



THE Forum Insider

Newsletter of the Genealogical Forum of Oregon
Volume 36 • Number 6 • February 2025

Unveiling the BIRLS Death File

In 2018, Reclaim The Records, a non-profit organization dedicated to making public records readily available, filed a multi-year Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit, successfully obtaining the majority of the Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) database in 2022.

Originally maintained by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the BIRLS database indexes biographical details of over 18 million deceased veterans who benefited from VA programs such as health care, disability, GI Bill educational benefits, and VA loans. It covers individuals from all U.S. military branches, including historic ones like the Women's Army Corps (WACs) and the Army Air Corps, and even includes veterans from the Philippine Commonwealth Army and Philippine Scouts.

Researchers can find additional details, such as the date the individual first enlisted in the military, their service serial number, and even their rank.

These records can also indicate whether the individual was honorably discharged, and in some cases, contain data about their last known address or next of kin.

Until recently, access to this data was often limited to paid subscriptions or entirely out of reach for many researchers. Now freely available online, users can search and download this public data. Beyond the index, finding a veteran's name in the database allows researchers to file a FOIA request for their full VA claims file. These detailed files may include extensive biographical and historical materials, offering insights into military service and personal histories from the late 19th century to the present.

To search the BIRLS database, click this link: <https://www.birls.org/>.

To learn more about the process of obtaining these records and about Reclaim the Records, please visit [Reclaim The Records](#).

GFO Annual Appeal Surpasses Goal

Geoff Smith, President

I am pleased to report that the Annual Appeal was successful!

We all owe a big thank-you to the 159 donors who supported our 2024-2025 Annual Appeal with a contribution. We met our goal with a bit extra that will help as we run into price increases.

This support ensures that the GFO will be able to continue to deliver first-rate support for our members

through the largest genealogical library in the Pacific Northwest, the growing resources available on our website, and our educational program of talks, classes, and seminars.

Moreover, this support underscores the value that our members (and other donors) find in maintaining resources for genealogical research as we look toward the future.

Thank you, donors!





Genealogical Forum of Oregon

2505 SE 11th Ave., Suite B018
Portland, OR 97202-1093

Mission

To inspire and empower every person to *discover* and *engage* with their family history.

Contact Us

503-963-1932
info@gfo.org

Visitor Information

Library Hours
Sunday 1–5 p.m.
Monday & Tuesday 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.
Wednesday 1–5 p.m.

Executive Board of Directors

President Geoff Smith	Treasurer Rebecca Tait
Vice President <i>Open Position</i>	Director at Large Harold Hinds
Secretary Alexa Waddle	Director at Large Tina Rainer

Committee Chairs on the Board

Insider Editors Geri Auerbach, AG® Keri Logan	Purchasing Loretta Welsh
Library Laurel Smith	Technology Richard Crockett
Membership Jane McGarvin	Webmaster Ed Vandehey
	Zoom Administrator Tina Lawson

Submissions to *The Forum Insider*

Please send short stories, news, announcements, comments, and corrections to Geri Auerbach, AG®, and Keri Logan, Editors, at insider@gfo.org.



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The Forum Insider [ISSN 1051-5666 (print), ISSN 2377-469X (online)] is the newsletter of the Genealogical Forum of Oregon Inc., 2505 SE 11th Ave., Suite B-018, Portland, OR 97202-1093. Dues are \$52 per year for individual memberships and \$78 for joint memberships. Membership includes digital subscriptions to *The Bulletin* (March, June, September, and December) and *The Forum Insider* (January, February, April, May, July, August, October, and November). Material from *The Forum Insider* may be reproduced provided credit is given to the publication, the author of the article, and the Genealogical Forum of Oregon. *The Forum Insider* staff includes Geri Auerbach, AG®, and Keri Logan, Editors. Many thanks to our proofreaders April Ober, Tanya Goffman, and Harry Auerbach.



The Forum Insider Seeks New Editor

Following our first announcement in January, we are still searching for a new editor (or editors) to take the reins of *The Forum Insider*, the Genealogical Forum of Oregon's newsletter. With Keri Logan and Geri Auerbach stepping down after the May issue, this is your chance to step into a rewarding and creative role within the GFO community.

What's in it for you?

- **A platform to spotlight genealogy research and discoveries.** Share the stories and findings that make our field so fascinating.
- **Opportunities to collaborate with passionate genealogists.** Work with GFO members and contributors to curate high-quality content.
- **A chance to develop your skills in writing, editing, and curation.** Whether you're an experienced editor or a beginner, this role offers valuable experience and personal growth.

We understand that stepping into a new role can be daunting, but don't worry—training and support



are available! Keri and Geri are committed to providing guidance to help you succeed.

