

**Genealogy Gems via GenealogyGems <genealogygems@genealogycenterfla.com>
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to me

Genealogy Gems: News from the Allen County Public Library at Fort Wayne
No. 268, June 30, 2026

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America @ 250

by Curt B. Witcher

This July 4th--America's Semiquincentennial! Wow! Though we have been hearing about this amazing milestone in our country's history for quite some time, it still feels a bit like it snuck up on us. While I remember the nation's bicentennial through a very young person's eyes, my recollection is still that there were many more activities leading up to that Fourth of July, and a cascade of events for years afterward including the formation of numerous genealogical societies. Though the mood of the country in some places may be less celebratory right now, I believe there is much we can do to celebrate our stories, our families, our heritage.

In recent days, one frequently hears versions of the question, "What is America's story at 250?" This is a near perfect time to embrace anew the truism that America's story is our story. The stories of our families--their successes and their struggles, their accomplishments and their discoveries, their triumphs and their heartaches--those are America's story. After the fireworks, cookouts, and family and community gatherings, I hope you will join me in making the twelve months following this special Fourth of July a time dedicated to discovering America's rich story through exploring our own families' wonderful stories. I have some specific 250 challenges for us.

Embrace writing two hundred and fifty words about a different ancestor at least once each month. As genealogists, we're typically so consumed with finding documents and other evidence of our

ancestors' stories that we often forget to compile our findings; we forget to tell our stories! (And if you want to know what two hundred and fifty words looks like, it's from the beginning of this column to the word "to" after "forget" in the previous sentence.) Once you start writing, you will be surprised how comfortable and even enjoyable the endeavor becomes.

Embrace identifying two hundred and fifty photographs in your files and albums and/or two hundred and fifty digital images from your smartphone each month. Most of us join generations of our ancestors in persistently thinking we'll get around to labeling and appropriately storing our photographs. Yet, our children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, and even some disinterested individuals stumble upon thousands of wonderful pictures and images with precious little or no identification. We haven't provided them with the story.

Embrace participating in at least two hundred and fifty minutes of in-person or virtual classes, programs, and seminars each month, actively learning something new historically, culturally, geographically and contextually about our families' stories. That's just a bit over four hours. If you register for all of the Genealogy Center's July virtual programs (listed further down in this ezine), you will meet and far exceed two hundred and fifty minutes. And there are some really fine program offerings over this coming month. Knowing the importance of military service in our families stories, I am particularly interested in the program, "Dead Letter Office Images: The Civil War's Lost Sentiments" being offered on July 8, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. During the Civil War years, hundreds of thousands of soldiers wrote letters home, many containing card-sized photos of themselves. By the end of the conflict, thousands of letters and images remained undelivered at the Dead Letter Office in Washington, D.C. Hear the touching stories of these special letters.

Our stories are America's Story! Celebrate America's Semiquincentennial by actively celebrating our stories with our words and deeds!

Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America--A Review
by Logan Knight

Genealogy is so much more than simply tracing a family line. Increasingly, it is about understanding the context in which our ancestors lived their lives. How did they view themselves and their world? To put it simply, what were they really like? For Americans who trace their lineage to early New England, few books answer this question as well as Michael P. Winship's "Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), GC 973.2 W732ho.

Winship's book is a straightforward history of Puritanism on both sides of the Atlantic, from 1540 to the 1690s. By tracing the ideological evolution of Puritanism along with the political events of the day, the author covers the rise of the "godly republics," their heyday and eventual downfall. This breath-taking story within just a few generations forms the bedrock of New England, and in many ways, the United States.

One of the most important and unique features of the book is how it focuses on both England and America. When we read more traditional histories of the New England colonies, the Old Country usually features as a Sodom and Gomorrah, fit only to be abandoned. Winship reveals the false

nature of this narrative by showcasing how developments in one place fueled the other. The book does a fantastic job showing how England (and developments there) obsessed the settlers. Events such as the English Civil War and the Restoration take on an importance in New England history that ranks with the landing on Plymouth Rock. You begin to understand that the history of New England cannot stand in isolation from the theological storms overtaking the European continent at the same time.

