

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA



## Foundations of the Future

### **Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future: Penny Cliff and the MAS Program at Clayton State University**

When Penny Cliff became Director of the Master of Archival Studies (MAS) program at Clayton State University, it felt like everything had come full circle. After a 16-year career directing a community archives, followed by roles in college teaching and at the Georgia Archives, Cliff found the perfect blend of her passions in this unique graduate program. “It is a combination of all that I have done and enjoy,” she says. “Teaching, archives, history, involvement in the college and community, working with colleagues and students. It’s deeply rewarding.”



Penny Cliff

Clayton State’s MAS program stands out nationally: it’s one of only two fully online archival studies programs in the U.S., offering students the flexibility to train for a broad range of archival careers from anywhere. From state archives and historical societies to digital repositories and religious institutions, graduates emerge equipped to work with records of all formats and in all types of collections.

The program emphasizes both traditional archival theory and digital fluency. Students develop expertise in appraisal, arrangement and description, reference, outreach, preservation, and records management, with coursework grounded in standards from the Society of American Archivists and the Academy of Certified Archivists. “Because the program concentrates solely on archives and records, it provides more in-depth study than students might receive in broader library or public history programs,” Cliff explains.

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## Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future: Penny Cliff and the MAS Program at Clayton State University (continued)

Despite being fully online, community and collaboration are at the program's core. Through ongoing partnerships with the Georgia Archives and NARA in Atlanta, students can participate in optional in-person tours. The Society of Georgia Archivists also welcomes MAS students to events and offers internship opportunities. Cliff's professional network and her genuine care for her students help open doors. "Students always mention in evaluations that I genuinely care about them. And I do. I will do anything I can to help them succeed."

That care extends beyond graduation. Many alumni stay in touch via LinkedIn, return as guest speakers, or offer guidance to new students. And in a tradition that started as a student suggestion, Cliff now hosts "Swan Song" lunches at the end of each semester to celebrate Capstone graduates in person.

Looking ahead, the program is growing. In Fall 2025, Clayton State will launch a stand-alone certificate in archival studies, and long-term goals include adding a minor in archives and expanding faculty. As the field of archives evolves, particularly through AI, digital preservation, and increased community engagement, the MAS program is adapting with it.

For those considering a career in archives, Cliff offers simple but powerful advice: "Do your research. Talk to archivists. Volunteer. The profession is rewarding, and archivists are some of the most helpful professionals you'll ever meet."

**Mrs. Cliff will share more about her work and the MAS program as the featured speaker at the Georgia Archives Lunch & Learn on Friday, August 8, 2025, from noon to 1:00 p.m.** Attendees will have the opportunity to learn directly from her and ask questions about archival education and careers. For those unable to attend, more information about the MAS program is available at [clayton.edu/graduate/programs/mas](https://clayton.edu/graduate/programs/mas) or by emailing Penny at [Pennelope.Cliff@Clayton.edu](mailto:Pennelope.Cliff@Clayton.edu).

### Newly Processed: Morgan County Superior Court Records

This newly available series offers a glimpse into Morgan County's legal and civic history through a range of Superior Court documents, including jury lists, affidavits, deeds, mortgages, and payment notes. While full case narratives are not always present, researchers may find related details in the Superior Court minutes or contemporary newspaper reports. The collection also includes selected Inferior Court records, such as probate and guardianship returns, and documents from the County Commissioner of Roads. Some records may overlap with other court proceedings, offering broader context for legal research in the region.

Click here to view the [Finding Aid](#) or search for record group 204-01-010 in the Georgia Archives' Finding Aids on [GeorgiaArchives.org](https://GeorgiaArchives.org).

