

Big Sky Roundup

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
MONTANA STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Desirée Funston

Fall is here in Montana, and I hope you're enjoying the cooler days and beautiful autumn colors. It's also a great time to settle in with a cup of coffee, pull out those family records, and see what new discoveries are waiting for us!

First, I want to say a big thank-you to the Lewis and Clark County Genealogical Society for hosting our 2026 conference. These events take a lot of time and effort to organize, and we truly appreciate your hard work and warm hospitality. It's always good to get together, share ideas, learn something new, and catch up with fellow genealogy enthusiasts.

I'd also like to welcome Diane Ascherman as our new Vice President for Programs and Stacey Corcino in her new role as Registrar. Thank you both for stepping up to help our society. We're fortunate to have members willing to share their time and talents, and I look forward to working with you!

Family historians know that even a small clue can lead to a wonderful discovery. Maybe this fall you'll find a record you've been searching for, solve a family mystery, or learn something unexpected about an ancestor. And if you don't, that's okay, too. Every step helps us get a little closer to understanding our family stories.

Happy researching, and enjoy the season!

OFFICERS:

President: Desirée
Funston (2023 - 2028)

Vice President for
Programs: Diane
Ascherman (2026 - 2028)

Vice President for
Development: Julie
Bushmaker (2025 - 2027)

Secretary: Dianne
Klinski (2023 - 2027)

Treasurer: Terry Atwood
(2013 - 2028)

Registrar: Stacey
Corcino (2026 - 2027)

Newsletter Editor:
Desirée Funston

34th Annual Conference Success

**Thank you to Lewis and Clark County Genealogy Society volunteers
and the staff of the Montana Heritage Center
for facilitating a wonderful conference in Helena!**



Speaker Jennifer Zinck presented four sessions on DNA research.



Fifteen raffle prizes brought in \$537 to help pay conference expenses. Thank you to everyone who donated prizes and who bought raffle tickets!



Mary Jane Bradbury performed as Nancy Russell.



Members assembled custom jigsaw puzzles created by LCCGS's Sandi Benson before the awards banquet.

Raffle Baskets and Winners

Dirty Girl Drink & Jigsaw Puzzle Butte-Silver Bow GS	Terry Dood, Gallatin County GS
Genealogy Basket Gallatin County GS	Lindy Bunch, Gallatin County GS
"But First, Coffee" Basket Great Falls GS	Karen Huck, Lewis & Clark County GS
Books and Basket Park County GS	Shelley Green, Yellowstone Genealogy Forum
Chocolate & Shirt Basket Western Montana GS	Karen Huck, Lewis & Clark County GS
"Tea Time" Basket Gallatin County GS	Denise Martin, Lewis & Clark County GS
"Sip & Search" Basket Lewis & Clark County GS	Stacey Corcino, Great Falls GS
"At the Courthouse" Quilt by Denise Martin, Lewis & Clark County GS	Earline Oset, Lewis & Clark County GS
Blue Shawl by Anonymous Knitter #1, Western Montana GS	Melanie McQuery, Absarokee
Purple Scarf by Anonymous Knitter #2, Western Montana GS	Julie Bushmaker, Butte-Silverbow GS
Trader Joe's Basket Walker Genealogical Research	Terry Dood, Gallatin County GS
"Genealo-jelly" Basket Desiree Funston	Joann Piazzola, Butte-Silver Bow GS
"Irish Blessings" Basket Anonymous Donor	Tricia Thompson, Gallatin County GS
"Garden of Earthly Delights" Basket Anonymous Donor	Joann Piazzola, Butte-Silver Bow GS
Bubble Basket Anonymous Donor	Nicole Derrick, Beaver Head Hunters

Door Prizes

Gary Wulf, Michelle Stephen-Hassard,
Karen Huck, Jim Thompson, Terry
Atwood, Cheryl Lucas