Familiar figures such as John Winthrop and Increase Mather appear in these pages. Yet, they appear in a new light, because of the new historical context in which they are set. They are not set in a deep and forbidding wilderness so much as perched on one part of this English-Atlantic world. Winship does an excellent job showing how figures in the Old World had a dramatic effect on the culture and religion of the new. Important figures such as John Cotton, John Bunyan, and Richard Baxter, who never set foot in the Americas, are important to the New England story. The reader soaks up this rich atmosphere and is left wanting more.

The book is not simply about Puritans, though. Baptists, Quakers, and Presbyterians all make appearances. The ideological struggle between these groups makes for excellent reading. The author succeeds in taking a subject as anodyne as the debates on who is allowed the full privileges of church membership and making it truly fascinating.

I would recommend this book to anyone curious about the development of New England and how its relationship with England created its unique cultural and religious heritage. Indeed, the two are one and the same. There is not a better book out there on how the New England of the Salem Witch Trials became the New England of the American Revolution.

Russian Émigré Publications to Become More Accessible
by Allison DePrey

Those researching Russian families who left their homeland following the 1917 Russian Revolution have a valuable new resource to anticipate. The Hoover Institution Library & Archives and the Czech Republic's Slavonic Library in Prague have announced a partnership to digitize nearly 1,700 Russian émigré publications and add them to the Russia Abroad Digital Collection.

Russian diaspora newspapers and journals often contain information that extends beyond the usual vital records. Obituaries, marriage and birth announcements, church news, society activities, school reports, business advertisements, and community events can provide valuable clues about ancestors who established new lives outside Russia. They also help researchers better understand the communities in which their families lived.

The project brings together publications that have long been scattered among libraries in multiple countries. As they are digitized, they will be freely available through the Hoover Institution's open access platform, making these important resources far more accessible to genealogists around the world.

If your research includes Russian émigrés or twentieth century migration, this growing collection is one to bookmark. Learn more about the project and access the Russia Abroad Digital Collection at <https://www.hoover.org/news/hoover-and-prague-partner-digitize-worlds-largest-russian-diaspora-press-collection>.

PERSI Gems: Stuff Once Hidden
by Adam Barrone and Mike Hudson

The field of family history research is a constant quest for knowledge. We seek ancestors, clues, evidence, relationships, roots, secrets, and stories. In our zeal to uncover truth, we encounter challenges and difficulties which seem to obscure the history for which we yearn. Names are hidden in books until we turn to the right page. Manuscripts are sequestered in archival collections far from our fingertips. Records are concealed in databases until we enter the correct sequence of search criteria. We look for hidden gems, hidden meanings, hidden relatives, and hidden treasures in our journeys to learn about our roots and our place in history.

Over the last forty years, PERSI catalogers have cited countless stories of revelations about people, events, and objects once deemed mysterious. These articles prove, over and over, that knowledge is only illusive until it isn't. The Periodical Source Index shines a light on tales of hidden bonnet pins, boots, cameras, doors, gold, money, and ships. Somebody made a discovery or had knowledge of a concealment. And somebody wrote it down.

Try a PERSI search here:

<https://www.genealogycenter.info/persi/>

Do you possess knowledge of the past known to no other? Do you have documents or papers unavailable elsewhere? Do you know where something is hidden? Your local or regional libraries, genealogical societies, museums, and archives can help you preserve and share knowledge of stuff once hidden.

