



Czechoslovak Area Genealogy Club of Southern California Newsletter

Newsletter July 2025

The Czechoslovak Area Genealogy Club (CAGC) is a non-profit, volunteer organization, dedicated to genealogical research of peoples of the geographical area formerly known as Czechoslovakia. This includes Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Ruthenia. CAGC encourages cooperative research, but does not provide professional (for fee) research services. Website: Cagc-ca.org/
Meetings are usually held bi-monthly on the first Saturday of the month at 1:30pm, Zoom hybrid meetings, in-person & Zoom at the Orange FamilySearch Library (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints/Mormon) on Yorba St. If you aren't doing any research but just want to meet some very nice people from the Czech and Slovak lands attend meetings anyway! We try to make the programs fun and interesting for everyone. We hope to see you all at future meetings.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Looking ahead to our 2025 meeting dates:
Oct 4th, Dec 6th Annual CAGC Christmas in-person Luncheon.

FUTURE EVENTS:

- **Whittier Genealogical Society (WAGS) : DNA-“Y Chromosome Insights and Strategies”**, Sept 20 at 1pm, Speaker/Author: Richard Hill.
- **Polish Dozynki Harvest Festival** -Yorba Linda, Sept 20-21, 2025
Pope John Paul II Polish Center, 3999 Rose Drive, Yorba Linda
 - Non-stop entertainment/music
 - Authentic Polish food-pre-order food by Sept 14th
 - Carnival games, arts & crafts
 - Cultural exhibits/Local Vendors
- **Orange Annual Family History Fair/Expo Sept 20, 2025**
“Discover & Connect” 9am-4pm, 16 classes!! At the library 674 S. Yorba St.
Register: <https://ocfhcregistration.kesug.com/OCFHC/fhd20252.php?i=1>
- **CGSI Conference**: Oct 28-Nov 1, 2025, Overland Park, Kansas.

BOARD MEMBERS 2025

President: Mary Shade
Vice President: Farah Takriti
Treasurer: Farah Takriti
Secretary: Mary Shade
Webmaster: Mary Shade
Virtual Coordinator: Linda McMahon
Board Member: Stacey Smith
Board Member; JoAnn Jones
Board Member: Emeritus: Frank Vogel

President's Message:

Ahoj! Dobrý deň!

I hope you are all doing well and enjoying the summer.

It has been a sad time with the passing of 3 of our CAGC members, Annette Gathright, George Dvorsky & Alice. We will miss them all dearly and send our condolences to their families. It reminds me that life is short and I should seize the diem. In researching Felix Gundacker's website and GenTeam.at, I saw his motto, "If you really want it: Do it now!"

There are changes to our CAGC Board Members with the passing of our President, Annette. I will transition to the President position and our Treasurer, Farah Takriti has volunteered to be our CAGC Vice President, in addition to being our Treasurer! For anyone who has worked with Farah, she is very knowledgeable and capable; and she has great ideas! We're always looking for more volunteers if anyone would like to participate more in our CAGC Organization.

Our Annual Christmas party will be at Mimi's Café, **but in Tustin instead of Yorba Linda**, as the survey showed 85% in favor of the southern location.

The Cottage in Balboa Park, House of Czech & Slovak Republics is still temporarily closed due to the tree falling on it, but they started to finally make progress since June. (Yay!)

We would always like feedback on our activities. We recently started a Facebook group for CAGC after voting to discontinue the Meetup group with price increases. So far, I have been posting just the CAGC Events, but since this is a private group, this may be a place to ask your research questions to our group? We also had a suggestion to experiment with Breakout Rooms in Zoom as time permits. We didn't get the chance to test it at our Aug meeting due to the settings, but hope to try again in the future.

Thank you for all of your support.
Mary Shade, CAGC President.



WELCOME NEW CAGC MEMBERS!

Kathy
Laurie
Natalia
Autumn



This is a shopping website (disclaimer, we are not paid to advertise for them), but it may **give you ideas** of Czech movies, books, music and **foods**, etc. to explore:

www.czechmovie.com/products/

2025 – REVIEW- PAST CAGC MEETINGS

Feb 1, 2025, Travel tips – Czechia & Slovakia – Feb 2025- Speakers: Mary Shade, Farah Takriti + others.

Apr 5, 2025, Speaker: Karel Pažourek Deputy Head of Mission, Consul Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Los Angeles Topic: “Czech Citizenship by Descent”.

Jun 7, 2025, Topic: "Exploring Food", Mary Shade showed Restaurants, websites and recipes that have Czech and Slovak food or similar German and Polish food.

