**Showcasing the DNR: Find your story with upcoming family history seminar**

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Each summer, the Archives of Michigan and the Michigan Genealogical Council host the [Barbara J. Brown Family History Seminar](https://www.michigan.gov/mhc/0%2C9075%2C7-361-85148_98951-523785--%2C00.html) to promote family history awareness and teach genealogy research skills.

This two-day celebration of education, discovery and story sharing – this year taking place July 9-10 – brings the family history community together and is generously supported by the Abrams Foundation in loving memory of Barbara J. Brown.

Brown was passionate about family history, and during her genealogy career authored two books on the Abrams family. She served as president and board member of Abrams Aerial Survey until its sale in 2003 and as president of the Abrams Foundation for 26 years. Under her leadership, the Abrams Foundation donated more than $2.5 million in support of family history and genealogy programs, services and collections for the Library of Michigan and the Archives of Michigan.

Her legacy continues today at the Archives of Michigan.

In years past, attendees have gathered in Lansing at the Archives, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, this year’s event (as with last year’s) will be held virtually via Zoom.

Seminar registration information and the complete program schedule can be found on the Archives of Michigan’s webpage at [Michigan.gov/ArchivesOfMi](http://www.michigan.gov/archivesofmi). The cost is $45, which includes registration for the two-day seminar with the syllabus as a downloadable file. If you’re interested in attending, please register before Wednesday, July 7, so that all participants can be accommodated.

The Archives of Michigan is proud to host Judy G. Russell, JD, CG, CGL – known as “The Legal Genealogist” – for this year’s event, which helps encourage learning about and understanding our individual and family past.

As Russell said, “Family history is so important to us, individually and collectively. As individuals, it grounds us. When we see what our ancestors faced and conquered, it helps us persevere through our own hard times. Collectively, it gives us clarity – we are all one people, with one shared past, working towards one shared future. And besides, it's fun. It's like working a puzzle where you have to find all your own puzzle pieces – and you have no clue in advance what the final picture will look like.”

A top presenter and researcher in the field today, Russell writes, teaches and lectures on a wide variety of genealogical topics, ranging from using court records in family history to understanding DNA testing. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism with a political science minor from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and a law degree from Rutgers School of Law-Newark. Before she retired, Russell worked as a newspaper reporter, trade association writer, legal investigator, defense attorney, federal prosecutor, law editor and, for more than 20 years, an adjunct member of the faculty at Rutgers Law School.

Russell will present three programs during the seminar, each emphasizing an important piece of the puzzle in family history research and reflecting one of the strengths of the Archives of Michigan’s collections:

* “No Person Shall ... Gallop Horses in the Streets” – Using Court Records to Tell the Story of our Ancestors’ Lives
Early court records give color and meaning to the lives and times of our ancestors. County courts often functioned as both judiciary and legislature, and appeals courts published fact-filled opinions. While the records often establish relationships to help build a family tree, they offer so much richness and depth to help tell a family’s story.
* Just Three Generations
Our oral family history can be completely lost in just three generations. Following genealogy’s best practices can help us keep those losses from happening in our own families – and with our own stories.
* That Scoundrel George
Tracking a black sheep ancestor through the records can be great fun – and a great challenge. When every record he ever left appears to be a lie, where is the truth to be found?

In addition to Russell’s sessions, the seminar includes a number of programs on topics including researching female ancestors, utilizing DNA in African American research, the [Michiganology website](https://michiganology.org/), naturalization records, Ontario research and Michigan World War I records.

“The Barbara J. Brown Family History Seminar is one of the most anticipated genealogy events in Michigan each summer,” Thomas Koselka, former president of the Michigan Genealogical Council, said. “The expertise of the keynote speaker each year concentrates on a specific topic. In addition, breakout sessions presented by local experts help smooth out some of the more intricate areas in researching our families.”

Attendees, whether just getting started in family history or having researched for many years, can find a topic of personal interest during the event.

The Archives of Michigan collections are a perfect companion to the educational opportunities available through the Barbara J. Brown Family History Seminar. With records documenting Michigan’s historical experience, including state and local government records and manuscript collections, the Archives is a destination for family history researchers. Amazing stories and discoveries await genealogists in the Archives’ naturalization records, probate files, military records, tax rolls, prison registries, court records and other record sets from across Michigan.

The Abrams Foundation Historical Collection at the Archives of Michigan also complements the original source material available at the Archives. Emphasizing the geographic areas that played a key role in the growth and development of Michigan, including New England, the Mid-Atlantic states (especially New York) and the Great Lakes region, as well as the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, the Abrams Collection includes vital records, naturalizations, cemetery transcriptions, city directories, military records, passenger lists, ethnic-specific sources and newspaper extracts from across the United States and Canada.

“Everyone and every community has a story. Events like the Barbara J. Brown Family History Seminar, together with the collections available at the Archives of Michigan, provide an opportunity to discover and explore the methods and records available, and to ensure these stories are not forgotten,” said State Archivist Mark Harvey.

The annual seminar attracts family historians from across the state for good reason.

Jessica Trotter, seminar speaker/attendee and vice president of the Lansing Area African American Genealogical Society, summed it up this way: “The Barbara J. Brown Family History Seminar is one I don't miss – the headlining speakers are always among the best in the field and no matter the session’s topics or levels, I always come out with new information and ideas, and reinvigorated to jump back into my research.”

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