

National Genealogical Society Presents Awards for Excellence in Genealogy Scholarship and Service at Family History Conference

24 MAY 2025—The [National Genealogical Society](#) (NGS) presented awards to those whose work highlights excellence in genealogy scholarship and service at a plenary session on Saturday morning, 24 May, during its [Family History Conference](#), Tales & Trails, at the Galt House in Louisville, Kentucky. Felicia Jamison, PhD, assistant professor of history at the University of Louisville, gave the keynote address, “Recovering Louisville’s African American History Using Genealogical Research.” Awards Committee Chair Judy Nimer Muhn presented the Awards of Merit, Awards of Excellence, and Certificates of Appreciation.

The Award of Merit is presented to an individual or non-profit genealogical or historical organization to recognize exceptional contributions to the field of genealogy over a period of five or more years. Their work must have significantly aided research or increased interest in genealogy. This year the NGS board of directors presented the award to the following distinguished leaders in our sector.

The British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa (BIFHSGO) is recognized for its outstanding work to connect, educate, share, and inspire people in the pursuit of genealogy. It supports researchers in Canada and beyond with effective research methods and practices focused on the British Isles. Its broad scope of programming includes in-person meetings, online education, publications, indexes to special populations of those of British Isles descent, and access to presentations of international speakers. The BIFHSGO continues to provide its members valuable content, a vibrant community of fellow researchers, and access to high-quality resources.

Valerie-Anne Lutz, MSLS, is president of the board of directors of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania (GSP) and a longtime member of NGS. Since at least 2008, Lutz has been an enthusiastic and indefatigable volunteer for the GSP. She is a past chair of its Membership Committee and currently chairs its Technology and Website Committee and the Library and Collections Committee. She has served on the GSP Board of Directors since 2011, was secretary in 2014, and is its current president.

Annie S. Mabry has dedicated more than thirty years to the field of genealogy. Her contributions have significantly aided research and increased public interest in family history. Perhaps Mabry’s greatest impact has been through her education initiatives. She has trained 3,250+ individuals in beginner, intermediate, and advanced genealogical methods. Through partnerships with the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, she has made genealogy more accessible to diverse communities, equipping participants with tools to uncover and preserve their family stories.

Elizabeth Swanay O’Neal, CG, has been active in the genealogy community for the past decade. Since 2019, she has served in a volunteer capacity as the director of the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* (NGSQ) Study Groups, which meet monthly to discuss the publication’s case studies. O’Neal is a leader in the Association of Professional Genealogists and has served as president of the South California Chapter since 2021. She is a past president of the Second Life Chapter and served as vice president and president of the Second Life Virtual Genealogical Society. She is currently the education and programs director for Santa Barbara County Genealogical Society. She was the Genealogical Speakers Guild secretary and a ProGen Study Group Coordinator. For the

Daughters of the American Revolution, she has acted as genealogy consultant, national chair of Congress Online, and national chair of Volunteer Information Specialists.

Ilmo. Sr. D. Pablo Antonio Pérez was born in Argentina and began researching his family history at the age of 14. He is dedicated to preserving the genealogy records, heraldry, history and ethnography from the island of Chiloé (Chile) as well as from Spain and other regions under historical German influence. He holds a Diploma in Genealogy, Heraldry and Nobility from the Instituto Español de Estudios Nobiliarios as well as Master in Nobility and Awards Law, Heraldry and Genealogy from the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Spain. Pérez is a prolific researcher and writer. He researched and published the first genealogies of Indigenous families from Chiloé, and has published three books and numerous scholarly articles in academies, universities, institutes, and research centers. His research has been published in ten languages and fourteen countries.

Donna Potter Phillips has been a strong supporter and volunteer of the Eastern Washington Genealogical Society since 1975. She has held multiple leadership roles on the Board and initiated the Annual Board Retreat. She launched online classes and multi-class workshops and spearheaded an Obituary Project, which added over 100,000 records to the society's online research index. She led the Walking with Ancestors event for several years and taught many beginning genealogy classes. Phillips has been a guest speaker at local sister societies and is a published author of her former newspaper column, Heritage Hunting, which ran for ten years.

Allen Thomas, a former Clerk of Court in Laurens County, Georgia, undertook and completed a herculean, fifteen-year project to preserve the records found three cardboard boxes in an old vault at the courthouse, which held 31,895 original documents from the nineteenth century. Original documents such as these have great historical value. The majority of the documents are estate records. Numerous other types of documents included guardian bonds, sheriff bonds, jury commissioner oaths, oaths of numerous elected officials, etc. These documents were bundled in separate categories. Thomas rearranged the documents into 3,800 files based on given and family names. He then spent years keying an abstract of each document into the computer. The documents are now housed at Laurens County, Georgia Public Library, where they are available for historical and genealogical research six days a week.

Barbara West, is a ninety-three-year-old volunteer who has been actively involved in the Roscommon County Genealogical Society of Michigan for over twenty years. A trustee on the Executive Board, she administers the society's research center on Mondays and Wednesdays, offering her years of expertise and knowledge to patrons needing assistance. West recently retired as editor of the society's quarterly newsletter. Over the years, she has collected and maintained a regional surname file sorted alphabetically and recorded on a database. When a historian in France contacted the center, West helped her trace the family a soldier who had landed the beaches of Normandy in WWII. The historian had found the soldier's duffle bag and wanted to return it to his family. Thanks to West, the society was able to contact the man's family and put them in touch with the historian.

Awards for Excellence

Awards for Excellence are presented for a specific, significant single contribution in the form of a family genealogy or family history book, a publication discussing genealogical methods and sources,

or an exemplary article published in the *NGS Quarterly*. The winners demonstrate scholarship and excellence in genealogy.

Genealogy and Family History Book

First place: Jenifer Kahn Bakkala and Eileen Curley Pironti (co-authors), *Ancestral Lines of Iain W.F. Shepherd and Helen Waugh (Gray) Shepherd*. Boston: Newbury Street Press, an imprint of American Ancestors, 2023.

Methods and Sources Book

First place: Jane E. Wilcox. *New York State Archives Guide for Family Historians, Biographers, and Historical Researchers*. New York: New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, 2024.

Second place: Mary Blauss Edwards. *Plymouth County, Massachusetts, Freeperson Families in 1790*. Boston: Newbury Street Press, an imprint of American Ancestors, 2024.

National Genealogical Society Quarterly Article

The article recognized for this award is selected from all of the articles submitted in the previous year and is chosen by the NGSQ staff team. The 2025 winners are Patricia Lee Hobbs, CG and Barbara J. Garrison, PhD, for the March 2024 article, "DNA Merges Families of Stephen Stilwell of Dutchess County, New York; Cornwall, Upper Canada; and Coshocton County, Ohio."

Certificates of Appreciation

The conference team from the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) were awarded Certificates of Appreciation for their volunteer work in preparing for the conference. The conference would not have been possible without their efforts and commitment. The honorees included Publicity Chair Drew Hight, Local Events Chair William Burchfield, and Local Host Society Chair Rae Ann Sauer. Volunteer Chair Melissa Thatcher, with FamilySearch, was also honored with a Certificate of Appreciation.

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