Aug 2, 2025, Brick walls meeting – Mary Shade demonstrated Czech records lookup on GenTeam.at and Slovak records on FamilySearch.org



Special Thanks

Special thanks go to Stuart for funding our shared Meetup site for many years! He donated selflessly to further spread the Czech and Slovak cultures in the U.S. and many members shared experiences at the beach parties, restaurants and New Years' Eve celebrations, with wonderful memories as a result. We are forever grateful.

Save the Date: Sept 20th All-day Genealogy Fair at the OC FamilySearch Library.

Orange County FamilySearch Center
presents:

“Discover & Connect”

Annual Family History Event

Find new tools and ideas to grow your family tree

9:00 am – 4:00 pm | September 20, 2025

 Keynote Speaker: Chuck Henry - a retired American journalist, who worked in the Greater Los Angeles media market for 48 years. 

- Classes for everyone
- Make Connections
- Online Registration opening July 1, 2025
- Check the website for more info soon

This event is free but you must register as classes fill up fast!



674 S. Yorba, Orange CA
www.ocfamilyhistory.org
(714) 997-7710

www.OrangeCounty CA FamilySearch Center
click to register

“Discover and Connect” OC Family History Fair/Expo at FamilySearch Library (cont.)

Orange County f

Registration is now open for our Family History fair on September 20, 2025

Click [here to register](#).

Session 1 speakers

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| A. FamilySearch.org - 10 Links You Have to Try | Devin Ashby |
| B. Are we there yet? Building a research plan to get "unstuck" | Peter Clayton |
| C. Resources of Colonial America: An Era Rich in Records | Linda Baker |
| D. Tour of Memory Lane Equipment & Booths | Mark Garrett |

Session 2 speakers

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| A. Using Technology to Solve Difficult Research Problems | Karen Clifford |
| B. Unlocking New Horizons: Descendancy Research | Amy Johnston |
| C. Introduction to FamilySearch Resources | Maribel Medina |
| D. Tour of Memory Lane Equipment & Booths | Mark Garrett |

Session 3 speakers

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| A. Using Family Groups in FamilySearch | Kathryn Grant |
| B. Cemeteries: Dead Men DO Tell Tales | Barbara Renick |
| C. Getting the most from Census Data, US and Canada | Glen Heiney |
| D. Tour of Memory Lane Equipment & Booths | Mark Garrett |

Session 4 speakers

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| A. FamilySearch AI full-text search (the new genealogy game-changer) | Mike Provard |
| B. Using the FamilySearch Research Wiki in English Research | David Flint |
| C. Uncovering Ancestral Stories: A Guide to Newspaper Research for Genealogists | Amy Johnston |
| D. Tour of Memory Lane Equipment & Booths | Mark Garrett |

See you there.

Orange County FamilySearch Center Staff

[www.OrangeCounty CA FamilySearch Center](http://www.OrangeCountyCAFamilySearchCenter.com)

click to register

New Travel Screening Coming at End of 2026 for Europe:

[Why is the EU launching a new travel authorisation system?](#)

Starting in Q4 2026, the European Commission will roll out a U.S. style electronic travel authorisation system for [visitors from countries](#) that are currently not part of the EU. These visitors have been granted visa-free access to the [EU and Schengen member countries](#) through virtue of their good track record on security issues and, thus, have not been deemed as a threat to EU security. However, the EU is wanting to strengthen its border security as well as digitally screen and track travelers entering and leaving EU countries.

ETIAS stands for the European Travel Information and Authorisation System. The system will check the security credentials and charge a fee to travelers visiting EU member countries for business, tourism, medical or transit purposes. Travelers who currently visit Europe visa-free are able to enter EU and Schengen Member countries cost-free and without any digital security screening prior to their arrival to Europe. ETIAS is not a visa, and is more accurately referred to as a visa-waiver. The ETIAS, like the ESTA, is a travel authorisation for travelers not requiring a visa to visit Europe. Under the ETIAS, these visitors will undergo additional security checks prior to being permitted to enter the EU. The ETIAS will be mandatory for citizens of such countries as the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Learn more about the various aspects and implications of ETIAS by visiting the FAQ.

Barring any delay in implementation, the ETIAS is due to come into effect in Q4 2026. After the initial launch, there may be a short-period of 3-6 months where ETIAS **may not be mandatory for travel**. This is to allow the EU to work through any system issues which may negatively impact travellers due to complications with the initial roll-out.

<https://etias.com/>

GOT SUGGESTIONS?

Since we no longer are limited by geography we can consider speakers from other areas, parts of county and the world, so suggestions for topics and/or speakers outside the area would be most welcome.

