



GENIE BYTES

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Grand Strand Genealogy Club

August 2026

Message from the Editor

Bonnie Kishpaugh

Editor, Genie Bytes, GSGC Member of the Board

"AI" – It's everywhere! It's everywhere! It's the latest thing in genealogy. In this issue, Suzy Hutchinson's article may clear up some of the confusion in using it for your own genealogy research.

Then we have Pat Bernschein's article on interviewing her cousin about their grandfather's family. She reveals how to interview and record your family's stories.

Anne Laymon has done it again with another book review. Way to go! Speaking of books. In the *Featured Books* section, as a complement to Pat's article, I found journals you can purchase which may inspire you to begin your own journey to preserve your family's life story and pass it down to your descendants.

Do you have any stories, books, websites, or tidbits you would like to share for our upcoming issues? You can send them to our club email address with *Newsletter* in the subject. Your help will make *Genie Bytes* as informative as possible for **all** members. ♦

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Book Review

Anne Laymon

Treasurer, GSGC Member of the Board

Schoenholtz, Michael. *Call Me John: A Genealogical Mystery Based on a True Story*. Michael Schoenholtz, LLC, 2021.

This short paperback (less than 150 pages) is the imaginative story of the author's uncle who disappeared at the age of 14. While early on in his genealogy journey, Michael's dad suggested he investigate his brother's disappearance. Michael found some possible relatives through *Ancestry DNA* but names and religious backgrounds didn't jive. Going with a hunch, and following other clues and documents discovered, he created this story of what life might have been like for his dad's brother. Is his long-lost uncle Isadore Katz or John Quinn?

I enjoyed the story, but I would like to know what actual documents were found to help create his narrative. I can guess that census records were used, but what else was discovered that led to events in this story. If you have read any of Nathan Dylan Goodwin's stories, this one will not be as detailed, but still enjoyable. ♦

Did You Know?

At its peak, the kingdom of Prussia was comprised of: West Prussia, East Prussia, Brandenburg (including Berlin), Saxony, Pomerania, the Rhineland, Westphalia, non-Austrian Silesia, Lusatia, Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover and Hesse-Nassau. You can find a list of online resources specifically for Prussian ancestry on the [*FamilySearch Wiki*](#). Confusing isn't it, but the Wiki may help clear up where you can find German/Prussian/Polish records. Prussia was officially abolished in 1947 and is the only country that has disappeared completely from the map. ♦

****Have a tip/tidbit you'd like to share? Please submit it to genieclub2002@gmail.com – Subject: "Tip/Tidbit." We'd love to hear from you. ****

Using Chat-Based AI for Genealogy

V. Susan Hutchinson

President, GSGC Officer of the Board

The current buzz word in genealogy is Artificial Intelligence (AI), but what is it and which apps will give the best output when researching our ancestors? AI is a computer program using algorithms and was developed to perform basic human reasoning, problem solving and learning skills. Creating an AI program requires an extreme amount of data for it to learn. As Google Cloud puts it “think of it as teaching a computer by showing it a million examples instead of writing a million rules.” As more data is input, the better it learns. This is a key point to remember and can explain why some chat-based AI apps (i.e., not a tool on a genealogy website) are better than others for genealogy. Whenever we put data into one of these applications, it is collected, the user info removed, and it will be used by the programmers to retrain for future revisions. Another important thing to remember is the old saying “garbage in, garbage out.” When working in any AI app you need to be very clear on what you want and if it does not give you the response you expected, let it know before restating your request.

We have all heard that *FamilySearch*, *Ancestry* and *MyHeritage* have now incorporated AI tools. *FamilySearch* shows digital images in their database transcribed with no formatting and an AI summary. Their Full-Text Search is also based on AI that finds documents with internal content that meet the search criteria put in by the user. *Ancestry* has several AI tools – AI Stories (narrated audio stories), AI Record Summaries (explanation of document content), Handwriting Transcriptions and Research Ideas. *MyHeritage* appears to be the most comprehensive with an AI Biographer™ (generates a Wikipedia style biography of the person), Scribe AI (translates, transcribes and interprets old documents), AI Time Machine™ (creates portraits of people appearing in different times in history), DeepStory (animates an image and creates an audio track telling their story from the first person), PhotoDater™ (estimates the year of a photo) and AI Record Finder™ (chat based that allows users to interact with the tool to search for ancestors in historical records). Unlike genealogy websites with AI tools intended to be used with their database records

and your family tree, Chat-based AI apps provide flexibility by allowing the user to upload any documents to start a conversation that is guided by user input.