### Coming Up at the Georgia Archives:

**July 11, 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.**

Lunch & Learn:  
*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Archives Through the Years*  
by Allison Schein

**August 8, 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.**

Lunch & Learn:  
*Lifelong Learning: Archival Studies and Free Education for Senior in Georgia*  
by Penny Cliff

**August 23, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**

FOGAH Annual Meeting  
(check [GeorgiaArchives.org](https://GeorgiaArchives.org) or [FOGAH.org](https://FOGAH.org) for more information)

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## GENEALOGY TIDBITS

### BY KENNETH H. THOMAS, JR.

#### Genealogy Events Calendar:

**Deadline: July 3** - Registration is open for the 2025 Institute of Genealogical and Historical Research (IGHR) Virtual Institute and will close on July 3, 2025. The institute will take place virtually from July 27 to August 1. Learn more here: [ighr.gagensociety.org/ighr-2025](https://ighr.gagensociety.org/ighr-2025).

**August 16:** The Augusta Genealogical Society's Annual Genealogical Symposium, 9:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Speakers include Judy G. Russell, the Legal Genealogist, and Erick Montgomery, past president of the Augusta Genealogical Society. Montgomery will speak on AI in research, and Ms. Russell will give three lectures on topics including using the National Archives (NARA) records, resolving conflicts in your records, and linking generations with court and land records. Hybrid options are available.

There is a fee. To see more and to register, check [AugustaGenSociety.org](https://AugustaGenSociety.org).

**August 23:** Friends of Georgia Archives & History (FOGAH) Annual Meeting at the Georgia Archives. The tentative program includes a panel of authors discussing how to publish your book, either through self-publishing or by regional publishers such as Arcadia. (This will not cover university presses.) Check [FOGAH.org](https://FOGAH.org) for membership information and meeting updates.

Also note: Annual Christmas ornaments will be available for purchase.

#### Beginner's Focus: Adoption Records in Georgia

The Georgia General Assembly passed a law this year that will go into effect on July 1, 2025. The law allows anyone born in Georgia who is over 18 and who was adopted in Georgia to have access to their original pre-adoption birth certificate directly from the Georgia State Vital Records office — no court order required. The Georgia Alliance for Adoptee Rights (GAAR) will provide guidance about the process to help adoptees. For more information, email [info@gaallianceforadopterights.org](mailto:info@gaallianceforadopterights.org) or visit [gaallianceforadopterights.org](https://gaallianceforadopterights.org).

#### Society Focus:

Local historical sources can be found in many small towns, even those that are not county seats. The Senoia Area Historical Society and History Museum (6 Couch St., Senoia) is a great example of a small local history museum with enough material on display to tell the town's history. It's worth a visit, or you can check them out online at [SenoiaHistory.com](https://SenoiaHistory.com).

#### DNA:

At FamilyTreeDNA.com, avail yourself of the Group Projects that include DNA matches from various surnames. Check out a family surname and ask the project administrator if anyone in your line of interest or descent is part of that program. You might be pleasantly surprised when they can put you in touch with a descendant of a long-lost line, especially if you do not know of anyone with the Y-DNA needed to be tested for that family.

#### African American Genealogy Focus:

Atlanta has a chapter of the national genealogy group Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society. Check out the Metro Atlanta Chapter to see their activities, meetings, and other news items to help anyone interested in researching their African American history and genealogy. Their website is [AAHGSATL.org](https://AAHGSATL.org).

#### Website News:

American military burials overseas are overseen by the American Battlefield Monuments Commission at [ABMC.gov](https://ABMC.gov). You can search for any United States soldier, sailor, etc., buried overseas in a cemetery managed by this commission. It's a great site to explore.

#### Website News (continued):

You can print out a "Memorial Certificate" for anyone you locate.

#### Georgia Archives Research Tidbit: Family History Books

The Georgia Archives is also a library, and there are a vast number of books available in their Reference Room. Libraries often catalog family history books differently. The Georgia Archives has many of these arranged by the surname of the main family covered, not necessarily by the author. While you can browse the shelves to check, it's always best to check the online catalog on a computer in the room to be sure. The books there cover families from all over the country, not just Georgia.

You can also search at FamilySearch.org under their Search feature and then the "Books" tab to search for digitized books. Those in the public domain can be searched there; others you may need to locate through other libraries or services.

Contact Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., P. O. Box 901, Decatur, GA 30031, or email him through his website, [kenthomasongenealogy.com](https://kenthomasongenealogy.com).