

Using ChatGPT as a Genealogy Research Assistant

A practical demonstration

Today's Plan

- Brief introduction to ChatGPT and AI (in plain language)
- Two ways to use ChatGPT for genealogy: Custom GPT and Project
- Walk through a Custom GPT demo: Bowling family example
- Walk through a Project demo: Draime family example
- Discuss pros, cons, and tips for safe, effective use

What Is ChatGPT?

- An online “smart assistant” you talk to in plain English
- Can read and summarize text you provide (PDFs, notes, GEDCOM exports, etc.)
- Can help think through genealogical problems and suggest next steps
- Very fast and helpful — but not perfect, and can make mistakes
- You are still the genealogist and final decision-maker



Open Sidebar



What can I help with?

Ask anything

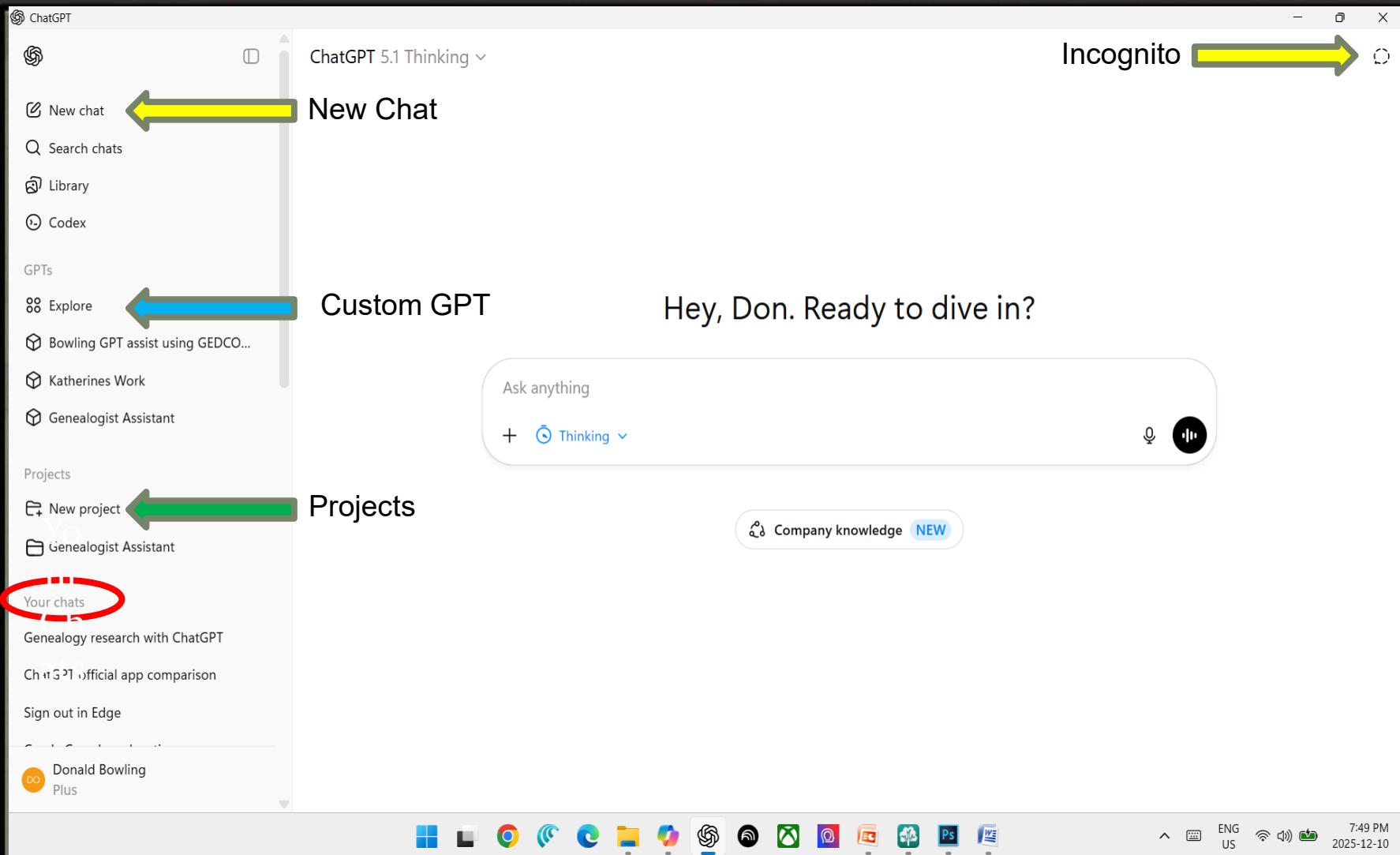
+ Thinking



<https://chatgpt.com>



Opening Screen



Why Use ChatGPT for Genealogy?