WEBINARS:

Legacy Family Tree Webinars has a webinar list showing: [Familytreewebinars.com-Future](https://familytreewebinars.com/Future)

The Legacy webinars are free for a week after live presentation.

www.familytreewebinars.com

RootsTech had several talks about topics that are now online from 2022. To access them, go to

[www.Reading Czech Parish Registers: Deaths](#)

**In Memoriam: (Annette Gathright,
George Dvorsky & Alice)**



Annette Gathright, 2005 Conference over 20 years of teaching Czech Genealogy!

Our longtime CAGC President passed away in March 2025.

Annette Gathright:

An excerpt from Annette's Obituary:

www.dignitymemorial/Annette-Gathright

...Her professional life was as dynamic as it was impactful. Annette began her career at Hughes Aircraft, contributing to projects involving electronic warfare, electromagnetic



Annette with John Sustacek displaying beautiful Family history book.

support measures, and microprogrammed computers. At Honeywell, she worked on radar memory systems, tactical warfare technologies,

Annette Gathright:

One of Annette's greatest passions was genealogy research. She dedicated countless hours to tracing her own family lineage while helping others navigate their ancestral paths. Embracing emerging technologies like DNA testing to deepen genealogical understanding, she served on the boards of both the Polish Genealogical Society and the Czech Genealogical Society. Her expertise led her across the country to present seminars on genealogy techniques—sharing knowledge with warmth and enthusiasm....

George Dvorsky:

George was an active member of the men's group at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church where he continued to deepen his faith and sense of community. He also regularly went to lunch with his ROMEO (retired old men eating out)



George used to bring his elderly mother, Marie to the CAGC Christmas party when she was 98 yrs old at the Jagerhaus restaurant; she passed away in 2022. He was involved in CAGC and gave input for topics for our meetings.

George Dvorsky passed away on Jan. 2024

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VA Database BIRLS Database

The BIRLS old version on Ancestry only goes up to 2010 with deceased veterans who had an open case. But, these BIRL files have C-files that are different than the USCIS C-files. And **you** can make a Freedom of Information Act FOIA request to ask for records. **Note: Beware YOUR FOIA request will be put into the VETERAN's XC-File**

<https://www.birls.org/>

JewishGen.org Talks hosted the BIRLS webinar:

Title: How to use the BIRLS database to unlock the records of US military veterans -- and then order copies for FREE!

Speaker: Brooke Schreier Ganz

About the Speaker:

Brooke Schreier Ganz is the founder and president of the non-profit organization Reclaim The Records, which obtains and freely publishes genealogical and historical materials held by local, state, and federal government archives, agencies, and libraries. She was the first genealogist to successfully sue a government archive under a state Freedom of Information law for the return of historical materials to the public domain.

About the Talk: (information excerpt from talk and website <https://www.birls.org/>)

Ever wanted to know more about the veterans in your family, and found those “military records were lost in a big fire in 1973”, etc? The BIRLS records are a “different” set of military-

related historical records that were basically unknown to most researchers, but which you can now order right from your home, using just your web browser, for any deceased US veteran, related or not -- and for free!

They showed the kinds of unique genealogical and historical data that has been just sitting in these files for years, with examples of files they've received from the VA. Once you FIND a name, then you can ask for a C-FILE (or XC-file after death), the “REAL” file. Like the Civil War, Revolutionary War & War of 1812 Pension file, not helpful for most of our members, but also have WWI, WWII and Korean War for later ancestors' records. A lot of 20th century military records don't exist because of the big fire in 1973. It has location where enlisted, may have DD214 Discharge record and possibly names of people he/she served with. It may even have the places of birth of parents, or it may have medical reasons if discharged, psychiatric records etc.

It took a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, two FOIA Appeals, and a federal court case filed in the Southern District of New York to reclaim this data for the public, and then several more years for the VA to clean up and turn over the data. *From website * RECLAIM THE RECORDS: a non-profit organization of genealogists, historians, journalists, teachers, and open data enthusiasts.

VA Database BIRLS Database (cont.)

<https://www.birls.org>

dom P... prebiotic foods - Bi... Synergy Sauna™ - S... Functional Medicine... Alternative Medicin... (1) Unblock Nose in... MaxFunction Panel... Mold Illness | Mold I... Total Body Wellness

MS

Home Search All About BIRLS

THE BIRLS DATABASE

A new project from



using data from

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

[www.Search the BIRLS Database - 18 million records deceased US veterans, from the US Dept of Veterans Affairs, FREE from Reclaim The Records](https://www.birls.org)

1949

Dental Record
Norman Brett



1933

Disability Record
Dave Berlin



1969

Educational Record
Joseph Mondello



1919

Insurance Record
John [Giovanni] Primo



VA Database BIRLS Database (cont.)