Brooke and Jeff Wente, mystery of hidden shoes, Jacob Schlesselman house history, c. 1880+ Towpath (New Bremen Historical Association, OH), Jan 2023

C. P. Stirn's concealed vest camera artifact photo and note, 1886
Wisconsin Magazine of History, Vol. 96, Issue 1 (Aut 2012)

Case of the hidden bonnet pins
Citizens' Companion (Civil War Courier, TN), May 2009

Clarke Birchard remembers the boot concealed in wall, concealment shoes early custom
Bruce County (Ont.) Historical Society Yearbook, 2007

Danville bank gold hidden among its directors, Mr. Waddill's stolen, 1865-1902
Piedmont Lineages (Virginia-North Carolina Piedmont Genealogical Society), Feb 2011

Dorchester Historical Society barn's hidden basement door photo
Dorchester (MA) Illustration of the Day, Issue 1850 (2012)

German submarine U-505 captured off Africa and hidden in Bermuda, 1944-1945
Maritimes (National Museum of Bermuda), Vol. 20, Issue 3 (2007)

Shirl Herr's hidden-metal detector invention, military mine detectors, 1910s+
MHQ: the Quarterly Journal of Military History, Vol. 29, Issue 4 (Sum 2017)

Squirrel behavior question and answer, nuts hidden, study, 1968+
Outdoor Indiana, Vol. 80, Issue 1 (Jan 2015)

William Barnes market garden business note, hid money under manure to thwart thieves, mid-19th C.
West Middlesex (Eng.) Family History Society Journal, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (Mar 2006)

Preservation Tips: The Declaration of Independence--A Preservation Case Study
by Christina Clary, C.A.

After the Declaration of Independence was signed and adopted 250 years ago, it travelled back and forth between the various colonies and Philadelphia, its primary home. The first "authentic" copy, ordered by the Continental Congress, was made and distributed in January 1777. The original version, meanwhile, was kept rolled up, as most parchment documents were at the time. It would have been frequently unrolled, and the section on the outside of the rolled document would have been exposed to dirt and other damaging elements.

In 1789, the document was transferred to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, later Secretary of State, for storage. It is unknown exactly how it was stored, but it would have been at the mercy of the heat and humidity that pervaded the new capital at Washington, D.C. during its notoriously muggy summers. It was during one of these summers, in August 1814, that it was spirited away to escape the burning of the capital by the British during the War of 1812. A clerk stashed the Declaration, along with other founding documents, into a linen bag. It was sent by wagon to a private home in Virginia until the danger had passed.

In the 1820s, a facsimile was created using the press copy method. It involved pressing a thin sheet of paper on the document until the ink was transferred. The ink on this sheet was then transferred to copper plates that were used to make copies. This lifting of ink from the original document caused the ink to fade much quicker.

The document was transferred to the Patent Office in 1841, where it remained until 1876. During this time, it was hung up in a gallery directly across from a window. The constant exposure to direct sunlight further contributed to the fading of the ink. During the centennial in 1876, Congress passed a joint resolution to try to save the document, though nothing came of it. The next year, it

was fortuitously sent back to the State Department after its exhibition in Philadelphia, just months before the Patent Office was destroyed in a fire.

Reports were conducted in 1894 and 1903 on the condition and continuing deterioration of the Declaration. After the 1894 report, it was wrapped and placed flat in a steel case. The 1903 report confirmed the damage from press copying and exhibition that the 1894 report had documented, and from then on, it was kept sealed between sheets of glass and locked in the steel case. It was only brought out by the order of the Secretary of State.

In 1921, the document was handed over to the newly created Library of Congress. The following year, \$12,000 was appropriated to create a preservation-safe gallery in which to display the Declaration. It stayed there until 1952, with one notable exception. In December 1941, just after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the founding documents were sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky. The Declaration was put between two acid-free manila sheets of paper, wrapped in neutral millboard, and placed in a bronze container sealed with lead during its transport. The case was escorted by Secret Service agents.

While at Fort Knox, archivists used the time to carefully inspect the document. They were horrified to see splatters of glue and scotch tape. Tearing occurred due to the stress caused by the document being mounted to a board backing. At one point, the upper right corner was detached. Records revealed that in 1940 someone had used scotch tape to try to reattach the corner. Two conservators were secretly brought to Fort Knox to repair the damage done by time and bad judgment. They removed the remnants of glue, tape, and other adhesives, mended tears, and cleaned the portion that had been exposed when it was rolled.