First let's look at where you can go to translate old foreign language documents. Keep in mind that the apps discussed only let you upload graphics files; such as, jpg or png; they do not have the ability to pull information from a pdf file. Transkribus was recommended by our April speaker Kate Penny Howard. As she informed us, it will translate to English which you would then upload to another site for interpretation or any other follow up. Chat-based apps ChatGPT and Claude claim translation capabilities and also have the option for you to interact for further insight. Keep in mind the accuracy of the translation is only as good as the quality of the document. I have not used any AI applications for translation, but I have used a Facebook group called “Genealogical Translations,” which has a set format for members to upload information (year, record type, language, etc.) along with the document. Keep in mind it will not be a literal translation. When I uploaded my document, someone in The Netherlands gave me a one or two sentence summary of what was in it. Also, if you have multiple documents, you need to create a separate post for each one and it may not be the same person picking them all up.

Let's talk about transcribing documents written in old English. Although AI can really help with transcriptions and understanding of content, you need to have some idea of what the document says or who is mentioned in it before you upload, as important information may be missed when it reads the file. We will stick to the three most common chat-based AI apps for this discussion – ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot and Claude. Copilot is built into Windows 11 (also available on Windows 10 with limited function). ChatGPT is an online website and Claude is available as a download to your computer. I have used all three of these apps and I will start by saying Copilot is not good for transcription. For one thing Copilot will only let you upload one page at a time. This means if you have a multi-page record you need to tell it not to do anything with it until you have finished uploading all the pages, then say “done” for the last page so it can begin the task. I recently uploaded a two-page petition from 1746 that was clearly from a man

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named Timothy Dwight and Copilot read it as Thomas Hutchinson (!) and said it couldn't read several sections. I then uploaded the same document to Claude; it read the entire thing and got the name correct. I have found a slight glitch in reading a different petition on ChatGPT where it clearly showed my ancestor's signature, but ChatGPT listed all the signers except him. When I told it where to look, it came back saying I was correct and did another transcription that included his signature. My recommendation is to tell the app not only to transcribe, but to make sure to look for any important names in the document. Overall ChatGPT and Claude appear to be good options for transcribing documents, but if you aren't confident, try uploading the document to one or more of these and do a comparison to see which will be best for you.

All chat-based AI apps are based on interactions with the user. For genealogists this is fantastic as it means you can possibly have it translate, transcribe, give you a summary of the content and put it into historical context all in one conversation. After each request or question you ask, it will give you prompts for next actions you might want it to take based on everything it has seen. These recommendations have proven helpful to me as it gave me ideas that had not occurred to me. After several days of discussion on one of my ancestors, I told ChatGPT my plan was to go onsite to the local library and state archives in Albany, New York. It then gave me a research plan for my trip. Given enough information, it can also draft a narrative of your ancestor's story that you can use for a family history book.

Now what everyone really needs to know – cost. Copilot is free. ChatGPT and Claude have free and paid plans. One thing to remember is that they are not offline systems. There could be millions of people using their AI system at the same time, so they take that into consideration to determine when limits have been reached on free and paid tiers. Claude's limitations are based on a daily and weekly system based on message length, file size, conversation length and tool usage (creating content, searching the web, etc.). Once the limit is reached it will keep you from continuing the conversation for 5 hours notifying you of what time you can pick back up. Longer conversations and large file uploads mean you hit the daily limit more quickly. One thing to note is limits are hit quicker during peak times,

which are weekdays from 5am to 11am PT. "Pro" plans are \$20 per month or \$17 per month when paid annually. "Pro" gives you five times more usage than the "Free" version, but it appears with either "Free" or "Pro" you can upload as many files as you want.

ChatGPT's limiting factor is the number of uploads you can do. The "Free" version has an upload limit of 3-5 per day. Paid subscriptions are the "Go" plan for \$8 per month with a 30 file per day upload limit and the "Pro" plan for \$20 per month with an 80 file per three-hour window upload limit. File sizes greater than 512MB may impact all these plans.

