



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society

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WMGS Constitution and By-Laws Updates:

Our Board has been working diligently on updating our Constitution and Bylaws to make some needed revisions and additions that will be required, as we seek to obtain Federal 501(c)3 non-profit tax status. We're hoping to apply for that status by the Fall. Having Federal 501(c)3 non-profit tax status will allow members and non-members to make tax-free donations to our Society and help us grow our resources.

The revised Constitution and Bylaws will be voted on at our May meeting. Please take a few minutes to review the changes to these documents. Both the current Constitution and Bylaws and the Proposed Draft Constitution and Bylaws with Revisions are posted under the Members' Only section of the [WMGS website](#).

Also at our May meeting, we will be having our annual election of officers. The Nominating Committee will present the slate of candidates at the meeting.

Upcoming Meetings

May 2017 Meeting

In May, we will be holding our **3rd Annual WMGS Panel of Experts!** Have you ever had to pay a professional consultant? I can tell you first hand that it's usually not an inexpensive proposition! Here's another benefit of membership at Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society: You have free access to a number of pros and experienced researchers to help you break down your brick walls, answer your research questions, point you in the right direction and, in general, lend a hand with your family histories. From pedigree charts to on-line research to DNA, WMGS can help you re-energize your research.

In May, the regular monthly meeting of WMGS will be not one, and not two but three panelists who are willing to take your questions. Dave Robison will be joined by Fran Malone and Hillary Schau for this event.

Put them on the spot! Responses won't be limited to what the panelists can offer as members of the audience are welcome to join in the discussion. That's what WMGS is all about, helping each other identify the goals and how to get there! So, bring your questions concerning problems you have or just a general question that you've been wondering what's the answer.

Please come early and get a good seat. Our last panel discussion was very well attended and very productive! This will also be a virtual meeting available only to the membership.

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June 2017 Meeting

Be sure to sign up for the "Pot Luck Dinner" during our May meeting because for our **June** meeting we will host not only a Pot Luck Dinner but an "Open Mic" Session too. So, bring your favorite casserole or main dish, a side dish, or some sort of dessert, and socialize with fellow genealogists searching for their family tree. Who knows, you might even find a 5th - 9th cousin 'X' number of times removed; sort of like Dave Robison and Bruce Cortis (through Deacon Chapin of Springfield). After dinner, members will have an opportunity to speak and share during our Open Mic session. Members are welcome to share genealogy information including ideas, tips, suggestions, research experience, and genealogy projects. If you have a new website to share, a place to visit, or a research success story, please be sure to share it during our Open Mic session that's how we all learn. Members are encouraged to bring a friend

April 2017 Meeting Recap

Our meeting in April was a presentation by Steve Hartwell entitled "**Building a Custom Website for your Family History**"

Pedigree charts may be an interesting way to share our genealogy, but what about the "rest of the story" - our family letters, photographs, heirlooms, tales, etc.? How can we share our ancestral stories online with everyone in our extended family? We learned how to bring our stories to life by using his easy building-block approach to create a custom website. We saw techniques and examples to give us ideas on how best to showcase our own family history.



Steve Hartwell lives in North Reading, Massachusetts, and has been researching his family for over 30 years. He retired from a long career at IBM in 2014 and has since become a professional genealogist specializing in both ancestral research, particularly in New England, and custom website design. Steve is a graduate of the [Boston University Genealogical Research Certificate Program](#) and the [Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy](#), and is a board member of the [Society of Essex Genealogists](#). His website can be found at shartwell.com/services.

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Articles

Search to Failure

Dave Robison

Old Bones Genealogy of New England

For the past 10 years or so, I've been providing guidance in family research, both on- and off-line. For quite a while, I've advocated specific strategies that I find effective. Last night I spontaneously described it as "Search to Failure." It just rolled off my tongue. Here's why I think it's a good strategy and a good description.

Just a few years ago, most genealogical search engines offered dozens of fields to be filled in so that you could locate the records of your ancestors. Early in my own research, I felt it necessary to offer up as much information as possible. After all, the fields were there waiting to be filled, right? Just like a job application or a mortgage application, the questions were there for a reason. But what I soon learned...or maybe not so soon...was that less is more. And the websites seemed to finally agree with me. Today, you're offered far fewer fields to fill which, in my opinion, is a good thing. Let me explain the strategy that I teach.