Early Bird

Terri Dood

2026 Year-end Profit & Loss

MSGGS Profit & Loss

November 1, 2025 through October 1, 2026

	Nov 1, '25 - Oct 1, '26
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
Book Frolic	542.00
FFM and ES	
FFM and ES Expenses	-57.75
FFM and ES - Other	314.00
Total FFM and ES	256.25
Interest Income	2.16
Membership Dues	700.00
Special Donations	1,000.00
Total Income	2,500.41
Expense	
Bank Service Charges	14.76
Montana Shared Catalog	
Lewis & Clark Share	-243.86
Montana Shared Catalog - Other	975.46
Total Montana Shared Catalog	731.60
NGS Dues	75.00
OCLC Library	
OCLC L&C Share	-51.54
OCLC Library - Other	206.14
Total OCLC Library	154.60
Office Supplies	61.45
Professional Fees	310.00
Website	400.00
Total Expense	1,747.41
Net Ordinary Income	753.00
Other Income/Expense	
Other Income	
Coffee	53.00
Conference Raffle	537.00
Conference Registration	12,987.00
Pins	
Pins Expense	-748.00
Pins - Other	234.00
Total Pins	-514.00
Total Other Income	13,063.00
Other Expense	
Conference Expense	288.65
Conference Meals	6,188.00
Mailing-Handouts	325.70
Miscellaneous	40.00
Speakers	
Lodging	586.24
Speaker Fees	2,350.00
Travel Expense	1,184.87
Total Speakers	4,121.11
Total Other Expense	10,961.46
Net Other Income	2,101.54
Net Income	2,854.54

*Approved MSGS Board meeting minutes will be provided
upon request to admin@montanamsgs.org*

First Families & Early Settlers

In the mid-1990s, the Montana State Genealogical Society created a program to document and honor the lives of our state's earliest residents. The First Families and Early Settlers of Montana program is open to anyone who can prove descent (either directly or through a sister or brother of a direct ancestor) from a resident of what is now the State of Montana during one of the following time periods:

- First Families of Montana - Arrived before statehood on 8 November 1889
- Early Settlers of Montana - Arrived between 9 November 1889 and 31 December 1929

To date, 520 individuals or couples have been certified as First Families, and 876 have been certified as Early Settlers. Successful applications that were approved before March 2020 are included in our five-volume series of print books. Volumes I-III and V are available for purchase.

Do you have an early Montana ancestor in your family tree? Have you certified them yet? If not, what are you waiting for? The process is easy, and it is very rewarding to preserve your family's history through our certificate program. Further, we are getting close to having enough certificates to produce a sixth volume in the print book series!

Please visit our website today for complete instructions and certification forms:

<https://montanamsgs.org/first-families-early-settlers/>

On that page, you can also order copies of Volumes I-III and V of *First Families and Early Settlers of Montana*. (Sorry, Volume IV is sold out).

Volume I © 2000 \$22.50
 Volume II © 2005 \$30.00
 Volume III © 2010 \$22.50
 Volume IV SOLD OUT
 Volume V © 2021 \$24.00

Shipping is \$6 per book. Checks accepted by mail or credit card payments accepted online.



Local Society Updates

Lewis & Clark County Genealogical Society - by Denise Martin

Hello from Helena!

Our July meeting program was a continuation of the interactive, hands-on June program answering members' questions on genealogy sites and software programs. This included demonstrations of the value of Find A Grave GPS coordinates and Family Tree Maker.

The August picnic at Spring Meadow Lake gave us a chance to visit with some members that are unable to attend our regular meetings in person. We informally shared our learning experiences from our Revolutionary War ancestor research that we used to write our newsletter stories and other lessons learned. As usual, the food was delicious and we gave Julie Walker a parting gift for serving as LCCGS president. **Thank you Julie for four years of leadership!**

In September we hosted the MSGS Conference in Helena, including the Thursday night social. What a wonderful opportunity to meet other genealogists from across Montana. Many thanks to several of our members that volunteered at the social and conference.

We skipped our regular monthly meeting so we could catch our breath after the conference.

On October 1st, six of our members partnered with Lewis & Clark County Library in support of their Big Read celebration. The Big Read is a grant program of the National Endowment for the Arts. This year's celebration included an "America at 250" component. Our volunteers displayed articles our members wrote about their Revolutionary War ancestors and an example graphic novel type ancestor story. Volunteers also assisted people with Sons of the American Revolution and Daughters of the American Revolution databases and Ancestry searches, shared pedigree charts and key genealogy books from our library, prepared a scavenger hunt focused on the Revolutionary War and genealogy, and set up hands-on stations that included a hand-crank coffee grinder, hand-crank sewing machine, and jigsaw puzzles from the Montana State Genealogy Conference dinner.

Enjoy the longer evenings hunting for those genealogy clues!



Yellowstone Genealogy Forum – by Mary Pickett Parker

YGF member Patricia Marchington presented excellent programs at our July and August meetings. In July, she spoke about the FamilySearch.org website and its new features.