By 1944, it was safe for the document to be returned to Washington, D.C., and in 1951 it was sealed in a Thermopane enclosure with humidified helium. It was moved to its current home at the National Archives in 1952. In 2003, it was removed from its encasement for further examination and treatment, including surface cleaning and mending tears using Japanese paper. It was placed in a new case made of titanium, aluminum, and specialized glass, and filled with argon gas.

History Tidbits: The Lord Who Joined the Rebels--The Story of Lord Stirling
by Logan Knight

"Here once the embattled farmers stood and fired the shot heard round the world." So, the great Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote to symbolize the opening of the American Revolution. Famously erupting out of a taxing authority dispute, the Revolution quickly evolved into something more, with a particular contempt towards monarchy and aristocratic privilege. How strange then to see a genuine British lord serving alongside these common folk? Yet, that is indeed what happened. William Alexander "the Lord Stirling" was a Patriot officer and loyal revolutionary. His story, while often overlooked, is one of the more fascinating tales of the American Revolution.

Despite his claims, William Alexander was born in New York City in 1727. His father, James Alexander, had fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie in the Jacobite Uprising of 1715. After that revolt was crushed, James wisely decamped to New York City, where he married Mary Spratt, one of the

city's most successful merchants. He was excellent at mathematics and engineering, and rose to the position of Surveyor-General of New York. James later became a lawyer and, in fact, died as the richest lawyer in the colony in 1756.

Young William Alexander was therefore used to the finer things in life. What he really wanted though was social prestige, and this meant an aristocratic title. He plowed money into proving his relationship to the defunct Earldom of Stirling. To his delight, a Scottish court awarded him the title. However, the House of Lords, based in London, blocked the title, due to differing inheritance laws between England and Scotland. The Alexander family's Jacobite sympathies may have had something to do with it as well. Either way, William took the title and was successful in getting his neighbors and associates to address him as "the Lord Stirling."

Despite his title and love of fine living, William embraced the Patriot cause with enthusiasm. He found himself elected as a colonel of a New Jersey militia regiment. Enthusiastically, he equipped the regiment out of his own pocket. His first exploit was to take some of these militia, disguise them, and sneak up on and capture a British transport ship, "Blue Mountain Valley."

Lord Stirling would serve throughout the war with distinction. His greatest moment came during the Battle of Long Island, when he and his men held off a much larger British force, at the cost of over fifty percent casualties. This enabled General Washington and the rest of the Continental Army to escape the British trap on the island. Some historians argue that this heroic stand saved the Revolution.

Stirling was not one to let the serious business of the war get in the way of a good time. His parties were notorious affairs where, as one person put it, alcohol ran like Niagara Falls. Even this redounded to his country's benefit as it led to the unmasking of the notorious Conway Cabal, a plot to oust George Washington as Commander in chief and replace him with General Horatio Gates. Aide James Wilkinson (later founder of Lexington, Kentucky, and a notorious traitor) got drunk and spilled the whole affair to Stirling. He told Washington, who was able to get the affair squashed.

Stirling would probably be better remembered if he had not died so early. His love of the bottle proved to be his undoing. In fact, his love was so great that he became the first man to successfully plant wine grapes in New Jersey. Sadly, he drank and ate himself to death, dying in 1783, just before the war ended. Even so, his career as "The Rebel Lord" should be remembered by all Americans during this patriotic season.

Genealogy Center's July 2026 Programs

July's engaging programs are listed below. Take a look and register for programs today!

Tuesday, July 7, 2026 at 2:30 p.m. ET "Finding Your Family's Story at the Genealogy Center" with Elizabeth Hodges - <https://acpl.libnet.info/event/16750085>

- <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/9687111111?pwd=ZUJlYkRldjVkdzFkbDZlc0NlZWdScEo0QWpKLTZkdz09>
- <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/SOMotiCZSvSVwkJFEMIP8Q#/registration>

- <https://acpl.libnet.info/event/16670707>

Figure 1. The effect of the number of nodes on the number of nodes in the network.