First, Grandma may have said that her grandfather was born on such-and-such a date, always used the name "Thomas" (for example) and he always, as far as Grandma knew lived in a certain town. My response is this: Well, Grandma, we love you but we don't necessarily believe you! New researchers will go to great lengths to use exactly that information without deviation. Contrary to the "job application" strategy, I demonstrate my "search to failure" strategy using the name "Smith." That's it, just "Smith." And I never ask for an exact spelling. As a matter of fact, in Ancestry.com for example, I ask for "Sounds like," "Similar," and "Soundex" in order to get every possible permutation. That's the only field I fill and I use "Smith" because I already know the dramatic results. Tonight, I got 146,696,564 results. That makes me happy. Why? Because I know I'm on the right track. Be patient, I'll get the results down to a manageable number and in a very short amount of time.

Now, I'll ask the audience to give me any first name. It doesn't matter what they give me, but let's say someone says "Michael." My response is "Do you know if it's really Michael? Or perhaps it's Mike, or just M or what if Michael was his middle name because he didn't like his first name. How can we be sure?" The answer, of course, is that we can't be sure about anything at this stage. But let's use Michael, making sure we also use "sounds like," "similar," and "initials." Now we're down to "only" 4,102,786. That's significant even at the volume of returns. It's only about 3% of what our original search brought. I explain here, that "Michael" is a filter and the filter, in this example, worked. Or so we think at least! Now I add another filter and then another. In literally no time, our 146 million number can be reduced to 6 or 8 results. But I want to end up with NO results. "Search to failure." Why? I want to make sure that I'm using the most efficient filters. That last filter that wiped out all my results is not the end of the search, it's the first "failure" that will force me to eliminate that filter then go back and refine, refine, refine what I've done so far. The point is this: I'm starting out by fishing in a big pond. If my first search includes so many filters that the first "cast" gets me nothing, what have I gained. But if I start out with an bulging net full of results then whittle them down with one filter at a time until there are no results, I can by-pass Grandma's data (without telling her, of course!) and hopefully come up with enough results that through principle #1 of the GPS, a thoroughly exhaustive search, I can determine which of the results is the target ancestor.

My point is "search to failure," then begin to massage the filters in to "search to success."

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WMGS Library Activity

The WMGS Library has had a few new additions this past month. William Lashua donated a copy of the Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research by NEHGS. New member Anthony Trojanowski donated 3 books: The Flow of Time in the Connecticut Valley by George Bain and Howard Meyerhoff. The Heart of Old New England by A. Hyatt Verrill. And Agriculture of Massachusetts by the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture. And lastly, George Podmore has given us a long term loan of The Great Migration Newsletter by NEHGS, 1990-2016. That's 26 years' worth! Definitely worth reading if you have ancestors from that time period.

The library is open during our monthly meetings and during any research clinics. Be sure to ask about it! And if you'd like to see our catalogue, you can view it at our website under the resources tab or by clicking [here](#).

Calendar

DATE/TIME	EVENT/PLACE
Wednesday, 3 May 2017 6 – 8 PM	WMGS Meeting - 3rd Annual WMGS Panel of Experts; Election of Officers.
Thursday, 18 May 2017 6 - 8 PM	Genealogy Research Clinic at the Agawam Senior Center
Thursday, 25 May 2017 6 - 8 PM	Genealogy Research Clinic at the Agawam Senior Center
Wednesday, 7 June 2017 6 – 8 PM	WMGS Meeting - Pot Luck Dinner and "Open Mic" Session
Thursday, 15 June 2017 6 - 8 PM	Genealogy Research Clinic at the Agawam Senior Center
Thursday, 22 June 2017 6 - 8 PM	Genealogy Research Clinic at the Agawam Senior Center

Genealogy Research Clinics are free to WMGS members. There is a \$10 fee per session for non-members. Annual WMGS membership is just \$25.