If you're passionate about genealogy and storytelling, now is the perfect time to join the editorial team and leave your mark on the *Insider*.

Ready to volunteer?

Contact us at insider@gfo.org or president@gfo.org to learn more. Let's work together to keep the stories of our genealogical community thriving!

Organizing Your Ancestors From Ancestral Mess to Historical Success

FEB. 15, 2025

2:30 PM PT



Presented by Jennifer Lava

FREE REGISTRATION: [GFO.ORG/GENTALK](https://gfo.org/gentalk)





GFO Board Elections Upcoming

Volunteers Needed to Serve

The GFO prides itself on being entirely run by volunteers. This year, we have three Board positions up for election: Vice-President, Treasurer, and Director at Large. We also elect a member of the Endowment Committee.

The GFO needs you! These are vital roles to fill. Active and engaged members keep GFO thriving, and leadership can be a professional and personal growth opportunity.

Candidates must be GFO members in good standing and agree to serve a two-year term for Board members or a three-year term for the Endowment Committee position. Terms begin on July 1, 2025.

Board member responsibilities include attending at least nine of our twelve monthly Board meetings each year and submitting monthly reports. The Endowment Committee meets four times a year. Currently, all meetings are virtual. No prior nonprofit board experience is necessary.

Please contact Geoff Smith (president@gfo.org) if you would like to know more about these positions. Send nominations to the Secretary, Alexa Waddle at secretary@gfo.org. Typically, members self-nominate.

Election Calendar

March 10

Nominations for positions are due. Candidate statements for inclusion in the April *Insider* are due. Send to insider@gfo.org.

March 15

General Membership Meeting: Additional nominations may be made “from the floor” at this meeting. Candidates are officially announced by the end of the meeting.

April 1–30

The election will be conducted online, with details in the April edition of the *Insider*

June 21

Annual Membership Meeting: Announcement and installation of new officers who assume office July 1.

To nominate someone other than yourself, please confirm that the nominee is willing to serve.

If you would like to attend a Board meeting to experience how the Board conducts the business of the GFO, please send an email to secretary@gfo.org to receive a Zoom link to that month’s meeting.

GFO General Meeting Set for March 15

The March General Membership Meeting will be held at 2:30 p.m., Saturday, March 15, by Zoom.

Per GFO's bylaws, the candidates for elected offices for terms beginning July 1, 2025, will be announced.

In addition, the membership will vote on a proposal to authorize the GFO board to identify and purchase a property for a permanent home.

Registration for the meeting will be available February 1, 2025. Visit the [calendar](#) on the GFO website for a link to registration.





Nominations Sought for GFO Hall of Fame

The Genealogical Forum of Oregon has established the Hall of Fame Award as a way to honor members who have performed outstanding service and shown exceptional leadership skills on behalf of the Forum. The award is limited to one person per year, except in the case where a pair of members has worked together.

A nomination may be made by any Forum member, and the recipient will be selected from the panel of nominations by a majority vote of the Board of Directors. The recipient must have a well-documented history of service, leadership, and accomplishment in more than one facet of the Forum over a significant period of time.

Procedure

Any member may nominate another member for the award in writing. A nomination must be submitted to the **Forum President** and should include the following:

1. Name and member number (if known)
2. List of services, activities, positions, and accomplishments.
3. A narrative describing the nature of their work in terms of its importance to the success of the Forum.
4. A short biography.

All areas of service will be examined and may

include, but not be limited to, serving as an officer or Board member, chairing a major committee, special interest group, research committee, or data development committee, serving as a research assistant, or performing other responsibilities. Other important activities to present might include publishing their own books, teaching, giving presentations, and developing publications or electronic GFO products such as online databases or CDs. The Board will review the information on all nominees and may consider nominations carried forward from a previous year.

The Board will select the one which, in their judgment, is the most deserving. The Board may decline to select a recipient if the available nominations are found to be inadequate or if no nominations are received. Information submitted for nominees who are not selected for the award will be retained by the Secretary for possible use in future years by the Board.

An honorary life membership is given to the recipient. An official biography will be prepared from the data submitted and will be presented to the recipient for verification prior to the publication of the award.

To see the Hall of Fame recipients from previous years, visit the **Hall of Fame** web page. Please submit nominations to the GFO President by March 31, 2025, by email (president@gfo.org) or in person.




Registration for Rogue Valley Genealogical Society Interest Groups.

All times are Pacific Time.