The bottom line is ... I highly recommend using a Chat-based AI app for your genealogy research. I know it has helped me a lot, not only for transcribing documents, but analyzing what they mean and explaining why they contain important historical information for my family history. You can also get some confidence boosting when it says things like "this is a really important historical document you've found" and "you are asking the right questions for your genealogical research." ♦

More Than Names and Dates (How One Conversation Became a Family Treasure)

Pat Bernscheine

Webmaster & Membership, GSGC Member of the Board

As genealogists, we spend countless hours searching for birth records, census records, wills, and obituaries. Those documents tell us **who** our ancestors were — but rarely tell us **who they were as people**.

Recently, I decided to record a conversation with my cousin, June Koontz. My goal wasn't to solve a genealogical mystery; instead, I simply wanted to ask her about the people she remembered growing up.

Our conversation lasted nearly forty minutes. June shared memories that could never be found in courthouse records or online databases. She told me about roller skating three miles to surprise her grandfather, George Conway, in Towson. She remembered family visits before television, afternoons spent listening to *The Shadow* on the radio, Sunday gatherings with cousins and the people who quietly shaped our family's story.

After recording the interview, I used today's speech-to-

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text technology to create a transcript. With a little editing, those spoken memories became the oral history that follows.

The experience reminded me that preserving family history doesn't always begin with documents. Sometimes it begins with a simple statement: "Tell me what you remember."

Our relatives don't have to be famous or have extraordinary lives. Their everyday memories — how families visited one another, favorite traditions, childhood adventures and stories about parents and grandparents — are the details that future generations will treasure.

As our genealogy club continues exploring new ways to share stories through our website, I hope this interview encourages others to record conversations with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and longtime family friends. Every family has stories waiting to be told.

The interview that follows is presented as an example of how a simple conversation can become a lasting family treasure.

AN ORAL HISTORY OF GEORGE CONWAY AND THE CONWAY FAMILY

Recollections of June Koontz

Interviewed by Pat Bernschein
May 29, 2026

Introduction

Family history is more than names and dates. It is made up of memories, stories and small moments that rarely appear in official records.

On May 29, 2026, I had the pleasure of interviewing my cousin, June Koontz, about her memories of our Conway family. June shared stories of our grandfather George Conway, his second wife Nellie Kelly Conway, childhood visits to relatives and what family life was like in Baltimore during the 1940s and 1950s.

These recollections have been edited for clarity while preserving June's voice and memories.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Roller Skating to Grandfather's House

One of June's clearest childhood memories took place in 1945, when she was thirteen years old and a freshman in high school.

Instead of taking the streetcar to Towson as she

normally would, she decided to roller skate the three miles from Rogers Forge to surprise her grandparents.

"They were completely surprised to see me," June recalled. "They invited me to stay for dinner and called my parents to make sure it was all right."

She vividly remembered George Conway's unusual driveway, which curved beneath the house to a garage built underneath the home.

After dinner, George insisted on driving her home rather than allowing her to travel after dark.

"It was the only time I can remember being alone with my grandfather," June said. "I've always treasured that memory."

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Remembering George Conway

Although June admitted she did not know her grandfather as well as some of her other grandparents, she remembered him as a quiet, gentle man.

"He was very quiet," she said. "I never heard him play, but everyone said he played the piano."

One family tradition stood out above all the others.

Every afternoon, everyone was expected to be quiet while George listened to his favorite radio program, *The Shadow*.

"I can still remember everyone having to be quiet while the show was on," June laughed.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Aunt Nellie

Like many children in the family, June grew up believing that Aunt Nellie was simply another grandmother.

Only years later did she realize that Nellie Kelly Conway had been George Conway's second wife and was actually the children's stepmother.

The family affectionately called her either "Nell" or "Nellie," although June believed her given name may have been Ella Kelly.

After George's death, Nellie moved into an apartment on York Road where she lived with, or near, her sister Kitty.

June remembered visiting the apartment and admiring its sunroom filled with plants and decorative knickknacks.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

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Sunday Family Visits

Before television, Sundays were devoted to visiting family.

"We visited someone almost every Sunday," June remembered.

Most visits were to cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents throughout the Baltimore area.

Children often entertained themselves with coloring books while the adults spent hours talking around the dining room table.

"When there were other children to play with, it made the visits much more interesting," June said.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

The Families We Visited

As the conversation continued, memories returned of many families connected to the Conways through blood and marriage.

Among those remembered were:

- The Kelly family
- The Hausenauer family
- The Conroy family
- Jim and Regina Kelly

Genealogy later helped explain many of those relationships that had seemed confusing during childhood.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Growing Up in Baltimore

June also reflected on growing up in Baltimore during the 1940s.

