WordPress is one of the most popular blogging platforms. However, you can do so much more than have “just” a blog. This session will explore the varieties of WordPress, how to choose the one that’s right for you, and how to customize it with plugins, widgets, and themes.

**Flavors of WordPress**
There are two basic ways you can implement WordPress: having a site on WordPress.com or by downloading the software from WordPress.org and installing it on your website somewhere else (called a “self-hosted WordPress site”).

**WordPress.com**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Free</td>
<td>✓ No custom themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Easy to set up</td>
<td>✓ Must pay extra for domain name if you don’t want you.wordpress.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Maintenance is done for you</td>
<td>✓ Must pay extra to customize CSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Customizable (some free, some fee)</td>
<td>✓ Can’t modify the PHP code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Major features included (site stats, spam filtering)</td>
<td>✓ Can’t install plugins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Numerous themes and widgets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WordPress.org (Self-hosted WordPress)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Upload custom themes</td>
<td>✓ Must pay for hosting and domain name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Install plugins</td>
<td>✓ Must install it yourself (Some hosts have one-click installations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Customize CSS</td>
<td>✓ Must maintain it yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Can modify the PHP code</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Active developer community</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Handy Features**

- Scheduling posts
- Social media sharing (built-in to WordPress.com; plugin for self-hosted)
  - Publish your content to Twitter, Facebook, etc.
  - Allow users to share links to their favorite social sites
- Discussion settings (invaluable for moderating comments)
- RSS feed settings
- Import/Export

**WordPress.com Dashboard:**

Choosing and Customizing a Theme

WordPress.com has over 100 themes available. Self-hosted sites have countless themes (some free, some fee). Many of them can be customized with header graphics and color schemes. You can search for the features that you need, such as two-column, fixed-width, custom header, etc. Be certain to preview before installing new themes. Customize the theme you’re using by going to Appearance > Themes.

Self-hosted sites can tweak the CSS all they want. (WordPress.com users can only do so by paying extra.) Access the CSS via Appearance > Editor.
**Installing Widgets**

WordPress comes with several widgets that you can drop into various areas of the page. Add RSS links, your Twitter feed, a tag cloud, and other cool stuff. Installing them are as easy as going to Appearance > Widgets and dragging and dropping to the area where you want it. (Different themes will have different areas available for widgets.)

One of the most useful and flexible widgets is Text. Use it to add arbitrary text or some HTML. It’s an easy way to add graphics, notices, etc. to your sidebar or footer.

**Finding and Installing Plugins (Self-hosted Sites)**

Plugins are the main way to customize a self-hosted WordPress site. Yes, you can change the PHP code yourself, but why do that if you don’t have to? There are more than 17,000 plugins available. Chances are good that someone has already built a plugin for the feature you want.

Think of how plugins can expand the functionality of your site. For example, there are plugins that allow you to set up members-only sections, which would be ideal for a genealogical society.

You can find plugins on WordPress.org ([http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/](http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/)) or by searching in the Dashboard under Plugins > Add New. Search by keyword or view a list of popular plugins. Each plugin has its own page with a description, information about version compatibility, installation instructions, screenshots, changelog, and stats.

You can install a plugin by downloading it from WordPress.org and then going to your Dashboard under Plugins > Add New > Upload. You can also search for the plugin in your Dashboard and click “Install Now.”

Two plugins that you should strongly consider installing:
- JetPack - gives site stats, WP.me link shortener, Twitter widget, email subscriptions to the blog, etc.
- WPtouch - lets visitors on mobile devices see it in a mobile-friendly format

Two Tips:
- Double-check that the version you are downloading matches the version of your WP installation
- Always do a back-up of your site before installing a new plugin

There are a few genealogy-specific plugins, including one by Darrin Lythgoe to work with TNG ([http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/tng-wordpress-plugin/](http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/tng-wordpress-plugin/))

**Some Genealogy WordPress Sites:**
- [www.ToniasRoots.com](http://www.ToniasRoots.com) (also uses the TNG plugin)
- [www.moultriecreek.us](http://www.moultriecreek.us)
- [www.ipentimento.com](http://www.ipentimento.com)
- [www.amyjohnsoncrow.com](http://www.amyjohnsoncrow.com)
- [michaelhait.wordpress.com](http://michaelhait.wordpress.com)
- [www.geneabloggers.com](http://www.geneabloggers.com)
- [www.geneabloggers.com](http://www.geneabloggers.com)
- [highdefgen.com](http://highdefgen.com)