

So You Want to Be a Genealogist?

By Gina Kapelewski

Genealogical researchers come in many forms. Some people are hobbyists who research their families for fun, some will get paid to do research for others, and some of those will get their certification or accreditation. Skilled researchers, both with and without certification, will present at conferences, publish papers, run educational sessions online and in-person, write blogs, etc. The possibilities are endless.

There are many courses, institutes, conferences, and webinars available to enhance your research skills. Institutes such as GRIP (Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh), or SLIG (Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy) are week-long sessions which go in-depth on one topic.

Researchers can continue to learn and improve skills by taking courses and webinars through many different organizations. Here are a few...some require a membership, some are free.

- ~ National Genealogical Society (ngsgenealogy.org)
- ~ Legacy Family Tree (familytreewebinars.com)
- ~ FamilySearch (familysearch.org)

There are study groups to join—groups are usually run by a volunteer mentor, and the assignments are reviewed by your peers. One example is ProGen (progenstudygroups.com). ProGen reviews assignments based on the book *Professional Genealogy: Preparation, Practice & Standards* by Elizabeth Shown Mills. Each month the group submits assignments, the assignments are peer reviewed, and then the group meets to discuss.

Researchers can also learn and stay up to date by subscribing to blogs. *The Legal Genealogist* by Judy G. Russell and *The Genetic Genealogist* by Blaine Bettinger are examples of blogs on specific topics. Understanding the legal aspects of a time period that you are researching can help you to understand the records, and Judy G. Russell is an expert in this field. DNA has just exploded in popularity for finding relatives and connections, and Blaine Bettinger is one of the DNA experts.

Boston University offers two online genealogy courses. Genealogy Principles is a 7-week course, and the Certificate in Genealogical Research is a 15-week course, both to learn and improve skills related to genealogical proof, and the standards around it. The 15-week course is intense, and costly, but a lot can be learned about research, genealogical proof, citations, and other aspects of doing research and writing comprehensive reports. More information can be found at genealogyonline.bu.edu.

If you decide that you would like to become a certified or an accredited professional genealogist, there are two organizations to consider.

BCG - Certification can be obtained through the Board for Certification of Genealogists. Certification requires the applicant to submit work, and it will be evaluated on standards for documenting, standards for researching, and standards for writing. Different work samples will need to be submitted, including all documentation to meet the Genealogy Standards. Detailed information can be viewed at bcgcertification.org.

ICAPGen - Accreditation can be obtained through International Commission for the Accreditation of Genealogists. ICAPGen sets standards for the genealogical community through comprehensive written and oral examinations. Detailed information can be viewed at icapgen.org.

Whether you do this for fun or for paying clients, there are many resources available, many free, to improve your skills. And if certification is for you, good luck!