Circumstance	Percentage (%)
If someone is attacking you	85
If someone is threatening you	75
If someone is harassing you	65
If someone is insulting you	55
If someone is annoying you	45

Staying Informed about Genealogy Center Programming

Do you want to know what we have planned? Are you interested in one of our events, but forget? We offer email updates for The Genealogy Center's programming schedule. Don't miss out! Sign up at <http://goo.gl/forms/THcVOwAabB>.

Genealogy Center Bits-o'-News

Look for the Genealogy Center merch! You really should check it out! The special Genealogy Center section of the store with some pretty cool items. Just added: some holiday ornaments! <http://acpl.dkmlgo.online/shop/category/4726261?c=4726261> Please remember that your purchases support the Friends of the Allen County Public Library, and they in turn support the Genealogy Center. As much as ever, this support is so very important.

Genealogy Center Social Media

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GenealogyCenter/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/genealogycenter/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ACPLGenealogy>

Blog: <http://www.genealogycenter.org/Community/Blog.aspx>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/askacpl>

Driving Directions to the Library

Wondering how to get to the library? Our location is 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the block bordered on the south by Washington Boulevard, the west by Ewing Street, the north by Wayne Street, and the east by the Library Plaza, formerly Webster Street. We would enjoy having you visit the *Genealogy Center*.

To get directions from your exact location to 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, visit this link at MapQuest:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?formtype=address&addtohistory=&address=900%20Webster%20St&city=Fort%20Wayne&state=IN&zipcode=46802%2d3602&country=US&geodiff=1>

›From the South

Exit Interstate 69 at exit 302. Drive east on Jefferson Boulevard into downtown. Turn left on Ewing Street. The Library is one block north, at Ewing Street and Washington Boulevard.

Using US 27:

US 27 turns into Lafayette Street. Drive north into downtown. Turn left at Washington Boulevard and go five blocks. The Library will be on the right.

›From the North

Exit Interstate 69 at exit 312. Drive south on Coldwater Road, which merges into Clinton Street. Continue south on Clinton to Washington Boulevard. Turn right on Washington and go three blocks. The Library will be on the right.

›From the West

Using US 30:

Drive into town on US 30. US 30 turns into Goshen Ave. which dead-ends at West State Blvd. Make an angled left turn onto West State Blvd. Turn right on Wells Street. Go south on Wells to Wayne Street. Turn left on Wayne Street. The Library will be in the second block on the right.

Using US 24:

After crossing under Interstate 69, follow the same directions as from the South.

›From the East

Follow US 30/then 930 into and through New Haven, under an overpass into downtown Fort Wayne. You will be on Washington Blvd. when you get into downtown. Library Plaza will be on the right.

Parking at the Library

The library's current parking system started on November 3, 2025, and may still be new to some. It is a real advantage for those using the *Genealogy Center* because the first three hours of parking are free. Then, as before, it is \$1 per hour up to a maximum of \$7 per day.

One can read all about the new system at www.acpl.lib.in.us/parking-at-main. There is a great FAQ section that will answer many questions one may have. And of course, one can always reach out to your friends in the *Genealogy Center*.

Genealogy Center Queries

The Genealogy Center hopes you find this newsletter interesting. Thank you for subscribing. We cannot, however, answer personal research emails written to the e-zine address. The department houses a Research Center that makes photocopies and conducts research for a fee.

If you have a general question about our collection, or are interested in the Research Center, please telephone the library and speak to a librarian who will be glad to answer your general questions or send you a research center form. Our telephone number is 260-421-1225. If you'd like to email a general information question about the department, please email: Genealogy@ACPL.Info.

Publishing Note

This electronic newsletter is published by the Allen County Public Library's Genealogy Center, and is intended to enlighten readers about genealogical research methods as well as inform them about the vast resources of the Allen County Public Library. We welcome the wide distribution of this newsletter and encourage readers to forward it to their friends and societies. All precautions have been made to avoid errors. However, the publisher does not assume any liability to any party for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions, no matter the cause.

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Curt B. Witcher and John D. Beatty, CG, FASG co-editors

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