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Member Events

Dave Robison has scheduled a number of classes, workshops and presentations so far this year and there are more to come! They include single presentations, four and five session programs and at least two (2) intermediate to advanced courses in genealogy research. Please click here to search the calendar for scheduled events "Calendar" that he will be presenting throughout Massachusetts.

NERGC Volunteering

Several members have signed up to help staff our table in the Exhibit Hall for the upcoming NERGC conference. Many thanks for your willingness to promote our organization.

If you read this before April 27, volunteers are still welcome to fill our 20-hour obligation as a sponsoring society which is separate from our table staffing. Send an email to westmassgen@gmail.com if you are willing to put an hour or two toward the WMGS volunteers.

Member Focus

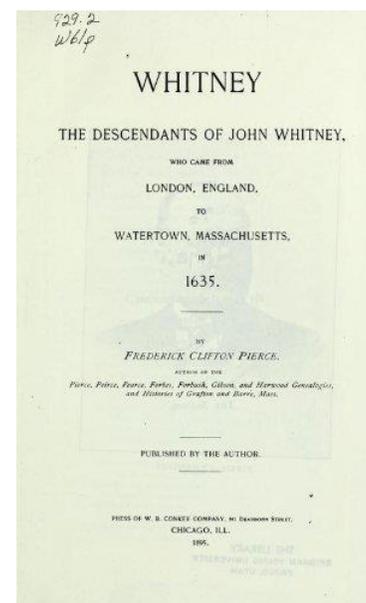
Bob Whitney

By Jeanne Leblond

A surprise gift of a book, titled "The Descendants of John Whitney", by Frederick Clifton Pierce, sparked Bob Whitney's interest in researching his family history. Unaware that his mother even had the book, the gift came at a perfect time as his retirement from the floral industry neared. Around the same time, his friend and 2nd cousin, WMGS member Deb Woodford was telling him about her research into their family. They share Swedish ancestry, and her stories inspired him.

Bob is relatively new to both genealogy and WMGS. He has New England Whitney roots, along with Swedish and German ancestry. Some of his research is basically ruling out famous Whitney's that he's not related to. He has confirmed that Eli Whitney inventor of the cotton gin is not a grandfather, just a relation many times removed. In the 1980's, he did, however, meet a grandson of Eli Whitney. Despite being born in Westfield, MA he is also not related to W. B. Whitney who contributed large sums of money to Westfield's Athenaeum.

It's been over 500 years since there has been a Robert Whitney in his direct line. Using the "My Heritage" website, he's been pleased to find that some of his ancestors were Lords, and one was a Sheriff. There's Sir Robert, circa 1521, Sir Robert, Lord of Icomb, circa 1491, and Sir Robert, Lord of Pencombe, circa 1287. Even further back, he's found Sir Eustace de Whitney, circa 1080. Fun finds!



Bob is a 10th generation grandson of John Whitney, who arrived in Massachusetts in 1635 from England, along with his son Richard. John Whitney died in 1673 in Watertown. Since then, there have been Whitney's living in a number of other Massachusetts towns, including Concord, Harvard, Stockbridge, and Westfield. Starting with his paternal grandfather, there has been a direct family line of Whitney's living in Westfield for at least the last 100 years. Using the book "The Descendants of John Whitney", he's been able to trace the movement of his family in Massachusetts over 400 years.



On the way to the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, there's a home with a sign saying it is the Whitney Homestead (see photo to left). Bob suspects that it's the home of George Fenn Whitney and his son Charles William Whitney, but he needs to research that further. He remembers visiting Charles' wife Minnie when he was a child. She lived into her 90's, and he remembers her death when he was about nine years old.

Bob's direct Whitney line has had only seven males born in the last 100 years. He has two brothers and eight Whitney cousins. His maternal grandfather was an only child, as was his mother. The maternal side of his family is quite small. He's heard that there are other branches of his family who are researching their history and he plans to contact them. Pending Ancestry DNA results may also provide him with some connections. As with many family genealogists, he laments that he seems to be the only member of his immediate family who is interested in their family history.



In 1992, Bob traveled to Sweden, long before his interest in family history was sparked. Visiting cemeteries, he saw many gravestones with his maternal grandmother's maiden name of Anderson. He's hoping to research that line along with his German maternal grandfather, George Luhn's family. He is hoping to find information on their origins in Germany and what ship brought them to New York.

