

What are my options?

ChatGPT (OpenAI)

- **Strengths:** Research brainstorming, document analysis, timeline creation, contextual insight, custom prompts
- **Best for:** General genealogical problem-solving, writing family history narratives, summarizing findings, generating alternate hypotheses
- **Bonus:** Can handle long context (e.g., census pages, ancestor bios, transcriptions)

Tip: Ask for next steps, historical context, or challenge your theories.

✓ **Why it's useful:** It understands nuance and historical reasoning better than most.

Google Gemini (formerly Bard)

- **Strengths:** Fast access to up-to-date info, web-based research, integration with Google tools
- **Best for:** Looking up what's been written online about a location, surname, or historical trend

✓ **Why it's useful:** Great for supplementing your genealogical questions with internet-driven info.

Claude (Anthropic)

- **Strengths:** Highly readable, clear explanations, strong at working with large documents
- **Best for:** Analyzing source material, comparing conflicting data, gently walking through complex reasoning


✓ **Why it's useful:** A good "editor" for your logic or written summaries.

Perplexity

- **Strengths:** Focused research results, auto-cited sources, quick factual answers
- **Best for:** Questions like "When did XYZ law go into effect?" or "What migration routes existed in 1820s Pennsylvania?"
- **Downside:** Not as good at abstract or emotional reasoning

✓ **Why it's useful:** Great for fact-checking and pointing to primary source links.

FamilySearch AI Tools (Experimental)

- **Strengths:** Record hints, relationship analysis, and pedigree data tools
- **Best for:** Tree-based reasoning within FamilySearch, suggesting research leads
- **Limitations:** Still in beta
-  **Why it's useful:** Can surface hidden connections in large tree data.

Ethical Use of AI in Genealogy

Because integrity matters—even when the tools are dazzling.

AI is powerful, but how we use it says everything about who we are as genealogists. Here are key ethical principles to keep in mind when using AI in your research:

Truth Over Narrative

AI is great at telling a story—sometimes too great. Always ask:

“Is this speculation, or is it backed by sources?”

 *Tip:* Label AI-generated text as **draft narrative** or **speculative interpretation**, not fact.

Respect for the Living and the Recently Deceased

Avoid using AI to dig into sensitive info about people who are still alive (or recently passed). Be cautious with:

- DNA matches
- Adoption stories
- Criminal records
- Modern criminal and civil court records

 *Tip:* When in doubt, prioritize consent and privacy.


Bias Awareness

AI tools were trained on a vast ocean of internet data—including biased, incomplete, or culturally skewed info.

Ask:

“Is this recommendation shaped by modern assumptions?”

“Could this perspective exclude marginalized communities or sources?”

 *Tip:* Use AI as a *starting point*, not the authority.

Attribution and Transparency

If you used AI to draft or refine something, consider noting that in your research log or final writing. It's part of your methodology.

✦ *Tip:* "Assisted by AI for brainstorming/timeline refinement" is a perfectly valid research note.

Data Sensitivity

Don't feed private, sensitive, or legally restricted data into public AI tools unless you're 100% comfortable with the risks.

✦ *Tip:* Scrub personally identifying info unless you're using a trusted or local tool (like a closed offline AI assistant).

Challenge the Answers

AI can be wrong — or even confidently wrong. Don't be afraid to challenge it. Also, don't let AI flatten the joy of discovery or the curiosity that drives genealogy.

✦ *Tip:* Keep asking *why*, even when the answer looks polished. It could be totally fabricated!

Level Up Your Genealogy Problem-Solving

Bust a Brick Wall with an AI Second Opinion

Paste a short summary of a brick wall into ChatGPT and ask for ideas based on historical context, migration patterns, or record alternatives.

Prompt idea:

"My ancestor vanishes after the 1850 census in [location]. Where else might I look?"

👁️ *Tip:* Ask for **unusual** suggestions too — sometimes the weird ones work.

Sharpen Your Research Questions

Try reframing from a vague question to a sharper one.

Instead of:

"Where is she in 1870?"

Try: "What might cause a woman in rural [location] in 1870 to avoid census records?"

It changes the game.

Timeline Gap Finder

Build a timeline of one ancestor's life. Then ask AI to analyze it:

"What might explain the gaps here? What records could fill them?"

This reveals research blind spots or assumptions you didn't realize you were making.

Talk to a 19th Century Neighbor

Ask AI to role-play someone from the past:

“Pretend you’re a midwife in 1850s Vermont. Why wouldn’t my ancestor’s birth be recorded?”

You’ll get historically grounded—and often surprising—possibilities.

Search for Records Before People

Instead of hunting for your ancestor first, ask:

“What rare or local record sets exist for [location] in the 1830s?”

Let the records guide you to people, especially when the paper trail goes cold.

Spelling Variants on Steroids

Ask AI to brainstorm 20 spelling variants of your surname, based on language, region, and phonetic errors.

“What are all the plausible 1800s variants of ‘Muller’ in Polish and German contexts?”

More names = more chances of a hit.

Context Clue Magnet

Ask about place and time-based context.

“What was happening in [location] in [year] that might explain migration to [location]?”

This turns local history into actionable leads.

Assumption Audit

Run a check on your own thinking.

“Here’s my research logic. Where might I be making assumptions?”

This one’s humbling—but powerful. It helps prevent wasted hours chasing ghosts.

Supercharge the FAN Club

Feed AI the names of neighbors or associates and ask:

“Which of these people might show up in land deeds, church records, or court cases with my ancestor?”

Watch your evidence web expand.

Brainstormed with the help of ChatGPT—shaped and sharpened by a human genealogist.