

Illinois Forensic Science Commission- FIGG Subcommittee

Meeting Minutes

March 21, 2025, 12:30 p.m. meeting

- I. Call to order
Amy Watroba called the meeting to order, at the request of subcommittee chairperson Cris Hughes who was unable to attend the meeting.

- II. Roll-call
The following people were present:
 1. Ponni Arunkumar, FS Commission Member, subcommittee member
 2. Claire Dragovich, FS Commission Member, subcommittee member
 3. Jeanne Richeal, FS Commission Member, subcommittee member
 4. Amy Watroba, Executive Director-Forensic Science Commission
 5. Robin Woolery,* Director Designee, subcommittee member
 6. Joanne Liu, Illinois State Police
 7. Wendy McLean, UNT Center for Human Identification
 8. Heather Wright, Illinois State Police
 9. Misty Gillis*

(*Individual who joined meeting after roll call)

- III. Approval of Minutes from Meeting on January 28, 2025
 1. The minutes from the January 28, 2025 meeting were unanimously approved.
- IV. Discussion Topics- Presentation and discussion with Wendy McLean- Genealogist, Investigative Support Unit, University of North Texas Center for Human Identification.

1. Wendy McLean shared a presentation she gave at the last ISHI conference with the subcommittee regarding hiring considerations for Investigative Genetic Genealogists. She explained that there are 4 types of genealogists: traditional genealogists, forensic genealogists, traditional genetic genealogists, and forensic/investigative genealogists.
 - i. Traditional genealogists use historical records to research and document ancestors. They do not use DNA. Most start as hobbyists but decide to become professionals. Professionals typically have small businesses. There are 2 major companies: Ancestry ProGenealogists and LegacyTree Genealogists. Traditional genealogists receive their

initial education from community instruction (local and state genealogical societies), books, webinars (legacy family tree webinars), conferences (RootsTech, National Genealogical Society conference, courses, books), and might join the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) and attend that organization's professional management conference. The next level is to attend institutes, which are 1-week courses offered by different groups (National Genealogy Institute (GRIP), Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy (SLIG), Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research (IGHR), or Genealogical Institute on Federal Records (GenFed)). These courses are approximately 40 hours in length and focus on one topic. GenFed is popular and is at the National Archives in D.C. Individuals who attend these conferences are generally moving from serious hobbyists to professionals. The next level is certificates. Boston University offers a certificate that takes approximately 15-weeks long to complete. The International Institute of Genealogical Studies offers certificates that are well respected within the community. There are other certificates available, some of which are recognized by the community and some of which are not. The next step for a traditional genealogist's education is study groups. Study groups are similar to a journal club for scientists. For example, the National Genealogical Society Quarterly has formal study groups. Gen Proof study groups is another serious study group. Many people take this before being credentialed. There are study groups related to credentialing, such as ProGen. There are not many degrees in Genealogy. There is one at BYU. There is also an online graduate level program at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. Credentials for genealogists have existed since 1964. There are 2 options: the Board for Certification of Genealogists (Certified Genealogist) and the International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (Accredited Genealogist). The programs are both intensive and take 1-2 years to complete. BCG is focused on methodology and can be viewed as more geared towards those interested in pursuing publication. They also offer 2 additions: Certified Genealogical Lecturer (CGL) and Certified Genetic Genealogist (CGG). ICAPGen focuses on methodology as well as a region or country. It has been described as more-client based. Some professional genealogists choose not to get credentialed but are still very skilled.

- ii. Forensic genealogists are a completely different field of individuals that deal with interests including: missing and unknown estate heirs, real estate issues, mineral interests, military repatriation, and dual citizenship. They do not use DNA. Unknown parentage also falls under

the field of forensic genealogists and may or may not use DNA. Most forensic genealogy disciplines are not in the practice of using DNA. They may work with issues of DNA inheritance but do not apply DNA to research the way that a FIGG practitioner would.

- iii. Traditional genetic genealogists use DNA evidence and historical records. They are very knowledgeable about DNA inheritance (atDNA, X-DNA, Y-DNA, and mtDNA). They use results from many of the direct to consumer (DTC) companies that offer that to consumers. Their education is the same as traditional genealogists but they may focus on DNA. The conferences they might attend include I4G and ECGGC. Hiring someone with this experience is good but they may not have applied it the FIGG world and there might be some related growing pains.
 - iv. Forensic/Investigative genetic genealogists (FIGG practitioners): Experience and skills that you might want to look for with a FIGG practitioner are unknown parentage cases. When a traditional genetic genealogist is trying to confirm the identity of their great great grandfather, for example, they have a lot of known information that supports the direction their research might take. This is not so with unknown parentage cases where everything is unknown, which is the same with UHR or violent crime suspect cases. Some traditional genetic genealogists have not worked with GEDmatch PRO and FTDNA and do not adjust well because the other DTC databases have more information and higher chances of closer matches, whereas in GEDmatch PRO and FTDNA the matches are more distant and more challenging. Looking at how a practitioner handles living people research and challenging cases is also advisable. Pedigree collapse and endogamy are also issues that arise in FIGG, as are populations with challenging genealogy and misattributed parentage. Another thing to look for is the ability to adjust to working with criminal justice guardrails. Even established FIGG practitioners who have worked for nonprofits may need instruction and education on how to work within those guardrails.
2. There are 2 organizations working on improving credentialing and the practice of FIGG. First, the IGG Accreditation Board is creating an accreditation program. Second, the NTVIC collaborative just started a new subcommittee called “public entity genealogists” and will be putting out information related to how to hire a genealogist, continuing education, and proficiency testing.

3. There are 3 programs that are specifically for FIGG that offer certificates. The University of New Haven offers a graduate certificate that is credit bearing and includes 4 courses: a fundamentals and forensic biological evidence course, a genetic genealogy course, a genealogy course, and a practicum where participants practice what they learn. They are in their 5th or 6th cohort, so completion of the certificate may appear on some resumes. Some individuals who have completed the certificate may not have prior background in traditional genealogy and thus may have a bigger learning curve than someone who also has additional background in traditional genetic genealogy. Ramapo also offers a certificate similar to the Boston University certificate, which takes about 15 weeks. It is more focused on practical applications; they receive some instruction and then work a case together. There also is a 1-week course that is an intermediate level course through FIU in conjunction with United Data Connect. The UNH program genealogy course is the equivalent of the Boston University certificate.
4. Discussion ensued about whether there will be educational, certification, or licensing requirements for FIGG practitioners in the future. Different models for in-house FIGG practitioners also were discussed. The possibility of bringing FIGG practitioners under a lab's accreditation scope in the future was discussed. The value of training genealogists, regardless of background, on issues related to documentation as it relates to discovery in criminal cases was discussed.

V. Old Business

None.

VI. New Business

None.

VII. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

VIII. Meeting Schedule

The next meeting will be scheduled via Doodle Poll and will be held via Web Ex.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:21 p.m.