

What Is Greenspace Genealogy?



Greenspace Genealogy Lectures
Content Provider Services for Land Trusts
Greenspace Donor Family History GEDCOM* Files
Assistance in Substantiating Historic Significance of Donated Greenspace



Greenspace Genealogy Defined

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What is Greenspace Genealogy?

Realizing Value

The concept of greenspace genealogy is rooted in the complete history of a greenspace. Inventories are one of the first efforts undertaken by any land trust when a greenspace is designated. It is important to know what plants and animals call it home and to define the soil composition.

We, at Greenspace Genealogy, leave that to the scientists and environmentalists. They are better at it.

Generally speaking, greenspace is often named in honor of the person who signed the deed over to an overseer agency. But, for the most part, we forget who lived there. Sometimes we don't even know who spent time at that greenspace, aside from the last owner.

A Greenspace Genealogist performs in-depth research into past residents. A land trust or other recipient will have a deed to the property. We see great value in a complete title search for a given property.

That search creates a trail of everyone who lived on the property. We then research all of those residents, focusing on the property – not the entire lives of everyone who lived there. We focus on what happened on site.

Often, it reveals surprises. [Lithia Springs Recreation Area](#) is located on the shores of Lake Shelbyville which was created when the Kaskaskia River was dammed to prevent farmland flooding.

The first European settlers who owned the property was the Douthit family. Eventually, Jasper Douthit converted the property into a Chautauqua site. There were also a few vacation homes on the property over the years.

We know that Douthit cared deeply for the property. He reminded visitors not to tie their horses to the trees because it damaged the bark.

We also know there are maps of the property, created by [Eugene Davenport](#), dean of the College of Agriculture, at the University of Illinois. They are, no doubt, reliable maps created well before satellite images.

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What is Greenspace Genealogy?

Greenspace Genealogy

The Family History of Individuals Who Donate Greenspace Where They Lived, Laughed, Loved, Worked and Played

Davenport was onsite. He drew the maps by hand on drafting paper.

There was a self-sustaining farm at Lithia Springs, which helped support the Chautauqua. Davenport was surely interested in Douthit's farm and political advocacy for farmers.

Davenport was probably also intrigued by the agricultural work of Douthit's friend, Dudley Smith who donated his own farm to the University of Illinois. That greenspace, near Pana, Illinois, exists today as the [Dudley Smith Initiative](#).

Davenport knew Jasper Douthit well. We find among Davenport's papers a collection called "Notable People I Have Known or Seen." Jasper Douthit is among them.

We find on Davenport's maps a spot called Daisy Pollitt Point. Upon further research, she was Daisy Hubbard Carlock Pollitt. Her brother was Elbert Hubbard who established the [Roycrofters](#) in Aurora, New York, before he died in the sinking of the Lusitania.

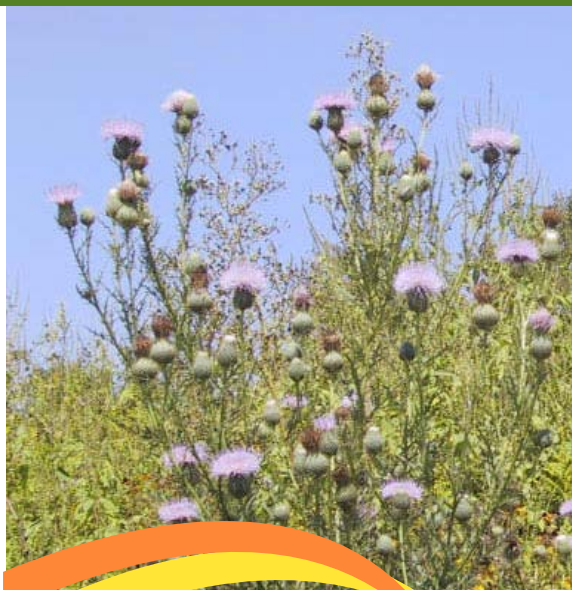
Hubbard had been invited to visit Lithia Springs and had communicated with Douthit, but never made it to the Chautauqua even though Douthit published a notice predicting Hubbard would. There was a time when Roycrofter-style signs decorated the Lithia Chautauqua dormitories.

Daisy did spend time at Lithia. She married a son of the Carlock family who founded Carlock, Illinois. When her husband passed away, she taught at [Berea College](#) in Kentucky and remarried to Rev. Pollitt. The Pollitt name may seem familiar. Their great-granddaughter is [Katha Pollitt](#) who writes for the *Nation*. Shortly before his death, Katha's father, Basil Pollitt had made plans to finally visit this place that meant so much to Daisy.

He wanted to visit a place where she was so loved that Douthit named an area of the property in her honor. Today, that historic connection between the Pollitt family and Lithia Springs is very nearly forgotten.