Her maternal grandparents operated the Darley Confectionery on Harford Road.

Her grandfather worked extraordinarily long hours, often from early morning until late at night.

During summer visits, June spent afternoons in the store reading comic books and enjoying free milkshakes while watching customers come and go.

Those simple pleasures became some of her happiest childhood memories.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Family Gatherings and Changing Times

The interview also touched on customs that have largely disappeared.

Family members gathered in one another's homes almost every weekend.

Funeral visitations were frequently held in private

homes rather than funeral parlors.

Women often left the workforce after marriage, something both June and I reflected upon while discussing our mothers' lives.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Genealogy and Preserving Family History

Although June admitted genealogy was never her greatest interest, she appreciated the importance of preserving family records.

Her mother had carefully assembled family trees and notes, many of which June inherited.

"I always wrote things down and put them in an envelope," she laughed.

Those papers remain an important part of the family's history today.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Looking Back

Near the close of our conversation, I thanked June for sharing her memories.

She smiled and said, "I've really enjoyed this. We should do it again sometime."

Perhaps the greatest value of oral history is not simply answering questions, but allowing forgotten memories to surface naturally through conversation.

Thanks to June's willingness to share her recollections, future generations will know not only who George Conway was, but also what it felt like to roller skate to his house, sit quietly while he listened to *The Shadow*, visit relatives every Sunday afternoon and grow up surrounded by a close-knit extended family.

These are the stories that breathe life into a family tree.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Genealogical Notes

- **George Conway** — Grandfather remembered throughout the interview.
- **Nellie (Ella?) Kelly Conway** — George Conway's second wife and stepmother to the Conway children.
- **Kitty Kelly** — Nellie's sister.
- **Rogers Forge and Towson, Maryland** — Locations of June's childhood and her grandparents' home.
- **Darley Confectionery** — Family business operated by June's maternal grandparents on Harford Road in Baltimore.

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- **The Shadow** — Popular radio drama remembered as George Conway's favorite afternoon program.

Afterword: You're probably asking yourself ... how did she record and transcribe the interview? Well, I have "Google Voice" as part of my Google "bundle." If you have Gmail, you have access to it. Google Voice allows you to record the conversation. You simply call the person and tell them you are going to record ... hit record. Once you have recorded the conversation, there is an option to download and save. In order to have the correct format to upload to TurboScribe, I needed to upload to my Wondershare software. Wondershare converted it to the correct format for the next step. TurboScribe was able to structure the conversation into clear text. In other words, it got rid of the pauses and the usual conversational ... "ah" ... "dah" ... etc. TurboScribe also gave the whole conversation a polished feel.

You may be asking ... what did it cost? Just my time. I already pay for Wondershare. Google Voice and TurboScribe are free.

I have the actual conversion preserved in both the audio version and the transcribed version. The process was yet another opportunity to learn a new skill. I am hopeful that I will be able to help others make permanent memories for themselves and their families.

Our ancestors had fantastic discoveries ... railways, airplanes, cars ... we have AI. I'm hooked. How about you? ♦

Featured Website

Anne Laymon informs us this website is for people who need to change the format of a document or reformat files. It's called [iLovePDF](https://www.ilovepdf.com/). Need to change a JPG to a PDF or change a PDF to a JPG? How about splitting a PDF, rotating it, or changing a Word doc to a PDF? There are so many options for FREE. (She never logs in; she just selects the tool option and drops in her file). DON'T hit Download just yet, she warns, since that takes you somewhere else. Instead on the right side of the page click "CONVERT" and then download your new formatted file! Easy Peasy. ♦

Featured Books

Schmidt, Josiah. *2000 Questions for Grandparents: Unlocking Your Family's Hidden History*. Genealogical

Lulu.com. 2014. According to Amazon, unlocking your family's hidden history has never been easier with this ultimate guide to family history interviews. This book will teach you how to prepare for, conduct and learn from interviews with family members. Includes 2000 useful, creative questions to get your relatives' fascinating memories and thoughts flowing on such topics as: childhood life; previous generations; world events; outlook on life; love, marriage and family; career and hobbies; spirituality and politics; likes and dislikes; travels and migrations; military service and more! ♦

Preserve your life story and pass it down to your family in these beautiful keepsake memory books. Thoughtfully designed to help adults write down memories they want to preserve and share with their family. Designed by bestselling artist and author Korie Herold, these keepsake books provide you with thoughtful writing prompts and plenty of journaling pages to record memories from your childhood, school years, early adulthood and more.