In August, Patricia discussed a common problem among genealogists -- how to organize our genealogy research. First, setting a goal helps focus your research, she said. Do you want to research ancestors far back in time? Just descendants of certain branches of your family? Are you more interested in ethnic backgrounds? Is tracking ancestors through DNA to prove accurate family lines important?

Patricia provided a helpful check list of other tips including keeping genealogy research documents separate from your other household files. She also suggested developing your own system of saving and filing genealogy files. You can file information by family surnames, individual names, locations or nationalities. Also, frequently back up computer files or physical records.

Federal Census Records can be particularly helpful, Patricia said. Free U.S. Census blank worksheets can be found at:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Census_Forms and at: ancestry.com/c/census-forms

At our September meeting, we discussed researching Irish and Scottish ancestors.

YGF members continue to staff our genealogy library at the Billings Community and Senior Center five afternoons a week. In September we restarted monthly public programs at the BCSC. Topics aren't limited to genealogy and encompass a wide range of interests. Planned topics include travels to Ireland, the Yellowstone County Museum in Billings, the Yellowstone National Cemetery in Laurel, holiday memories, dementia and its signs, Zoo Montana gardens, Germans from Russia, pollinator gardens and Billings's historic Boot Hill and Coulson cemetery.

Longtime MSGS members will remember Verba Valentine, who passed away in Billings 18 August 2026 at the age of 96. Verba co-chaired the 2002 MSGS annual conference and continued to organize the conference as the group's first vice-president until 2023. Verba's daughter, Shawna Valentine, was MSGS president for 14 years. Verba's obituary paid tribute to her service: "... she took pride as she watched her efforts earn the state conference a respected reputation among the national genealogical community and served to bring better education opportunities to the genealogists of Montana."