Suddenly, such a connection brings Lithia Springs to life in our minds and our hearts. The stories of the people who lived, laughed, loved, worked and played there endear the property to us even more.

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What is Greenspace Genealogy?

At Greenspace Genealogy we tell stories of life. Even when greenspace genealogists tell the story of a cemetery that has been saved as a nature preserve, we tell the stories of lives.

We see value in knowing who donated the cemetery land. How did those who lay there in rest spend their lives?

We don't stop with the last resident or their parents or even their grandparents. We don't stop until we trace every person who likely lived, laughed, loved, worked or played on that property.

We research property deeds as far back as history allows. We want to know whose children played with the now-endangered butterflies that have survived for so long. We want to identify the merchant who travelled across the property to trade their wares. We want to know who plowed the land and hunted in the forest.

That is Greenspace Genealogy.



A family who donates acres of real estate deserves to be honored.

Privately donated greenspace carries with it centuries of history.

Their footprints may no longer be visible, but a long line of past owners is a part of the value of each and every land trust.

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What is the Value of Greenspace Genealogy?

Protecting greenspace and raising funds to continue that protection are two of the greatest challenges facing any land trust. Greenspace Genealogy offers a unique solution. The whole life of a greenspace is its greatest value.

Innately we know this. We inventory living plants and wildlife and inspect greenspace water quality. We assess the soil which, due to the natural fertilization process, has a lifecycle of its own.

We have different values when it comes to humans. Greenspace commitment has traditionally been associated with end-of-life events.

We have traditionally protected cemeteries and battlefields. We protect places where humans have died or been wounded. In the most simplistic of views, we honor a few people who lived great lives and we honor thousands who died.

We make shrines of battlefields. Even then, we forget that a Civil War battlefield may have been a site where horrible death and injury took place – but for a matter of days.

A significant number of land donations come at the reading of a will. Many land donations do not occur until the donor's demise.

Eons of humans lived, laughed, loved, played and worked on all of these acres before they became dedicated greenspace. We have forgotten the living.

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We forget that the beautiful hiking trails at [Ballard Nature Center](#), near Altamont, Illinois, was a 210-acre dairy farm that belong to Ernie Ballard. He never really intended to be a dairy farmer until the job he was promised when he moved to Altamont fell through.

Ballard described himself as having been a frail a young man – two years before he passed away at age 96. Determined to improve his own health, in 1958 Ballard began carving by hand the trails across the property he donated as greenspace. Later, the trails were used for national cross-country finals. Ballard continued to walk the trails as best he could until the end of his life.

The property's location is significant. It is located on the [National Road](#), a significant part of our country's history.

Ernie Ballard spent as much time as possible on site at Ballard Nature Center right up until his death. But, without Ernie to remind everyone of the past lives and partial lives spent on the property, it loses a bit of its fascination.

While each person's genealogy ends in death, the genealogy of a greenspace does not. The value of greenspace is life. That includes the lives of those who have spent time there throughout the history of the planet.

How many of those teenagers who ran national cross-country finals there are aware that the property is now a nature preserve? They had a doubly memorable experience there. They ran in a national competition, and they did it among hand-carved trails created by someone who once described himself as frail.

The runners were not the only ones present during finals. There were coaches, friends, and family. How many of them realize they spent time on what later became Ballard Nature Center?

We tend to reach back millennia to establish the value of a greenspace. The more recent and certainly the perpetual history of a greenspace vastly substantiates its sentimental value as much as the non-human life.



What is the Goal of Greenspace Genealogy?

Protecting land means endearing it to donors, volunteer stewards, professional environmental protection staff, government entities and visitors. Land trusts currently make a valiant effort through bird counts, native plant seed collection, and lectures about the site's ecology.

The [U.S. Civil War battlefields](#) serve as an example of how we jealously protect land associated with the lives of humans. It would be very difficult to convince the public, or the government, that any kind of structure should be built in the midst of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield, for instance.

We know who fought there. We know who died there. There is a human history. Yet, the Civil War battlefields are preserved as greenspace, under the U.S. National Parks Service. Before that, they were property of the Department of War.

History is essential. We love parks. But the history of the living is essential to protecting those parks.

We respect land where we know the history of former residents and visitors. We preserve houses where famous people lived and even where they slept. "Abraham Lincoln Slept Here" is a common source of pride, whether it can be documented or not. It still might be enough to prevent a house from being destroyed.

Many places where Lincoln did sleep were inns and boarding houses. He was a circuit-rider. His life and his lifestyle make those places interesting.

Knowing who did spend even a few hours of their life at a certain place on the globe is significant to us. Unfortunately, we tend to focus on the famous, forgetting that most famous Americans were not always famous.