- Quick summaries of long documents or manuscripts
- Create family group sheets, timelines, and research plans
- Compare information from multiple sources for agreement and conflict
- Draft research checklists and research tasks
- Translate and transcribe difficult handwriting or foreign-language records

Two Main Options in ChatGPT

- 1. Custom GPT – a personalized genealogy assistant you design
- 2. Project – a workspace where chats and files stay together
- You can use either one alone, or both for different purposes
- In this demo we will try both and compare the experience

Custom GPT: What Is It?

- A tailored version of ChatGPT with your own instructions and examples
- You give it a name, e.g. “Genealogist Assistant”
- You describe how it should behave (tone, format, level of detail)
- You can upload “knowledge” files that it treats as reference sources

Custom GPT Setup: “Genealogist Assistant”

ChatGPT

Genealogist Assistant Live · Anyone with a link

Last edited Dec 11 Updates pending ... Share Update

Configure

Name
Genealogist Assistant

Description
Grandparents Surname Research

Instructions
You are my genealogical research assistant. Always start by searching the documents in this project and treat them as priority sources, then (if needed) consult your broader knowledge and trusted online records for additional context or evidence. Present answers in genealogical form when appropriate (e.g., family group sheets, ancestor/descendant lists, timelines, research plans), using full names, full dates, and full place names. Always

Conversations with your GPT can potentially include part or all of the instructions provided.

Conversation starters

Knowledge
Conversations with your GPT can potentially reveal part or all of the files uploaded.

Ahnentafel of Ida Mar. X Document

Ahnentafel of Agnes C. X Document

Preview Model 5.2 Thinking

Genealogist Assistant
Grandparents Surname Research

Ask anything

+ Thinking

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Custom GPT Demo: Bowling Comparison Task

Goal: compare

Sources:

- Thomas Bowling Kentucky
- Ahnentafel
- Ancestors Search

Task to the AI:
“Compare names of
Ancestor Siblings”

The screenshot shows a genealogy software interface. On the left, a vertical list of four documents (labeled 1, 2, 3, 4) is visible. The main window displays an 'Individual Summary' for Hillary 'Hil' Bowling, with the date 13 December 2025. The summary includes basic information: Name: Hillary 'Hil' Bowling¹, Sex: Male, Father: William Bowling 1809-1857, and Mother: Eleanor Julia Johnson 1820-1856. A 'Individual Facts' section provides details about her birth (27 Apr 1854), first communion (1865), and death (8 Feb 1930). It also lists her census records from 1880 to 1920, her occupation as a housekeeper, and her burial at St. Joseph Cemetery in Bardstown, Kentucky. A 'Marriages/Children' section lists her marriage to 1. Rose Ann 'Rosie' Tennenly 1854-1938, which occurred on 2 Jan 1877 (age 22) at Saint Ann's Catholic Church, Howardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky, United States. Her children are listed as Mary Ellen Bowling 1878-, Anthony Bowling 1879-1946, Nancy Bowling 1880-1900, Bernard Bowling 1881-1942, Alphonsus Bowling 1884-1947, and Anna Mary 'Annie' Beam 1887-1957. Below this is a section for '7. Frances Ophelia Greenwell' with her birth and death details. On the right, a 'Comparison' grid shows the names of her siblings in a grid format, with columns for Name, Birth, Death, and other demographic information.

Custom GPT Sample Result:

Hilary & Rose's Marriage

Difference 1 – Hillary & Rose's marriage year

- **Ancestors Summary – Hillary “Hil” Bowling**
 - “Marriage 2 Jan 1876 … Saint Ann’s Catholic Church, Howardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky” (also restated as St. Ann’s in Bardstown in the notes).
- **Thomas Bowling manuscript**
 - States that **Hilary Bowling** and **Rose Ann Tenny** “were married at St. Ann’s Catholic Church in Howardstown, Kentucky on 2 January 1877.”

Conflict: Marriage date

- Ancestors Summary: **2 Jan 1876**
- Thomas manuscript: **2 Jan 1877**

The children’s births beginning in 1878 fit either date. The Summary cites **Kentucky marriage records** for the 1876 date.

Working evaluation: The **civil/church record (1876)** should carry more weight than the later compiled family manuscript. I would keep **2 Jan 1876** as preferred, note “**Thomas Bowling ms. gives 2 Jan 1877**”, and flag it as a known discrepancy.

Custom GPT: Pros and Cons

- Pros:
- Easy to reuse – just open the same GPT each time
- Consistent behavior and formatting for genealogy tasks
- Good for routine work: summaries, group sheets, timelines, comparisons
- Cons:
- Custom GPTs only available in the paid version.
- You must upload knowledge files into the GPT itself
- Chats show up in Your Chats – rename them so you remember they belong to this GPT

Project: What Is It?

