a male person :) or it should have been :(He's quite nice — the only man in the entire aggregation that is anywhere near "par". Perhaps that's why I like to talk to him occasionally — to relieve the dead level of the thing. The rest of the men in the "shop" are with the exception of the three married ones, Messrs Burnett, Bonas & Parker, quite below the mark — at least as far as they appeal to me — not even "interesting".

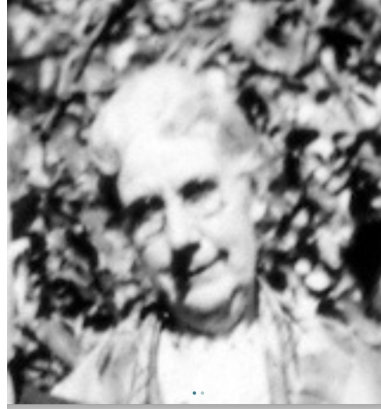
Am pretty busy all the time — of course some days more than others and today was a busy one. I like everything but chasing after material for the Bulletin "Elec. Power" First issue. 1

Why AI Matters for Genealogists - Photographs

Photo research analysis



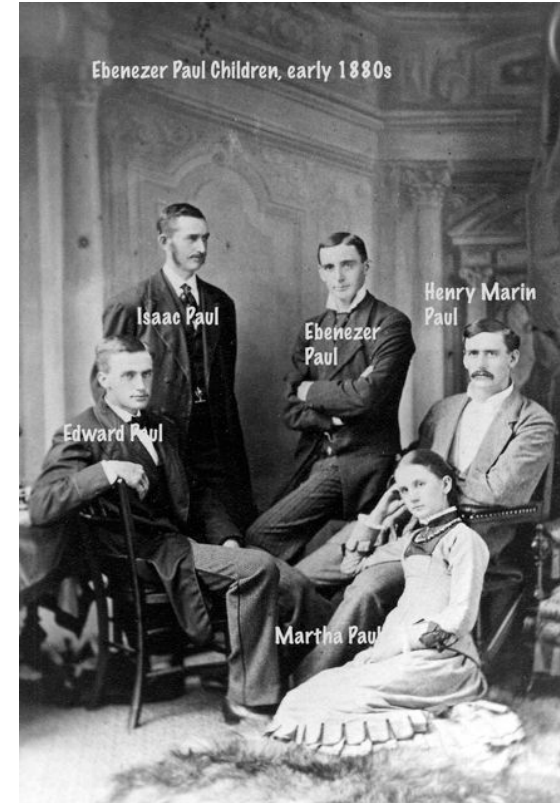
Henry



Martha



Isaac



Record Types - Help Explain migration patterns and naming customs

Prompt: You know there was a migration in your family.

Ask about it.

Query: Richard Tillman was born in Virginia about 1727 and died in North Carolina in 1800. Did he and his family (wife Anne Randle) migrate alone or with a group and why and when?

Records confirm Richard and Ann selling land to John Harrison in Brunswick Co. on 8 Jan 1783, with a query noting they were living in Montgomery Co., NC “by that time,” suggesting migration shortly after (likely 1783–1785).

No Named Group: Queries mention no wagon train or specific migration party; likely informal with kin like other Randles/Tillmans amid land exhaustion and tax pressures.

Record Types - To Help with Law, Geography and Social History

AI can scan many record sets at once, pull out names/places/dates, and then “cluster” or summarize what they reveal about:

- What laws applied (age of consent, property rights, immigration rules).
- What the geography really looked like (jurisdictions, migration paths, neighborhoods).
- How people actually lived (work, religion, conflict, health, community life).

Record Types - To help interpret occupation terminology

Record types like censuses, city directories, and employment records often list occupations with outdated terminology that AI can decode instantly

What does someone listed as a “scrivener” actually do?

Census takers used shorthand or regional terms, and jobs evolved fast with industrialization—AI bridges the gap by cross-referencing with historical glossaries.

The type of prompt to use: “Based on this job in 1870 Baltimore, what laws/geography/social issues affected them?”

Writing & Documentation

- Draft research summaries and narratives
- Organize source lists and timelines
 - put them in APA or MLA style
- Generate biographical sketches (to fact-check)
- Edit and improve research notes

Good Types of Questions to Query

- Explain genealogy concepts (FAN club, cluster research)
- Suggest additional source types
- Learn DNA basics and analysis
- Get methodology coaching

Never Let AI Do Your Tree

- AI invents people and relationships
- Not trained on genealogical proof standards
- Cannot verify accuracy of family connections
-  Don't ask: "Who are the ancestors of John Smith born 1820 Ohio?"

AI is Not a Source

- Must verify all claims in original records
- Apply Genealogical Proof Standard
- AI = research assistant, not evidence
- Always cite actual documents, not AI output

Question Auto-Hints & Matches

- Ancestry/FamilySearch hints can be wrong
- Merged identities and false matches common
- Evaluate each hint critically
- Don't accept suggestions blindly

Beware Fabricated Content

- AI-generated ancestor images aren't real
- “Life story” tools fill gaps with fiction
- Emotionally persuasive ≠ historically accurate
- Distinguish fact from speculation

Privacy & Ethics Concerns

- **Data Privacy:**

Be aware of DNA and tree data sharing risks

- **Living People and Sensitive Information**

Never upload living relatives' information unless the site protects living people

- **Responsible AI principles**

Read terms of service carefully (You can ask AI to help you summarize it)

- **Respect ancestral dignity in storytelling**

Encourage respectful storytelling and avoiding sensationalized or speculative AI-generated content about real people.

Responsible AI Principles

- Accuracy: verify everything
- Transparency: disclose AI assistance
- Privacy: protect living people
- Education: stay informed on best practices

When to Skip or Be Skeptical About AI

- Complex identity problems
- Conflicting evidence requiring detailed analysis
- Sensitive family situations
- Cases needing traditional record-driven research

DEMOS Google's NotebookLM

 NotebookLM

 Settings



Create new notebook



FNT Diary

Feb 4, 2026 · 50 sources



James Rogers Tillman

Feb 12, 2026 · 1 source



Oliver Hunt Howe
Journal

Feb 12, 2026 · 11 sources



DNA Research

Feb 4, 2026 · 10 sources



Albert Morey Sturtevant

Feb 12, 2026 · 3 sources



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