



MTGS Messenger
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Jim Long, Editor



May 18 Meeting with John F. Baker Jr.

John F. Baker Jr. is the speaker for our **Saturday, May 18 regular MTGS meeting**. For his groundbreaking book [**The Washingtons of Wessynton Plantation: Stories of My Family's Journey to Freedom**](#), John researched over 11,000 documents pertaining to the Robertson County plantation on which his ancestors, and 300 other enslaved individuals, lived. Using letters, diaries, family documents, interviews and DNA, John has

been reconstructing the genealogies of the family groups that lived at Wessynton, and has been bringing back to light their stories of struggle, survival and freedom.

John, a Robertson County native, [**speaks around the country**](#) about genealogy and about his Wessynton project, and does genealogy research for clients.

Join us to hear of John's personal journey of discovery, and to get caught up on the latest discoveries that John has made in this monumental genealogy and history project. The meeting takes place at **1:00pm Central** at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, and on Zoom.

John will also be presenting our annual [**Writer's Award**](#), for the best-judged article in our quarterly *Journal*.

The Zoom link for this meeting is

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86170933625?pwd=o3zizOEyfpV2nIG7CrdwaR6muWQ2CY.1>



A Grave Reminder

The [Association for Gravestone Studies](#) is having its Annual Conference from **June 18-23 at Emory University**, Atlanta. Registration ends May 15 for in-person attendance and June 10 for virtual registrants. Events include cemetery tours, a conservation workshop, lectures and discussions, and a late-night show and tell. Topics include anthropology, archaeology, art & architecture, cemetery management & laws, history & culture, and preservation practices.



Get a GRIP on Genealogy

Registration for this year's [GRIP Genealogy Institute](#) is underway, this year offering eleven virtual courses from June 23-28 and nine in-person courses in **Pittsburgh** from July 14-19. Each course is led by a Coordinator who is an expert in one or more genealogical disciplines. It's a great way to connect with genealogy researchers and lecturers in an in-depth learning environment.

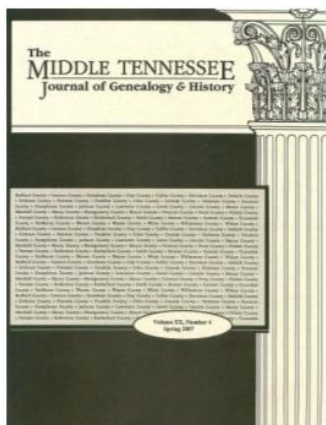
GRIP began in 2011 as the Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh, and last fall was acquired by NGS. NGS members receive discounted registration rates. As of this writing, 9 of the 11 virtual courses and 8 of the 9 in-person courses still have seats available.

A Big Discount

[MyHeritage](#) is offering a 70% discount on its all-access "Complete" plan for the next few days only (well, at least for me it seems). I have my DNA kits on MyHeritage (because you never know where your DNA cousins have tested) and I check for new matches there regularly. I haven't otherwise used the site for research much, though. If you have, reply to this email and let me know what you like about MyHeritage – before my discount offer runs out!

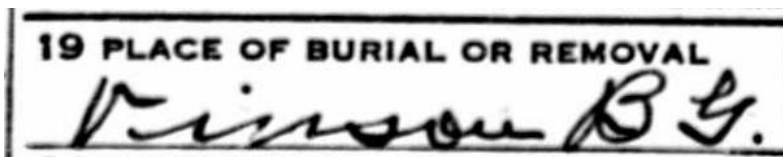
Another Mity Discount

FamilyTreeDNA is offering a Mother's Day sale on upgrading your existing mtDNA kit to **mtDNA Full Sequence for just \$79**. The offer explains that the upgrade should narrow down your mtDNA matches to a more-recent common ancestor, which should make the matches more useful for genealogical purposes. Their sale ends May 15.



MTGS Journal Access Opens Up

The MTGS Board recently voted to move most of the back issues of our award-winning *Journal* to the public section of our website. The most-recent 5 years of Journals will remain only in our [Members](#) page, but the older ones (Volumes 1-32) are now accessible on the [Journal](#) page. Tell your friends!



Finding the Knights

I recently helped a seasoned genealogist visiting my area who was hoping to visit

the **burial locations** of her great-grandparents, John and Nancy Knight of Stewart County. Fortunately for her, Nancy Knight lived long enough (1926) to have a Tennessee death certificate that indicated her place of burial: “Vinson burying ground”. Great!

I was able to show her on a map where the Vinson Cemetery is located – on Clay Bay of Tennessee River. It wasn’t easy to reach, but at least she now knew her destination. Oh, and **never mind** that the cemetery was located in a **different part of the county** from where she knew that John and Nancy had lived. They must have moved later in life, right? And never mind that the undertaker was from the community where John and Nancy lived – on the opposite side of the county from the Vinson Cemetery...

As we continued to visit and talk about John and Nancy’s life in the county, she shared that John was a Civil War veteran, and that she had ordered the **pension packet** for John and Nancy’s applications for pensions. The pension packet was a treasure trove of affidavits from neighbors and fellow soldiers. Almost in passing, she quoted one statement from one of the affidavits, that John had been buried in the **Daniel Vinson burying ground**.