Family folklore says that they are Mayflower descendants, most likely from the Cummings or Winslow family. However, he's only been able to trace those names back to the early 1900's. Bob's future genealogical projects include, exploring the Mayflower legend, visiting cemeteries in Hartford and Stockbridge to find information on his grandparents, and collaborating with his cousin, Deb Woodford, on their shared Swedish heritage. Though new to genealogy, he's already sensing what the brick walls will be, and is hoping to work with Deb to find the answers.

Note: Stay tuned for a follow up on Bob and Deb's shared Swedish heritage.

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New WMGS Members

The Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society (WMGS) welcomes our six newest members:

Regina M Mullen
Jim & Judy Moran
Susanne Haenisch
Estelle Stasz
Gwen Laprade

We hope that they will avail themselves of all that WMGS has to offer and that they find success in the hunt for family ancestors.

About Us



The Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society was founded in Springfield, Hampden County, Massachusetts in 1972, and officially incorporated on 6 February 1973. We are devoted to the research and documentation of our family ancestry and history. We also assist others in the pursuit of discovering their ancestry.

We meet year-round on the first Wednesday of each month from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center, located at 954 Main Street in Agawam, Massachusetts. We welcome non-members and beginning genealogists. Please join us!

We currently have about 100 active members, approximately 80% living in the Western Massachusetts area. The other 20% are residents of other states but with ancestry from Massachusetts or New England.

We receive numerous inquiries each month via U.S. & e-mail from people looking for information on area families. Our members are happy to volunteer to research these requests

Dave Robison – President
Fran Malone – Vice President
Katy Krause – Treasurer
Ann McDougal – Secretary
Hillary Schau – Newsletter Editor

Susan Levenson – Webmaster
Jeanne Leblond – Surname Project Coordinator
Ellen Janik – Facebook Administrator
Carolea Hayden – Refreshment Coordinator
Diane Ascioti – Founder

Jeanne Leblond, Nancy Netherwood and Hillary Schau - Directors
Susan Levenson, Katy Krause & Dee Pederson – Website Redesign Team.

Meeting Details

We meet year-round on the first Wednesday of each month at the Agawam Senior Center, located at 954 Main Street in Agawam, Massachusetts.

Our genealogy research clinics are offered on the third and fourth Thursdays of the month from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Agawam Senior Center. The cost of the computer class is \$10 for non-members; free for members of the Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society.

We look forward to you joining us at our next meeting!

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Membership

Like most things in life, membership is not free - but for our reasonable annual membership fee, you get a lot for your money.

Reasons to Join Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society

1. Meet people with similar interests of family history and genealogy
2. Attend monthly meetings featuring local and national presenters
3. Receive assistance from our members on your family research
4. Attend our free genealogy research clinics held twice per month (3rd & 4th Thursday of month - \$10 / session non-members)
5. Share our library of resources including books and CDs
6. Opportunity to serve as a volunteer, coach or be a member of the Board of Directors

Membership Dues

Annual membership runs from 1 September to 31 August each year. Membership rates are:

- \$25 for an individual membership
- \$40 for a couple of the same household
- \$15 for students
- \$500 for Lifetime membership

Join by mail, email, or in person at our monthly meeting: Click [here](#) for the WMGS Application for Membership; the image is to your right to view, save, and print. Payments may be made online on our [Join Page](#), by mail at the address listed below, or brought in person to one of our meetings.

Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 418
West Springfield, MA 01090

Newsletter Deadlines

Please submit all information to be entered into the next newsletter by 15 May 2017.

We are looking for articles written by our members. Have you been to a repository or a federal or state archive? Have you been to where your ancestors lived? Have you tried a new gadget or software? You do not have to write the article yourself. If you would like to do an interview about a subject, that would be helpful as well. What are you interested in? Tell us, share your knowledge.

E-Mail Update

Please let us know if you have changed your e-mail address. We want to make sure that you continue to receive all of our updates, meeting reminders and electronic newsletters. Just send your name and new email address to us at WestMassGen@gmail.com.

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