Most famous Americans started out as ordinary people living ordinary lives – and then they did something extraordinary. And ordinary lives are endearing.

A land donor did something extraordinary. They loved their land enough to share it with the public and to trust that it would be preserved forever.

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What is Forever?

Nothing is forever. Just as a specific greenspace was not always greenspace, it might not always be greenspace in the future.

There are laws attempting to protect greenspace, and they often do a pretty good job. But sometimes a greenspace is not forever in other senses.

From time to time, parks are renamed. It's perhaps not so important if City Park is renamed Bob Goodguy Park. But what if City Park has been named for its donor James Jonathan City, III, who was a lifelong botanist and whose family owned the land for four generations? It would not be long before James Jonathan City, III, was forgotten along with his work.

This is where Greenspace Genealogy steps in and endears a property. It is perhaps more difficult to repurpose or rename greenspace when we know the identity of its former residents and visitors. We

When we remove or revise the name of a greenspace, we begin to forget the donor. Greenspace Genealogy creates and reiterates those who lived, laughed, loved, worked, and played on greenspace property.

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How Is Greenspace Genealogy Conducted?

To a large extent, it is conducted the same as any traditional genealogy. But the parameters are a bit different.

People move. Instead of following a family from New Hampshire to Georgia or Texas, Greenspace Genealogy traces all the people who spent time on a specific greenspace. We recognize everyone who has come and gone. We look at why.

The challenge is to focus on the people who spent time on a particular acreage. The temptation is to continue to follow a family after they left the property.

It can be insightful to document where residents spent their time prior to living on or owning the greenspace. It is interesting to trace their immigration route or to know that they came to live on a property because it was taken from Native Americans and given to them in exchange for military service, for example.

It is equally important to research the Native Americans who spent time on a greenspace. They are sometimes more difficult to trace because so many tribes were nomadic. But, there are extensive Native American censuses available now. In some cases, it may be possible to identify the names of the aboriginal residents.

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How Is Greenspace Genealogy Conducted?

We look at what led all former residents to a property. We examine the quality of their lives, their religious beliefs, their education, their entire lifestyle. We look at how they interacted with that land.

It has been predicted that it takes 100 years for a traditional farm, where herbicides and pesticides have been in use for decades, to recover. The Margaret Guzy Pothole Wetlands Land and Water Reserve is an example of a farm that had been the largest crop producer around, largely because of heavy use of chemicals.

DNR staff at Guzy discovered that farm recovered in less than five years. Native plant seed, long dormant and resistant to chemicals, returned to the point where the DNR began harvesting native grasses from the site to reseed other nature sites.

Knowing how a property was used by former residents is important. It provides a benchmark for recovery for lands that have been used for various purposes.

We begin by tracing property deeds, if that is not already done. We trace government boundaries, funding sources, stewards of the space over time, land use both before and after greenspace designation. Whenever possible we draw the connection between the soil, the biology, the botany and human history over the longest possible period of time.

We rely heavily on primary sources. These are documentable and reliable sources such as government documents. We use census enumerations, birth, marriage and death records, immigration and military records, pension records, agricultural records, and involvement with related groups such as the Grange.

We also use newspapers and other historical accounts but only when we can corroborate that information as being accurate and complete.

While we acknowledge secondary sources, such as oral histories or self-published works, we only accept them when their data can be proven through primary sources. We acknowledge diaries, handwritten letters, and stories told three generations after the fact. But, we concentrate on documentable evidence.

We appreciate folklore and myth. But, at Greenspace Genealogy we take research seriously. We document our research with cited primary sources. We are as scientific as our environmentalist counterparts.

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Why Hire A Greenspace Genealogist?

We think differently. We do not research single-family lineage. We avoid the temptation to focus on a famous distant relative, especially if they had no significant connection to the greenspace aside from a shared gene pool.

We focus on those who actually spent time at a greenspace. All of those people had a relationship with that land.

There was a reason they lived there. There was a reason why European settlers were living on lands in North America.

There are reasons people from a specific region in Europe tended to settle in the same county in Illinois or Idaho. A speculator bought those lands in the United States and traveled to Europe where they sold the land door-to-door. They often arranged for large groups to travel together aboard the same ship which, of course, was not always a good thing given the cramped quarters.

Where immigrants settled is not necessarily as random as one might think. We are intrigued by who lived on a greenspace and how they arrived there. We want to know how they lived on their land.

Ultimately, every land trust aspires to creating the ideal profile of a greenspace donor. At Greenspace Genealogy, we are convinced that there is no profile. Donors come from every conceivable walk of life and donate land for a myriad of reasons.

We find that inspiring. It is evidence that every property owner is a potential donor.



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Do We Work With Genealogists and Historians?

Of course, we do. But we take a much bigger view of the world and we focus on who stayed behind on a greenspace when the rest of the family relocated. We study the new residents who bought the land.