Stop the presses! Did she say the Daniel Vinson burying ground? Yes, and I’m *sure glad that she did*. The Daniel Vinson burying ground isn’t called by that name anymore, I explained. It’s now called the **Hicks Cemetery** (much to the chagrin of the Vinson descendants). And the Hicks Cemetery is located in the community where John and Nancy Knight were known to have lived. I got the county map back out and showed her how to get to the Daniel Vinson burying ground where her Knights are buried.

It pays to order pension packets when they're available, and to talk with locals who sometimes eventually stumble upon the right answers.



AI is A-OK With Me!

I was recently given a large family photo collection by a friend who had saved it from the trash (in a house she had purchased years ago as a rental property). She had done some genealogical work over the years in identifying the families depicted. Fortunately, the original collector had written on the back of about 2/3 of the photos. My charge from my friend was to find a home for the collection - with members of that family. There was even a family Bible in the collection.

I studied the 100 or so marked photos, and constructed a sprawling family tree of those depicted – mostly from a few families in a small community in southern Montgomery County. I am in the process of identifying living descendants of everyone, and have already made one contact and have mailed out a handful of her family's photos.

I then turned my attention to the challenge of the 50 or so unmarked photos. Quite by accident, I discovered a feature on Ancestry that **uses AI to match faces with already-uploaded photos** in Ancestry family trees. My first try of the technology was the photo of an unidentified couple (at left), whose photo included the photography studio's name – **Smith's Studio, Ottawa, Kan.**

I uploaded the photo to the tree I had been building on the family, then clicked on the photo to view it along with Ancestry's photo tools. The **Tags** feature is what you click on next, which

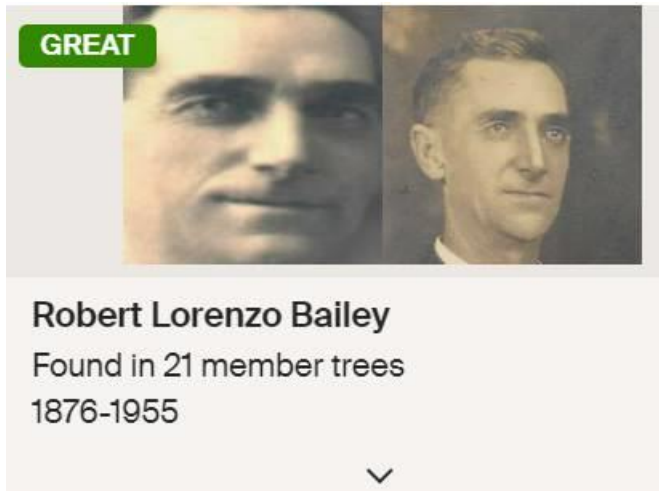


is a little icon representing a silhouette. You then click on a face and adjust the size of the bounding-box accordingly. When you click on the face, Ancestry pops up some guidance, explaining that it will search your existing tree and find someone in it for you (if you already know the identity). But then it goes on to say that it can use AI to try and figure out the identity. There's a big, tempting blue button that says

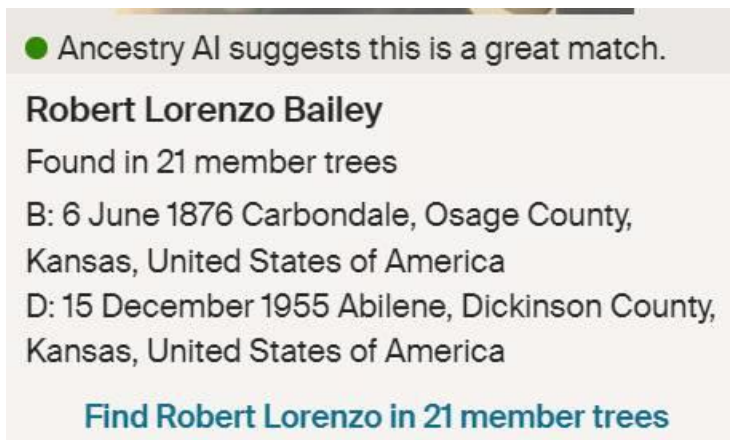
Recognize ancestors

. I clicked on the gentleman in this photo first, and then clicked the tempting blue button.

The AI tool rates its findings as Fair, Good or Great. The very first match it presented was rated Great, and looked like this:



with my photo selection on the right and the AI-matched image on the left. That sure looked like the same person to me! I clicked the little down-arrow for more info, hoping I'd see that Robert Lorenzo Bailey lived somewhere close to Ottawa, Kansas (as mentioned on my photo), and saw this:



Wow, this guy did live in Kansas! Now, I had to figure out whether this guy out in Kansas had some connection to the family in Montgomery County, Tennessee whose collection I had. I clicked on the link to see links to the 21 Member Trees. It took just a matter of minutes looking at the trees to realize that [the woman pictured in my photo was from Montgomery County](#). She was one of the children listed in the family Bible that was part of the collection. Wow!

[I would have published this Newsletter sooner](#), but as you might imagine, I've been spending all of my waking hours uploading the unknown photos from this collection – and from my own family collections – to this Ancestry AI tool.

OK, what this tool is doing is matching your photo – using facial recognition technology - against photos already in Member Trees on Ancestry. It's not going to just figure out

everyone's identity, but what have you got to lose in trying it? My experience so far is that the tool is best on photos of adult males, so-so on adult females (with lots of "Great" matches that aren't), and quite lousy on photos of non-adults.

I hope that you will try this fascinating use of AI – but not lose track of time so that you can join us on Saturday for our regular meeting.