Search the BIRLS Database

Every field of data in this search engine is optional (even the veteran's name!) -- so when in doubt, leave it blank.

Veteran Name and Personal Information

Given Name	Middle Name	Surname
Steven	Grant	Rogers

☒ Include common nicknames, soundalike names, possible misspellings, etc. (recommended)

☒ Include soundalike surnames, possible misspellings, etc. (recommended)

Social Security Number

You can search this database by using the full SSN or by using one or more asterisks (*) as wildcard symbols to search partial numbers.

☒ All Records ☐ Choose from records that had gender data recorded

Veteran Dates of Birth and Death

☒ All Years of Birth ☐ Search by Year of Birth Range ☐ Search by Exact Date of Birth

(Note: you can use * for wildcards for the names, (replacing one or more letters) to search for partial names. For example, a search on **H*R*M*N** will also find HARMON, HERTMIN, HIRSHMAN, etc.)

FOIA request button info above

Would you like a copy of the full Claims File (C-File) for your relative?

You can request and receive photocopies of a deceased veteran's full Claims File (C-File) through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Each C-File will contain **many more details about the veteran's life and service**, with sometimes a hundred pages or more of additional information, including biographical details, service records, educational ("GI Bill") or home loan benefits, pension or life insurance, and many other types of historical information related to a veteran's service.

Anyone can file a FOIA request for a deceased person's file. You do not need to be a US citizen or resident, and you do not need to be a relative. You do need to provide your name and contact information, **including your e-mail and mailing address**. You can make a FOIA for your veteran's file right from this website! They built a special online template to help us, then the link faxes the information right to the VA's special FOIA processing center for C-Files, **for free!**

VA Database BIRLS Database (cont.)

The VA might ask you to pay a few cents per page for any file that they find and copy, but they've found that they usually don't bother to charge FOIA requesters for this service. Occasionally, small parts of the file may be redacted (blacked out) if any part of the information in it refers to a possibly-living person, or for other legal reasons. Processing times for these types of FOIA requests usually take a few months, and the documents will most likely be sent to you as digital files placed on a DVD sent by postal mail.

Step 1 Veteran's Info	Step 2 Your Info	Step 3 Agree to Terms	Step 4 Sign Form	Step 5 Review Request	Step 6 FOIA Sent!
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Please enter your information, so the Veterans' Administration will know where to send this file. Legally, all federal agencies are *supposed* to be able to e-mail you digital copies in response to a FOIA request, but in practice the VA only seems to want to mail out a DVD with data files on it, or sometimes paper photocopies, so we strongly suggest that you include your mailing address.

Your Given Name: 	Your Mailing Address (Line 1): 	
Your Surname: 	Your Mailing Address (Line 2): 	
Your Organization (if applicable): 	Your City: 	
Your E-Mail: 	Your State (or Province): 	Your ZIP/Postal Code:
Your Phone Number: 	Your Country: 	

Step 2: You do need to put in your info. & Steps 3 & 4, agree to the terms & sign. They will send you the file information in the mail on a DVD.

VA Database BIRLS Database (cont.)

FILE A FOIA REQUEST ONLINE – FREE!



TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Please read the following terms and conditions, and some warnings about the possible content of these files. Check the box at the end of the scrolling section if you've read everything and you agree with the content.

veteran's file will likely become incorporated into that same veteran's file, and therefore any researcher who requests that same veteran's file at some point in the future will likely see evidence of your earlier FOIA request, possibly with your personal information and address visible on the request.

- We reserve the right to update this list of terms, conditions, and warnings from time to time, as needed.



If you understand and agree to all of the terms, conditions, and warnings presented here, please check the box to continue, or else cancel the FOIA request.

Step 3: You need to agree to the Terms at the bottom. & Step 4: E-sign at the bottom

This gets sent to the VA Fax line.

It takes **6-8 weeks to receive a letter in the mail** saying that they received your FOIA request

Then, it will take about 4 months (maybe longer since they have sent 15,000 FOIA requests to them) to receive the XC-file, or letter saying that they didn't have it. The DVD has a .pdf file on it.

What to do if you can't find a veteran's name in the BIRLS database

The BIRLS database is not a comprehensive database of all American veterans, but rather a partial and incomplete index of veterans who were eligible for VA benefits or whose heirs had some kind of contact with the VA regarding benefits. Furthermore, the version of the BIRLS database on this website only includes the names of people who were known to the VA to have been deceased at the time when Reclaim The Records won their FOIA lawsuit in 2020, with the subset of the database being exported and turned over in mid-2022.

