

# Attending genealogical conferences and events

by Kimberly Brown, Family Historian



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If you've never attended a genealogical conference or event before, you may feel intimidated by the prospect. After all, aren't genealogical conferences for professionals, or people who make genealogy their life's work? Actually, no. There are genealogy conferences, expos, retreats, seminars, and workshops for every skill and interest level. Whether you're a beginner or an expert (or somewhere in between), you can find an event to suit your needs.

So what can you gain from attending a genealogical event? You can hone your research skills; you can try out new genealogy software programs; you can network with other family historians; you can learn about the latest and greatest innovations in the field of family history.

Another bonus of attending family conferences is that you can get free stuff. Up-and-coming genealogy software companies have been known to distribute free copies of their programs at events like these (I once received a free copy of Legacy Family Tree's newest software at a conference!). Most event coordinators also provide copies of the conference syllabus at no extra charge. These are packed with useful charts, outlines, and articles from the conference speakers. That way the information you need is already in the syllabus, so you can relax and absorb what each lecturer is saying instead of furiously scribbling down notes.

Many conferences are hosted by genealogical societies; others are hosted by archives or libraries. Some events have become very renowned in the genealogical world and are attended by hundreds, or even thousands. The Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy, held annu-

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ally in January and sponsored by the Utah Genealogical Association, is one of these. Classes at the week-long institute cover all kinds of topics: source-citation and documentation, American land and court records, U.S. military records, methods to use to trace an immigrant ancestor's origins, illegitimacy in Europe, and Scottish roots research, just to name a few. The annual conference of the Federation of Genealogical Societies is another prominent genealogical event; it is held in a different American city every fall. The National Genealogical Society Conference is one of the most prestigious because of its backing organization, the National Genealogical Society in Boston. The NGSC holds a conference in a different American city each year. The conference workshops cover everything from Italian to Scandinavian ancestry, and there are also "consult-an-expert" sessions where you can collaborate with others and get research guidance on difficult projects.

If you prefer something more low-key, however, you don't have to fly across the country to attend a high-profile conference. Nearly every city in America has a genealogical or historical society. Local chapters usually hold quarterly, if not monthly, meetings. Most state archives also host historical and genealogical conferences and workshops. Ask the folks at your local public library, inquire at your state's archives, or get online and do a little internet searching to find a genealogical conference that can take your research to the next level.