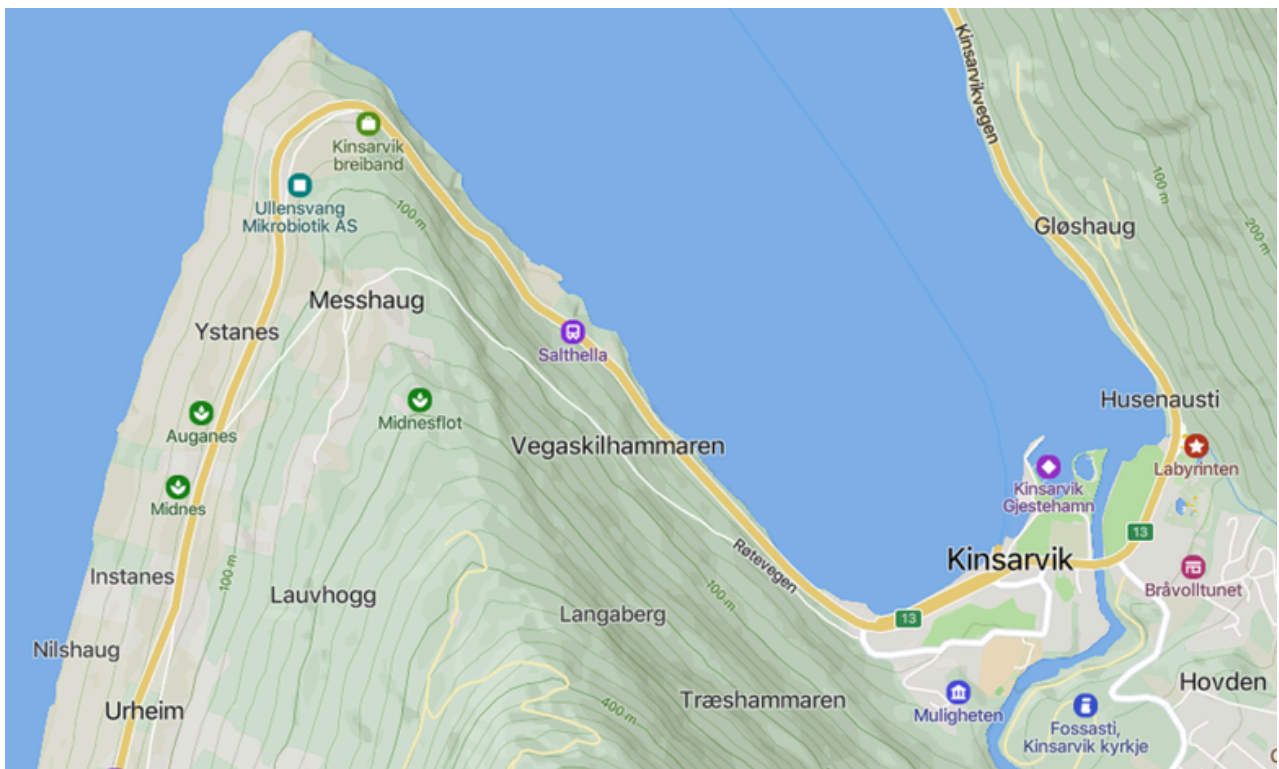
Norwegian Place Names and Surnames

By Gary Wulf

On my trip to Norway in 2024, I was looking for the area where my great-grandfather Lars Olafson Olson Instenes had lived. A map of the area showed a point of land on the west side of Kinsarvik bay. Near the point was “Ystanes” and a bit south was “Instanes”. A librarian in Kinsarvik’s library said that Ystanes meant outer cape and Instanes meant inner cape. I did not press him for further details and embarked on a drive of the area, which has several other place names ending in “nes”, similar to “nese”, nose in Norwegian.

“Nes” can mean headland or promontory and “inst” means inner or innermost. Combining the two words results in Instnes, similar to the Instanes found on the map and the place-name part of my great-grandfather’s surname. (Had he lived farther up the coast, he would have been called Lars Olson Olafson Midnes or Augenes.)

One other language note: vik, as at the end of Kinsarvik, means small bay. It may not be a coincidence that it also starts the word Viking.



IN MEMORIUM

Verba Phelps Valentine
13 August 1930 - 18 August 2026

Yellowstone Genealogy Forum

Verba's obituary is on the Michelloti-Sawyers Funral Home website.



Calling all family historians! Missoula Public Library is holding its third annual **Family History Writing Contest**. Memorialize your family history and compete for cash prizes: \$100 for first place, \$50 for second place, and \$25 for third place. Submissions will be accepted 1 October 2026 through 1 March 2027.

For further details please visit
<https://www.missoulapubliclibrary.org/family-history-writing-contest/>



Starting at age 73, the IRS requires you to withdraw funds (a required minimum distribution or RMD) from certain tax-deferred retirement accounts. Donating to charity through a qualified charitable distribution is a great way to reduce the tax liability on the RMD. This charitable strategy can help manage your taxes and support the causes you care about. So talk with your financial advisor about donating to MSGS today!


TREEALIVE
treealive.com

Watch your ancestors move across the maps of their time.

TreeAlive turns your family tree into a short animated film. Then you can explore each ancestor's life on historical maps from the years they lived.



Two film frames: America in 1809, Europe in 1620. Yours follows your own tree, wherever it leads.

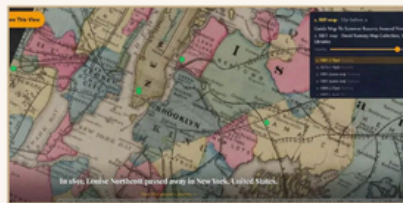
After the film, three more ways to explore your tree



JOURNEY

Walk one ancestor's life,
stop by stop

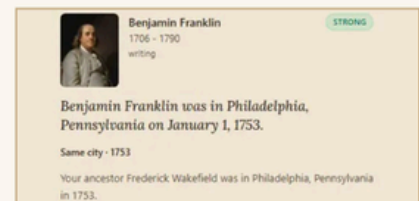
Each event in their life, in order,
on a historical map from around
the year it happened.



TIME MACHINE

Step into any moment

Pick any event and see a map
from around that year, with what
else your family was doing
nearby.



HISTORIC CROSSINGS

Where your family met
history

Historic figures who were in the
same place as your ancestors at
the same time, plus historical
markers and sites near home.

Over 80,000

historical maps of the U.S.,
Canada, Australia and 15
European countries

Over 21,000

official historical markers
in 25 U.S. states and
Canada

Over 94,000

places on the U.S. National
Register of Historic Places

Over 300,000

heritage register entries in
Ireland, Northern Ireland,
Wales, France and the
Netherlands

How to start

1. Go to treealive.com on a computer, tablet or phone.
2. Upload your family tree file (a GEDCOM), connect FamilySearch, or enter your WikiTree ID.
3. Watch your film, then explore.

Free, with no account required. Your film is made in your browser, and we keep no copy of your tree on our servers unless you choose to share it. To map your tree, places and years are sent out, never people's names.



See the sample family
treealive.com/?demo=johndoe
Questions? sam@treealive.com