That being said, almost all veterans who served in the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries probably do (or did) have some sort of claims file stored with the VA, likely in one (or more) of their warehouses, and that file may

VA Database BIRLS Database (cont.)



(Sample only above)

We reviewed our records and found no holdings, but you can appeal **within 90 days** of receiving this letter. (this process is on their website)

They may not be in the file if they didn't file any claims after 1970.

Congratulations, you have successfully filed a FOIA request with the US Dept. of Veterans' Affairs!

We have faxed a copy of your FOIA form to the Veterans Benefits Administration's Centralized Support Division. We have also e-mailed you a copy for your records.

The agency is *supposed* to acknowledge the receipt of your FOIA request within **twenty** business days, and ideally by e-mail, but it will probably be more like two months and probably arrive via postal mail. Nevertheless, they should eventually send you a formal FOIA acknowledgement letter, followed a few months after that by a packet of information on the veteran you're researching.

If the VA does not provide you with any response after several months, or if they claim they cannot find the file at all, or if you believe the resulting files were not properly produced or had too many unnecessary redactions, then you can file a free FOIA appeal with the VA's Office of General Counsel at this email address: ogcfoiaappeals@va.gov.

RESOURCES: Online

Facebook Grp: Czech & Slovak Americans Genealogy Soc. of Illinois: www.CSAGSI Facebook group from website

Hosting Student Exchange from Czech Republic: www.greenheartexchange.org/host-exchange

Passenger lists: <https://stevemorse.org/>

Czech Gazetteer for villages: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Czech_Gazetteer_K

Austrian research guide — www.feefhs.org/sites/default/files/guide/austrian_research.pdf

Beginner's Czech blog: www.czechgenealogy.nase-koreny.cz/p/contact.html?m=1

ICARUS church books & local history — www.icar-us.eu/en/

Moravian Heritage Society — www.czechusa.com/index.html

FEEFHS Slovakian page — www.feefhs.org/resource/slovakia

FEEFHS Czech Republic page — www.Czech Republic Resources | FEEFHS

Pathfinders.cz -do research, but also will obtain just a record in Czechia, have partner for Slovakia

Archives: Austrian-focused genealogy database — www.genteam.at

Czech Archives webinar: Introduction to Czech Archives - YouTube (Sokol Milwaukee)

[Matriky - ACTA PUBLICA \(mza.cz\)](http://Matriky - ACTA PUBLICA (mza.cz))

Austrian genealogical forum — www.forum-ahnenforschung.eu

Pilsen-Munich archives Sudetenland project (English) — www.tinyurl.com/mj6v6r7

www.Holocaust.cz

Historical Atlas of Czech towns: [Historical Towns Atlas | Historický atlas měst \(cas.cz\)](http://Historical Towns Atlas | Historický atlas měst (cas.cz))

Passenger lists Bremen: [www.Bremen Emigrants \(passengerlists.de\)](http://www.Bremen Emigrants (passengerlists.de))

Czech newspapers —

www.digitalniknihovna.cz/

www.tschechien-online.org

www.prag-aktuell.cz

www.pragerzeitung.cz

Slovakia Newspaper — www.spectator.sme.sk/

Slovak dictionary: www.slovake.eu/en or [www.Slovak dictionaries \(savba.sk\)](http://www.Slovak dictionaries (savba.sk))

Slovak genealogy website Bill Tarkulich: www.iabsi.com/gen/public/

Beginner's Slovakia Research: www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Slovakia_Beginning_Research

Bohemian church registers — www.tinyurl.com/gsp6ykr

Surname database www.SlovakPride.org

PODCAST » [Slovak Ancestry \(slovak-ancestry.com\)](http://Slovak Ancestry (slovak-ancestry.com))

www.Arolsen Archives.org for Holocaust

www.Mapy.cz for both Czech and Slovakia locations

www.Arcanum Maps - The Historical Map Portal

www.zanikleobce.cz website for vanished towns

www.slovník.juls.savba.sk Historical dictionary for Slovakia

www.kdejsme.cz for places where Surname is common.

www.portafontium.eu/ for PILSEN records or German Bohemians (Bavarian)

Mapire.eu

MEMBERSHIP

Members receive the newsletter, meeting notices, periodic mailings from the club, handouts from meeting presentations and programs, and receipt of genealogical research assistance from club members. Donations are suggested at \$5.00 per year, mail to Treasurer: Farah Takriti. Please email Mary Shade with questions: meshade@gmail.com

CZECHOSLOVAK AREA GENEALOGY CLUB

We support the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI). Visit them at www.cgisi.org.

And we support the Southern California Genealogical Society (SCGS). Visit them at www.scgsgenealogy.com.