- A Project is a dedicated workspace inside ChatGPT
- You can:
 - Upload multiple files (PDFs, word docs, etc.)
 - Keep all related chats under the same project
 - Add project-specific instructions to all chats inside
- Ideal for big family lines or “brick-wall” research

Project Setup: “Genealogist Assistance”

- Create a new Project and upload key files, for example:
 - Ahnentafel of Bowlings, Ballards, Willmotts, Draimes
 - Individual/Ancestor summaries for the four families
- Add project instructions (same as Custom GPT):
 - Always check project documents first
 - Then consult trusted online records when needed
 - Use genealogical formats and clear citations

Project Demo: Draime Verification Task

- “Using ‘Ancestors of Ida Draime’ and the ‘summaries of each Draime’ verify names, relationships, and key dates (birth, marriage, death).”
- If either document already has primary proof (certificate, civil registration, etc.), report that and do not search further for that entry.
- Otherwise, use online records (Ancestry, FamilySearch, etc.) to confirm or refine the data.
- Work through the list person by person.

Project : Refined Request & Processing

- The request was refined to:
- Verify full name, birth, marriage, death for each person in the Draime summary
- Confirm parents, spouses, and key children when possible
- Note and cite any primary evidence found in the project files
- Use external records only when necessary, and cite them clearly
- Result: ChatGPT produced a detailed, multi-page review for each person in the line

[New chat](#)[Search chats](#)[Library](#)[Codex](#)[GPTs](#)[Explore](#)[Bowling GPT assist using GE...](#)[Katherines Work](#)[Genealogist Assistant](#)[Projects](#)[New project](#)[Genealogist Assistant](#)[Genealogical verification...](#)[Thomas Bowling manus...](#)

Your

All

DO

If you'd like, I can turn this into:
a set of **RootsMagic** research tasks

Summary of where you already have primary proof vs. where to look next

- Ida Mary Francis Draime (1) – *Primary evidence already in your project* for birth/baptism, marriage, and death (Ohio vital & church records). No additional searching done per your rule.
- Others in the Ahnentafel (2–9) – Your project currently leans on:
 - Censuses (US 1860–1930),
 - cemetery transcriptions (St. Peter's, Holy Cross, etc.),
 - Find A Grave and online trees,with no explicit B/M/D certificates or parish entries cited in the I. Draime Endnotes excerpt.

External research confirms or strongly supports:

- Parent-child links and dates for Jean Baptist "John" (2), Mary Anne Fierstos (3), Jean Francois (4), and Mary Catherine (5).
- Names, places, and approximate dates for George Fierstos & Anne Marie Schwartz (6–7) and Jean Baptiste Draime & Elisabeth Fayon (8–9).

For future work, the best "next step" source ↓ chase primary proof would be:

- Stark Co., Ohio civil vital records (birth, marriage, death) for John B. & Mary Anne.