We are geographically focused. The players change but the map doesn't.

We welcome sourced research conducted by genealogists and historians. We do, of course, verify every source for accuracy and direct connection to the land in question.

We avoid distractions such as claims that a greenspace resident's great aunt by marriage was married to a senator in another state. We would not include the information at all, unless she spent significant time on the greenspace or made some significant contribution. Merely being a blood relative does not qualify an individual for inclusion in the Greenspace Genealogy of a property.

Greenspace Genealogy is not about the prestige of human relationships. It is about that very special relationship between humans and land.

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Why Does Greenspace Genealogy Matter?

Endearing greenspace generates protection. It inspires donors to give to a land trust because they know that the previous residents will be remembered, while the land itself is protected.

Greenspace Genealogy motivates volunteers to don their mud boots and collect native plant seed or help with a controlled burn because they know Daisy Pollitt spent a summer in that place. They are not only caring for a property that is environmentally significant. They are helping care for land that was loved by a specific group of people.

We, at Greenspace Genealogy, introduce them to those people. Our belief is that donors are more likely to donate money and time to protect land when they know who lived there – or laughed, loved, played or worked there.



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What Can You Expect From Greenspace Genealogy?

We are storytellers at heart, but they are stories firmly embedded in fact. We love sharing the complete story of a greenspace.

Every time we drive past [Spitler Woods](#) or [Detweiller Park](#), we cannot help but wonder who Spitler and Detweiller were. Why are their names on those properties?

Names are not always obvious connections. Franklin Park, in Bloomington, Illinois, was donated by a group of local businessmen, none of whom were named Franklin. One of them, however, was [David Davis](#) who managed Abraham Lincoln's presidential campaign and was appointed as a Supreme Court judge.

We can't help ourselves. We love the stories of lives lived at a specific GPS location.

Along with narratives, we create GEDCOM database files or [G](#)[E](#)[n](#)[e](#)[a](#)[l](#)[o](#)[g](#)[i](#)[c](#)[a](#)[l](#)[o](#)[g](#)[y](#)[D](#)[a](#)[t](#)[a](#)[C](#)[O](#)[M](#)[M](#)[U](#)[N](#)[I](#)[C](#)[A](#)[T](#)[I](#)[O](#)[N](#) files. These are generic files that anyone can load into the genealogy database of their choice. Normally a GEDCOM traces a single family from the present time as far back into history as possible, following them around the globe.

We use GEDCOM files to document each family who resided on the greenspace. Documentation includes sources proving as much information as possible about each resident. We use government and church records to prove when each person was born, how they were educated, when they married, what they did for a living, and as much information as possible about their lives. We end by documenting where each person died and where they were buried.

The combination of this information presents an image of the individuals who spent time on a greenspace. It also creates a picture of what life was like on that spot for each one of them.

That information can be used to create pamphlets, brochures, web content, or book-length projects to further educate the public. Everyone loves a story. Everyone loves greenspace. Only Greenspace Genealogy tells the full story of your greenspace.

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Do You Need to Hire A Greenspace Genealogist?

Anyone can be a greenspace genealogist. We at Greenspace Genealogy are just very good at it.

We combine the strict rigors of history with the techniques of the genealogist, all told with the flare of a storyteller.

We want to inspire others to become Greenspace Genealogists. Soon, we will be releasing self-guided curriculum for creating your own Greenspace Genealogy.

You can hire Greenspace Genealogy to conduct that research for you. We can prepare simple narratives for your website and publications, or we can create a book-length publication. We can also create GEDCOM files for former residents of your greenspace.

You can schedule a day-long Greenspace Genealogy workshop with hands-on guidance to conducting research. We come to you and teach you how to create a complete history of your greenspace.

Our Services

❖ Researcher and Content Provider Services for Land Trusts

Judy Rosella Edwards is a professional genealogist and freelance writer with a master's degree from Indiana University. Her forte is researching the family history of greenspace donors. She can create professionally researched and source-cited content for your website or for your print publications. Contact Greenspace Genealogy for rates.

❖ Greenspace Genealogy Lecturer

Do you need a keynote speaker or lecturer to promote the cause of Greenspace Genealogy? Contact us about speaker availability.


❖ Greenspace Historic Significance Documentation Provider

What is the historic significance of your greenspace? Greenspace Genealogy can establish and preserve the role a greenspace played with the history of the world, regardless of scale. A great tool for seeking additional funding.

❖ Greenspace Donor Family History GEDCOM* File Creation

Attract genealogy researchers to your greenspace. Greenspace Genealogy can create GEDCOM files of your greenspace's history. Genealogists and historians can then download your historic data into their genealogy databases, increasing your connection with historical and genealogical societies.



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