



The Importance of Belonging: The Role of Genealogical Societies In Your Research Plan

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There are hundreds of genealogical societies around the world, each with a different focus and purpose. Somewhere there is at least one society which can assist in your research or technique development. Learn to analyze your needs and search out an appropriate organization. Then participate, which can aid in your personal growth and development.

First, there are several types of organizations: your “hometown” local society, “research area” societies, and regional, national, or special-topic organizations. There are different reasons for joining each type of organization, and it is not necessary to belong to all organizations all of the time.

Local organizations may be where you live (your hometown) or where your ancestors lived (your research area). Reasons for joining where you live are different from joining those societies where your ancestors lived – but these reasons are just as compelling.

If there’s no genealogical society, check for a historical society – they may serve both groups, which is wonderful for getting a different point of view. If you have a local archive, see if they need volunteers – that’s a great opportunity for learning about the history and people of the community while you are assisting the organization to serve others.

Your local society is also often where you will have the most opportunities for personal growth – start as a SIG attendee or committee member, then become a leader or chair, then serve on the board. At each step you will gain new skills for working with others, which are definitely benefits in your personal, business, and social life. Then you can assist a larger organization in similar ways, as an experienced society participant.

Finally there are the regional, national, or special-topic organizations. These come in all sizes and flavors, but here are a few examples:

- American Ancestors/New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) – they offer events, lectures, courses, and tours -- <http://www.americanancestors.org/>
- Palatines to America German Genealogy Society [researching German-speaking ancestors from locations all over the world] – their next annual conference will be 7-8 June 2024 in Albany, New York] -- <http://www.palam.org/>
- Foundation for East European Family History Societies (FEEFHS) – this is a great place to locate international organizations for genealogy -- their most recent annual conference was 1-4 August 2023 in Salt Lake City (also offered online) -- <http://www.feefhs.org/>

- Ethnic organization of your choice. If you are researching ANY ethnicity, religious background, or occupation, there is probably a society that specializes in that research. If you haven't looked into it, do it. Did you know that there is a society for the descendants of colonial tavernkeepers? Yup, the Flagon & Trencher Society <http://www.flagonandtrencher.org/>. Or how about the Society of Brushmakers Descendants <http://www.brushmakers.com/>? A good starting place for these kinds of inquiries is always Cyndi's List at www.cyndislist.com. She has nearly 8,000 links in the Societies & Groups topic! Use the search box on her page and narrow the search with some term – you can use a category, like Occupations, to get to a broad area, then browse the sections at the top to get to a more manageable list. If you're looking for a religious group, put the religion in the search term. If it's an occupation, nationality or ethnic group, put that in the search term. If you don't find it on Cyndi's list, then try Google.
- There's a Guild of One-Name Studies that may help to find an organization specializing in researching your family name (<https://www.one-name.org/>) .
- These are just a few of the organizations that are available. In 2020 the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) merged with the National Genealogical Society (NGS), one of the oldest national non-profit genealogical organizations in the United States. In addition to courses and other educational opportunities, they hold an annual Family History Conference, (most recently held 31 May-3 June 2023 in Richmond, Virginia) which is also one of the outstanding annual events for individuals and their member societies. www.ngsgenealogy.org
- If you have developed your genealogical knowledge and expertise to the point that you are ready to share, the Genealogical Speakers Guild (GSG) is there to help you spread the word that you are ready to speak to audiences, or to aid in your preparation if you're not quite there yet. <https://www.genealogicalspeakersguild.org/> .
- If you are ready to put out a shingle and take professional clients (or are preparing), or any of the many other professional services, the Association of Professional Genealogists would be pleased to include you "under the umbrella." To be a member of APG, you must agree to abide by the APG Code of Ethics. www.apgen.org

All-in-all, if you can't find at least two or three societies that you MUST join, you haven't looked enough. There are so many benefits, and there are so many choices. The problem is managing the joining and the budget. Oh, by the way – there is no rule that says you must belong to all the same organizations forever. This applies particularly to the "research-area" societies. Those may be areas that you join for a while, do your research in that location, and then move on to another area – or not. Let your budget be your guide. Decide based on how much benefit you derive from the society – and what you feel you want to contribute.

Also note that there are organizations which now provide FREE educational opportunities. Some invite guests to their meetings and some have virtual presentations (webinars) open to the public. These are speakers selected to introduce members (and guests) to topics of interest to the area or genealogists in general. You can find these

events through one of the calendar programs designed for us (you can find dozens more on Cyndislist):

- Conference Keeper -- <https://conferencekeeper.org/>
- Geniebugs (The Sleepless Genealogist) -- <https://thesleeplessgenealogist.com/calendar/>

If you find yourself returning to the same organization frequently, perhaps you should join that group. They all need members to continue to provide information and services, and you have shown an interest in their offerings. Many societies who have meetings open to the public have special incentives for members (such as the opportunity to view previously-recorded presentations, attend special interest groups, or some provide handouts only to members).

But DO remember to check them out and join! There are so many benefits to you and your genealogical growth.

Remember, genealogical (and similar) societies help you:

- Interact with like-minded researchers – people who will get excited with you over “eurekas” in your research
- Learn resources, skills and techniques for genealogy -- which may also apply in other areas
- See new perspectives – look at a problem from someone else’s viewpoint
- Break through brick walls – someone in the group may have just the resource or direction that you need
- Leadership opportunities
- Hone your speaking skills – your local society is always looking for speakers – this may be a chance to practice a new presentation with friendly faces
- Build a sense of belonging – and everyone needs that!