<p>FEBRUARY 11, 2025 1:30–3 p.m. Family Tree Maker</p> <p>FEBRUARY 12, 2025 10:30 a.m.–12 p.m. Genetic Genealogy 1:30–3 p.m. Great Lakes</p> <p>FEBRUARY 13, 2025 1:30–3 p.m. Colonial America</p>	<p>6–7:30 p.m. Genealogy 101</p> <p>FEBRUARY 14, 2025 1:30–3 p.m. Irish</p> <p>FEBRUARY 19, 2025 1:30–3 p.m. Let's Talk Genealogy</p> <p>FEBRUARY 25, 2025 11 a.m. –12 p.m. German</p>
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February Events

Saturday, February 1

Virginia Roots
10 a.m.–12 p.m.

[Register](#)

German Group
1–3 p.m.

[Register](#)

Sunday, February 2

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

Monday, February 3

First Monday
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

RootsMagic
10 a.m.–12 p.m.

[Register](#)

Tuesday, February 4

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Wednesday, February 5

Learn & Chat
10 a.m.–12 p.m.

[Register](#)

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

Sunday, February 9

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

Monday, February 10

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Tuesday, February 11

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Tuesday, February 11

Board Meeting
6:30–8:30 p.m.
All GFO members are invited to attend. To receive a link to this online meeting, or request an agenda item, send an email at least 24 hours in advance to president@gfo.org.

Wednesday, February 12

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

Great Lakes SIG
1:30–3 p.m.

[Register](#)

Thursday, February 13

The Q Review
6–7 p.m.

[Register](#)

Saturday, February 15

Genealogy Problem Solvers
9:30–11:30 a.m.

[Register](#)

African American Ancestry
12–2 p.m.

[Register](#)

*GenTalk—
Organizing Your Ancestors:
From Ancestral Mess to
Historical Success*
2:30–4 p.m.

[Register](#)

Sunday, February 16

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

The Writers' Room
2:30–4:00 p.m.

[Register](#)

Monday, February 17

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Tuesday, February 18

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Wednesday, February 19

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

DNA Q&A: The Basics
1–3 p.m.

[Register](#)

Irish Group
6–7:30 p.m.

[Register](#)

Sunday, February 23

GFO Work Party
9 a.m.–2 p.m.

Library Open
1–5 p.m.

Monday, February 24

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Tuesday, February 25

Library Open
9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

Wednesday, February 26

Library Open
1–5 p.m.





GFO Star

January Barbara Schrag



Barb has been working almost every day for the last year and a half, creating a spreadsheet database for the Historic Columbian Cemetery. Her excellent work includes researching the people buried in the cemetery, creating or adding information to Find a Grave memorials, and adding the information to a spreadsheet that will be posted on the GFO website soon. Along with others, she has proofed, checked and rechecked the data, over and over again. Barb's efforts will be appreciated by family researchers

for years to come. Thank you, Barb.

GFO Inclement Weather Policy

In case of inclement weather, the GFO Library follows the Portland Public Schools guidelines for closure or delayed opening. If it is a day when school is not scheduled, check the GFO website (gfo.org), and call the GFO at (503) 963-1932 to speak with a Research Assistant to make sure that the library is open and staying open.

Plunge into Genealogy!

- 20 free virtual classes
- Pacific Northwest Resources
- Research Library Open Everyday

Join us at
GFO OPEN HOUSE

Coming March 23-29, 2025



GFO Special Interest Groups

SIG meetings occur virtually in Pacific Time. They are open to the public. Learn more about our SIGs at our [SIG page](#).

AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP

Led by Janice Sellers
african_american@gfo.org

BRITISH GROUP

Led by Duane Funk
uk@gfo.org

DNA – Advanced

Led by Tim Janzen
dna@gfo.org

DNA Q & A – The Basics

Led by Lisa McCullough
dna_qa@gfo.org

FAMILY TREE MAKER

Led by Johnna Waldon
ftm@gfo.org

GENEALOGY PROBLEM SOLVERS

Led by Katie Daly
gps@gfo.org

GERMAN GROUP

Led by Tia Cobb
german@gfo.org

GREAT LAKES

Led by Kim Thurman
greatlakes@gfo.org

IRISH GROUP

Led by Dawn Carlile
irish@gfo.org

LEARN & CHAT

Led by Sandy Alto
learnandchat@gfo.org

THE Q REVIEW

Led by Alexa Waddle
qreview@gfo.org

ROOTSMAGIC


Led by Barry Wolff
rootsmagic@gfo.org

VIRGINIA ROOTS & VINES

Led by Judi Scott and Carol Surrency
virginia@gfo.org

WRITER'S ROOM

Led by Geri Auerbach, AG®
writers@gfo.org





Get Help at PMUG Clinic

**Every Tuesday Evening
6:00 – 7:30 pm on Zoom**

- Get Free Help for your Macintosh, iPhone, iPad, iPod or Apple Watch
- For info on how to attend, contact us at:

info@pmug.org