Project Results

Project Demo: Checklists and

Research Goals

- Examples
- AI
- • C
- • C
- • L
- L
- S
- S

2. Jean Baptiste “John” Draime (2) – 23 Apr 1843 – 29 Dec 1922

Research goals

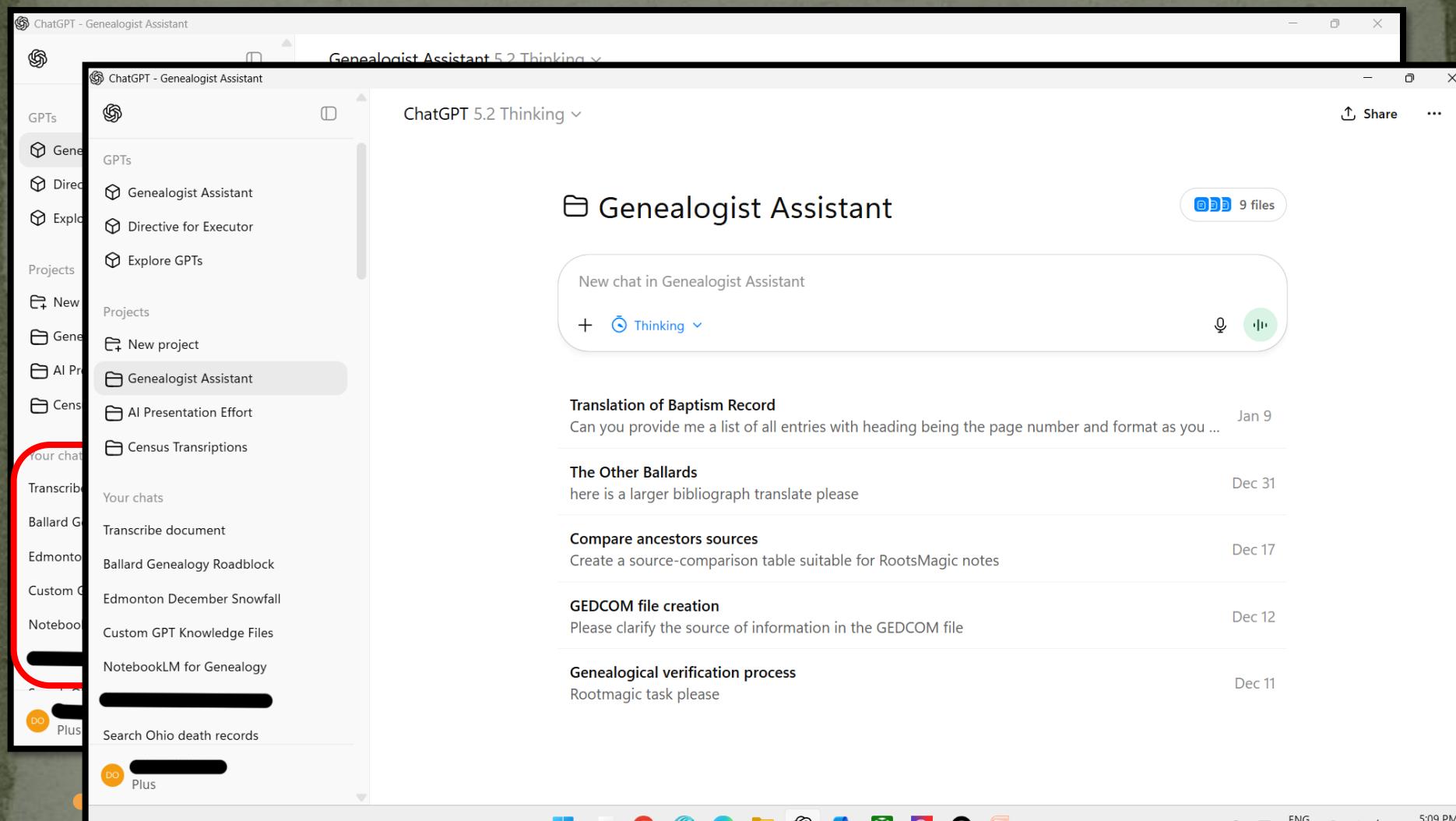
- Secure primary evidence for:
 - Birth or baptism (likely Stark Co., OH; possibly Catholic parish).
 - Marriage to Mary Ann Fierstos.
 - Death and burial in Ohio.

Checklist

- **Death**
 - Search Ohio state/county **death records** (1922) for John/John B./John Baptist Draime.
 - Confirm exact date, place, parents, and informant.
 - Save image + full citation.
- **Burial**
 - Confirm cemetery (likely St. Louis or St. Peter's / Holy Cross).
 - Capture a **photo of the stone** (Find A Grave / BillionGraves or local cemetery transcription).
 - Note stone inscription and compare age vs. birth date.
- **Marriage**
 - Search **Ohio county marriage records** (likely Stark Co., possibly Summit) for:
 - Groom: John/Jean/John B. Draime
 - Bride: Mary Ann Fierstos (variants: Fierstos, Fierstoss, Fierson).
 - Look for Catholic parish version of the marriage if civil not found.
 - Save image + full citation.
- **Birth/Baptism**
 - Check Catholic parish registers around **1843**:
 - St. Louis (Louisville)
 - Other Stark Co. German Catholic parishes.
 - Search for “Jean Baptiste / John Baptist / John B. / Johan Bapt.” with parents Jean Francois & Mary Catherine/Catherine Mary Lallemand.
- **Correlation**
 - Tie residence in Stark Co. + children’s baptisms to his identity as the son of **Jean Francois & Mary Catherine**.

Project: Pros and Cons

- Pros:
 - Keeps files and chats together for one research problem
 - Great for larger, multi-step tasks and long-term work
 - Easy to revisit and continue where you left off
 - Projects are available on the free version
- Cons:
 - Slightly more setup and navigation than a simple GPT
 - Currently cannot “attach” a Custom GPT directly to a Project
 - Remember to start new chats from inside the Project



Tips and Cautions for Using AI in Genealogy

- AI is a powerful assistant, but it can be confidently wrong – always verify.
- Treat AI output like a research hint, not proof.
- Ask it to explain conflicts and label hypotheses vs. proven facts.
- Ask for original records and image.
- Document what came from AI vs. what came from traditional sources.
- Use AI to save time on reading, organizing, and planning – not to replace careful analysis.

Questions and Discussion

- What parts of this workflow might help your own research?
- Are there tasks you would like to try with ChatGPT on your own families?
- What concerns do you have about accuracy, privacy, or complexity?
- Thank you for listening!

Presenter: D. Bowling