

AAHGS Metro Atlanta – General Meeting

DATE: June 27, 2026

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY: Clevlyn Anderson

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES: 41

Welcome and Introduction The meeting was opened by President Clevlyn Anderson, who welcomed members and guests to the June chapter meeting. Attendees were reminded that the session was being recorded for documentation and future member access.

Meeting Etiquette and Disclaimer

- **Etiquette:** Participants were instructed to put themselves on mute once the meeting started, use the "raise hand" icon or chat for questions, and disconnect and rejoin if experiencing technical difficulties.
- **Disclaimer:** The intellectual property and copyright notice was read, stating that all materials and guest presentations are legally protected and may not be photographed, recorded, screen-captured, or otherwise replicated without permission.

Presentation: FamilySearch.org, an Exploration of a Multi-Layer Resource

Guest Speaker: Tamika Strong, Librarian, Genealogist, Archivist, Reference and Research Division Manager at the Auburn Avenue Research Library, and Vice President of the AAHGS Metro Atlanta Chapter.

Presentation Highlights:

Historical Context of FamilySearch

- **Origins:** The platform was founded in 1894 as the Genealogical Society of Utah to help Church of Latter-day Saints members trace their family trees, which is a core tenet of their religion.
- **Technological Milestones:** They began microfilming records with government archives in 1938 and transitioned to digital scanning in 2002. Their first publicly searchable collection was the 1880 census in 2002, and by 2013, they had reached 1 billion indexed records.

Preparation and the "Lay of the Land"

- Strong emphasized that successful research requires prep work before ever typing a name into a search box.
- She advised creating a "**location profile**" using resources like the CDC's guide to vital records and the "Red Book" to understand exactly when a specific county or state began collecting vital records.

- She also recommended utilizing historical newspaper databases, such as Chronicling America and state-specific newspaper projects (like the Georgia Historic Newspapers at UGA) to add context to your research location.

Mastering the Search Features

- **Historical Records Search Hack:** Strong pointed out that the standard search currently defaults to the ancestor's "birthplace." She highly recommended clicking "more options" to **remove "birthplace" and replace it with "residence."** In her own example, searching by residence dropped her results from 30,000 irrelevant matches down to a more targeted list where her specific ancestor appeared in the top three results.
- **Full Text Search:** Fully integrated in 2025, this feature utilizes advanced Optical Character Recognition (OCR) capable of reading old handwriting. Instead of only searching indexed fields, it searches every word on a page. Strong demonstrated how entering an enslaved ancestor's name in quotation marks uncovered a potential tenant farming agreement.
- **Catalog and Image Searches:** To find records that haven't been indexed yet, researchers must browse the catalog. Strong explained the vital format icons:
 - *Camera:* Browser collection (viewable online).
 - *Magnifying Glass:* Keyword searchable.
 - *Camera with a Caution Triangle:* Viewing restrictions apply; you must visit a FamilySearch Center or an affiliate library to view the record.
 - *Paper with a Bent Edge:* Included in the new Full Text search.
- **Research Wiki:** This section features over 156,000 articles on various record types, military regiments, and locations. Strong demonstrated how the Wiki provides invaluable data on county formations, parent counties, and **courthouse disasters/record loss** (e.g., noting if a courthouse burned down and exactly which records were lost or saved).
- **Books:** The digital library contains hundreds of thousands of family histories and local publications. While some are fully viewable online, others are protected by copyright but can be viewed at an affiliate library or requested via interlibrary loan from your local public library.

Record Preservation and Erasure (Q&A Insight) During the Q&A, the importance of FamilySearch's early microfilming efforts was highlighted. Strong noted that because the LDS church microfilmed county documents decades ago, **they successfully saved records for courthouses that subsequently burned down**, such as the 2014 courthouse fire in Hancock County, Georgia. Additionally, member Judy shared a story of a missing "G-book" in a Mississippi courthouse (suspected intentional erasure), which was safely preserved and accessible through the state archives and FamilySearch.

- The chapter has grown to 104 financial members.
- Members were encouraged to join or renew via the national website (AAHGS.org).

Meeting Minutes and Treasurer's Report

- The meeting minutes and the financial reports are posted in the members-only section of the chapter website.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) & Projects

- **Active SIGs:** Caribbean (3rd Sundays), Georgia (1st Saturdays), Tennessee (4th Thursdays), Military, and Alabama (4th Thursdays).
- **SDUSMP:** The Sons and Daughters of the U.S. Middle Passage application group coordinated by Johnny Brown successfully concluded on June 26th.
- **New Writing SIG:** Coordinated by Mallard Benton and Tamika Strong, this new group has officially launched and started meeting.

Announcements

- **Juneteenth Celebration Success:** The chapter successfully hosted an information table at the Atlanta History Center's Juneteenth Celebration on Friday, June 19th. Volunteers William Durant, Mallard Benton, Betty Stuckey, and Cheryl Jones were recognized for their help.
- **Summer Break & Virtual Events:** There will be no regular chapter meetings in July or August. However, weekly virtual events coordinated by Lynda Sampson will continue through the summer.
- **Upcoming September Meeting:** The next chapter meeting will be held on September 26, 2026. It will be a hybrid meeting hosted in-person at the Auburn Avenue Research Library from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM, featuring archivist Derek Mosley presenting on "Researching in Archives," followed by an indexing project at 1:00 PM.
- **AAHGS Virtual Fall Symposium:** The national all-day virtual symposium will take place on October 24, 2026, in lieu of the October chapter meeting. Registration is currently open.
- **Georgia State Scholarships Campaign:** Johnette Brooks reminded members to contribute to the data capture campaign for Black educators who utilized Georgia State Scholarships.
- **Newsletter Contributions:** Members were highly encouraged to write articles over the summer break. Johnette Brooks was recognized for her recent article honoring the late Emma Hamilton.

Adjournment The meeting was adjourned by President Clevlyn Anderson after wishing everyone a safe and productive summer research break.