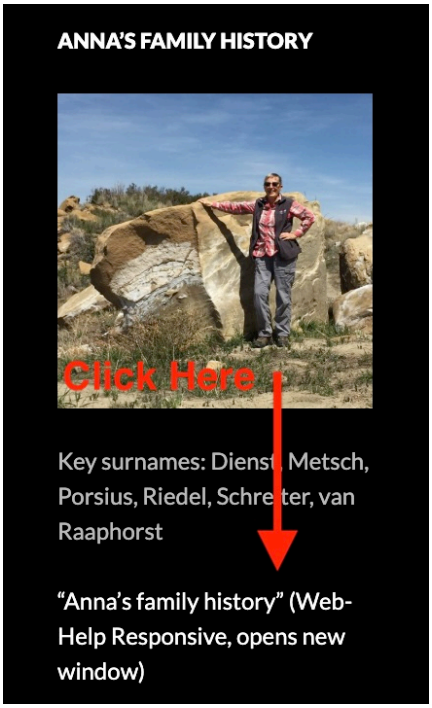
# News from Nan

GENEALOGY, FAMILY HISTORY, PROFESSIONAL, TECHNOLOGY

# FAMILY HISTORY GETS A MAKEOVER — AND IT'S ACTUALLY FUN TO READ

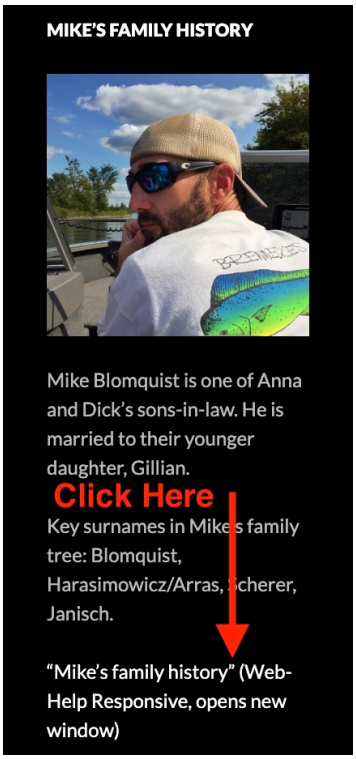
AUGUST 6, 2026 | ANNA

(AI enhanced by Perplexity AI)




If you've visited "News from Nan" over the years, you may remember our old "family pages" — a mix of photos, charts, and links that tried to keep everyone's history in one place.

**Now those pages have had a makeover: they've become full-fledged, searchable family-history sites built with WebHelp Responsive, each focused on one branch of a family group (Anna's and Dick's, as well as the families of our two sons-in-law, Mike and Rick).**



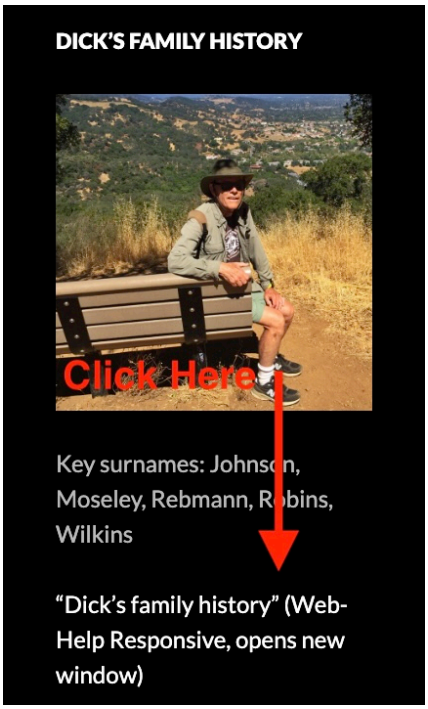

## What are the new family sites on "News from Nan"?

Behind each brand-new family site is a structured collection of facts, stories, and media about one family group. At a practical level, that means it's easy for you to browse people, follow links to source material, and keep coming back as new items appear.

## Family stories, front and center

**In family history, facts and charts are important, but family lore is what people remember and pass around. Stories already published on the new family sites include:**

- "Anna's most memorable Fourth of July"
- "Shirley Woodruff, her husbands, and her children"
- "Lena Düjer's birthplace: Groß Varchow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany"
- "Jennie and Henry Edward Blomquist: Workplace romance?"
- "The Janisch family in Wisconsin"
- "Theodorus and Agatha van Raaphorst, mystery couple"
- "Moseley-Wilkins ancestor surnames"
- "Were John and Abraham Livengood cousins, or only brothers-in-law?"




## How did we do it?

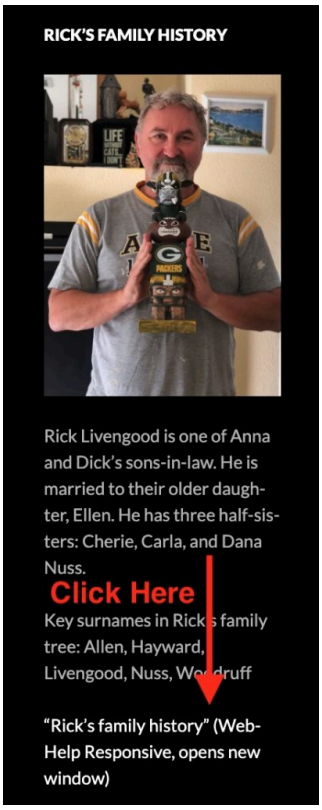
1. We collected and saved information in Family Tree Maker, Ancestry, and related tools — the usual names, dates, relationships, and notes that go into a family tree.
2. Dick then wrote a Python program that takes a standard genealogy export file (GEDCOM — basically a portable family-tree file) and converts it into XML, and from there into DITA, a structured format that works well for publishing. You don't have to know XML or DITA to use the sites; this is just the machinery that makes them easy to generate and update.
3. We repurposed existing material — older posts on our "News from Nan" website, papers, and book excerpts — by turning them into DITA topics and PDFs so they can be published right alongside the tree-based facts.
4. Finally, **we wrote new stories (and, where helpful, used AI assistants, agents, and tools to draft or refine them)** so that each person has at least one readable narrative, not just a list of dates. The stories and the facts now live together in one navigable place.

## What was the result?

The result is something you can click through like a website, but that's backed by a structured, update-friendly foundation. When we find new information, or when someone writes a new story, we can fold it in without starting over.

## Please take a look

**You'll find links to our four family history collections (Anna's, Dick's, Mike's, and Rick's) in the left-hand sidebar of the newsfromnan.com home page. Clinking a link opens a new, browsable window. Enjoy!**




# If you're interested…

We're not starting a formal project or class, but if you're a family member — or a fellow genealogist with similar motivation and reasonable technical comfort — and **you'd like to try something like this with your own data,** we'd be glad to talk. Our offer is simple: we can show you in more detail what we did, answer questions, and offer informal, pro bono help as you think through your own version.

**As for our own four WebHelp Responsive sites,** we'll hang on to the "heavy lifting" (tree management, site structure, and publishing steps) for now, but there's lots of room for others to contribute short stories, photos, and memories. It's a way to widen participation without turning every relative into a researcher. **Please send us your pictures and stories!**

2026