The following Heirloom Story Books and Guided Journals are published by Paige Tate & Company.

- Grandpa's Story: A Memory and Keepsake Journal for My Family (2021)
- Grandma's Story: A Memory and Keepsake Journal for My Family (2021)
- Dad's Story Journal (Linen Hardcover): A Memory and Keepsake Journal for My Family (2022)
- Mom's Story: A Memory and Keepsake Journal for My Family (2022)
- Uncle's Story: A Memory and Keepsake Journal for My Family (2025)
- Aunt's Story: A Memory and Keepsake Journal for My Family (2025)

The perfect gift for any time of the year! ♦

Call for Genie Jar Donations

Members of the GSGC last met solely in person in March of 2020. Expenses such as maintenance of our website and Zoom subscriptions as well as payment of speakers and the *Ancestry* subscription for Chapin Library continue. Please help us. Mail your check or money order to Grand Strand Genealogy Club, 6529 Valene Court, Myrtle Beach, SC, 29572. Thank you, in advance, for continuing to support YOUR GSGC! ♦

State Guides

Connecticut

(Source: State Guide Connecticut by O'Sullivan, B. Originally published in the Mar/Apr 2026/Vol.27, Issue 2, P. 33 of *Family Tree Magazine*)

Statehood: 1788

First federal census: 1790

Birth and death records begin: from establishment (town); 1897 (state)

Marriage records begin: from establishment (town); 1897 (state)

Contact for vital records:

CT Dept. of Health, State Vital Records Office. ♦

Washington

(Source: State Guide South Dakota by Hanson, V. Originally published in the Mar/Apr 2026/Vol.27, Issue 2, P.37 of *Family Tree Magazine*)

Statehood: 1889

First federal census: 1860 (as territory); 1900 (as state)

Birth and death records begin: 1905 (state); counties may be earlier

Marriage records begin: from settlement (county); 1905 (state)

Contact for vital records:

S.D. Dept. of Health. ♦

Dear Miss Genie

No questions received this quarter. ♦

**Do you have a question for Miss Genie? Why not send it to her at genieclub2002@gmail.com – Subject: "Miss Genie." She would love to hear from you. **

SOUTH CAROLINA GRAND STRAND GENEALOGY CLUB (SCGSGC)

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► Become involved. Shadow a Board member. We welcome you. ◀

Lanyards (\$5 ID Badge Holder + 2 Ribbons. Additional Ribbons \$.25 each) – See Richard Maclary or email the Club at genieclub2002@gmail.com to order

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

GSGC MONTHLY MEETINGS

PLACE: CHAPIN MEMORIAL LIBRARY/VIA ZOOM

TIME: 10 A.M.

PRESENTATIONS: (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

- August 8: Ancestry — Additional Searching Tools — Bob Dahlin
- September 12: True Grit and Determination: Finding Female Ancestors — Amber Oldenburg
- October 10: Problem Ancestor Live

GENEALOGY MEETINGS/CONFERENCES

New York Genealogical and Biographical Society (NYG&B) 2026 New York State Family History Conference

– September 18 – 19, 2026. New Perspectives, Best Practices is this year's theme for New York's largest statewide family history conference. Livestreamed presentations from the NYG&B headquarters in New York City as well as additional on-demand sessions for all conference registrants. Check website for details. ♦

NCGS 2026 Fall Conference – September 18 – 19, 2026.

Join us for our annual two-day conference at the McKimmon Center in Raleigh, NC or streamed online everywhere. Twenty-two lectures in person ALL livestreamed and ALL recorded for viewing afterwards – you won't miss a thing! Plus 4 workshops and 9 recorded videos – a total of 36 hours of genealogy education. Check website for details. ♦

** Please visit [ConferenceKeeper](#) for the most complete "Calendar and Collection of Genealogy Events" on the Internet. This is your chance to attend a meeting virtually you may have been unable to attend onsite because of its distance or cost. **

MEETINGS

2nd Saturday of each month at 10:00 a.m. at:

Chapin Memorial Library (*FamilySearch* Affiliate Library)
400 14th Avenue North, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

Meetings held both at Chapin Library and via ZOOM

Email - genieclub2002@gmail.com

Website - www.scgsgc.org

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Note: Please send your questions/suggestions/feedback to genieclub2002@gmail.com - Subject: "Newsletter."

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