The Promise of Artificial Intelligence in Genealogy & Family History

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Genealogical research has long been a painstaking process, slowed by unindexed records, language barriers, and fragmented archives — a professional genealogist can manually process only about 50 documents a day. Artificial intelligence can be a research partner rather than a replacement, showing how AI tools already support transcription, translation, image restoration, relationship mapping, storytelling, and research strategy. We will explore seven leading AI platforms through real genealogical case studies, while learning to apply the critical thinking, fact-checking, and ethical judgment AI cannot supply on its own.

Learning Objectives

- Define artificial intelligence in plain terms and explain its relevance to genealogical and family history research.
- Describe the synergy between traditional research methods and AI-assisted tools.
- Identify how AI is already quietly supporting genealogists in record analysis, translation, and image restoration.
- Apply AI tools — Transkribus, Gemini, Copilot, ChatGPT, MyHeritage, Claude.AI, and NotebookLM — to authentic research tasks.
- Evaluate AI-generated output critically, recognizing that AI hallucinates incorrect answers 33% to 48% of the time.
- Apply best practices and ethical standards — privacy, bias, copyright, and disclosure — when using AI in genealogical work.

AI Platforms Covered

• Transkribus.org	• Gemini (gemini.google.com)
• Microsoft Copilot	• ChatGPT
• MyHeritage Scribe AI, Deep Nostalgia™	• MyHeritage LiveMemory™
• MyHeritage AI Biographer™	• MyHeritage Tribute Reel
• Claude.AI	• NotebookLM (notebooklm.google.com)

Foundations of AI in Genealogy

What AI is, in plain language; why it matters for family history; and the four persistent obstacles — unindexed records, language barriers, slow manual processing, and fragmented data — that AI is best positioned to address.

Tools: Overview discussion

Record Analysis, Transcription & Translation

Using Transkribus to transcribe handwritten registers, and Gemini to translate a French baptismal record into English, illustrating AI's core capabilities: transcription, facial recognition, relationship mapping, and natural-language processing of old cursive.

Tools: Transkribus.org, Gemini

Image Restoration & Enhancement

Restoring and colorizing damaged photographs, from grainy black-and-white originals to enhanced color images, including MyHeritage's Deep Nostalgia™ and LiveMemory™ for animating historical photos.

Tools: Gemini, Copilot, ChatGPT, MyHeritage.com

AI-Assisted Transcription Case Study

A worked example using MyHeritage Scribe AI on 1749 parish records, including AI-suggested next steps — cross-referencing the Drouin Collection, PRDH, and BAnQ archives to extend the research.

Tools: MyHeritage Scribe AI, PRDH, BAnQ

Simplifying Complex Topics (ELI5 & TL;DR)

Prompting techniques that let AI explain unfamiliar concepts — such as how DNA supports genealogical research — in plain, accessible language without complicated prompt engineering.

Tools: ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude.AI

Storytelling & Biography Writing

Comparing AI-generated ancestor biographies — from MyHeritage's AI Biographer™ mini-biographies to full narrative life histories written by ChatGPT, Copilot, and Claude.AI from the same source facts.

Tools: MyHeritage AI Biographer, ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude.AI

Research Strategy & Brainstorming

Using AI to break through research "brick walls," formulate effective search queries, and identify correspondence or record requests for hard-to-reach archives.

Tools: ChatGPT, Claude.AI, Gemini

NotebookLM Deep Dive

Building a source-grounded research notebook: what to upload (research logs, record images, transcriptions, articles) and what to avoid (paywalled links, identifiable DNA match lists), plus Studio outputs such as podcasts, mind maps, and quizzes.

Tools: NotebookLM.google.com

Limitations, Best Practices & Ethics

AI cannot access undigitized records and carries knowledge cutoffs, so it does not replace critical thinking or a genealogist's judgment. Best practice is to treat AI as an assistant, write specific prompts, safeguard private data, disclose AI use, and fact-check every output against original sources. This module also covers bias in training data, AI-generated content and copyright, and the emotional considerations of AI-animated photos of deceased relatives.

Tools: All platforms

The Future of AI in Genealogy

Where the field is headed as major platforms — MyHeritage, FamilySearch, and Ancestry — integrate AI natively, and why the strongest results come from pairing human expertise with AI's processing power.

Tools: MyHeritage, FamilySearch, Ancestry

Best Practices & Ethical Considerations

- Use AI as a tool, not a replacement — it complements research skill, it doesn't do the research for you.
- Be specific with prompts; give AI all the known details so its suggestions are targeted.
- Protect data privacy — avoid entering sensitive or private information that could be used to train AI models.
- Fact-check everything. AI can hallucinate or generate incorrect information; always verify against original sources.

- Disclose when and where AI was used in research or presentations, and cite AI tools as sources when they surface clues or context.

Ethical Considerations

- Bias in training data can shape results, particularly around cultural or historical nuance — review AI output with that in mind.
- Content generated by AI currently cannot be copyrighted, though the underlying input data might be.
- Consider the emotional impact of using AI to animate or "resurrect" images of deceased loved ones.

Discussion Questions & Reflection

- Where in your own research could AI transcription or translation save the most time this month?
- Which AI-generated biography (Module 6) read as most trustworthy, and what made it feel that way — tone, detail, or sourcing?
- What is one piece of personal or family information you would choose not to enter into an AI tool, and why?

How will you disclose or cite AI assistance in your own family history writing going forward?

Resources

- Transkribus — transkribus.org
- Gemini — gemini.google.com
- Microsoft Copilot — copilot.microsoft.com
- MyHeritage — myheritage.com
- Claude.AI — claude.ai
- NotebookLM — notebooklm.google.com
- PRDH (Programme de recherche en démographie historique) — for French-Canadian family reconstructions
- Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) — digitized manuscripts and historical context