

A Dozen Resources That You Should Be Using But Probably Aren't

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Like all humans, genealogists are creatures of habit. When we start researching a new family line or a new ancestor in a working line, we tend to fall into our habitual pattern. We run through our “usual” resources – Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, maybe a few others. This presentation addresses resources that we all should use regularly, but which we probably don't. Some are sources, and some are sites where you can find multiple sources.

Google <https://www.google.com/> & Google Books <http://books.google.com/>

Google is the website that everyone tries sooner or later, but which, after finding themselves buried under literally millions of results, most people soon give up on. But by using the tools and strategies that Google provides, you can narrow your search and get more useful results:

Tools for Writing Search Criteria:

- **Quotation Marks:** Putting your key terms in quotation marks, “George Brown” ensures that your results will be limited to hits that include your keyword or phrase will appear in every result, exactly as you typed it.
- **Asterisk:** Adding the asterisk between your key words will find the name with any middle name or initial. “George * Brown” will return results for George F. Brown or George Frederick Brown, etc. The asterisk does not work for parts of words as it does in Ancestry.com and other sites.
- **Number Ranges (...):** “George Brown” 1840...1900 will return only results containing a year that falls within the range specified.
- **Minus Sign (-):** Using the minus sign insures that your results do not include the word immediately following the minus sign. A search for Jerkins –clothing –jacket reduces the number of results I get that include the jacket known as a Jerkins.
- **OR:** ex. “George Brown” OR “Brown, George” will yield results with both forms of the name. □
Site: You can use this tool to search an entire website with one search.

Google Books

When Google started Google Books, their goal was the digitization of every book ever published. They have not yet achieved that, but they have digitized many millions of books – many of which are great for genealogists. You can search by any word and get a list of books containing that word. Since a search for the word “genealogy” returns a list of more than 8 million books, you will want to tailor your search. I have had excellent results searching for my ancestor's name and a location. One search using the ancestor's name and state brought me a book on court cases that included a suit involving his estate – every child and grandchild was named. Many of the books can be downloaded as PDF files. Google Books does include books that are still under copyright, and you will only be allowed to see selected portions of those books.

State Censuses

State censuses can be as important as the federal census to genealogists but, because they are lesser known, remain a much under-utilized resource in American genealogy. State censuses were typically taken midway between the Federal censuses, in the years ending in 5 (1855, 1865. Etc.), and were intended to complement those census reports. For the genealogist, State Censuses can actually serve as substitutes for some of the missing federal census records - most notably the 1790, 1800, 1810, and 1890 censuses. Also, many state censuses also asked different questions than the federal census, providing information that cannot be found elsewhere in the federal schedules.

Not all states took their own censuses, and some censuses from the states that did have not survived. Copies or microfilms of these state census records are typically found at state archives or libraries. Many are available also on microfilm through a local Family History Center, and some are available online via commercial genealogy databases such as Ancestry.com. A list of all of the States that took their own censuses – and the years that they took them – is found at:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/other_resources/state_censuses.html.

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp>

The National Archives are chock-a-block with original records about our ancestors, and if you get the opportunity to go and research there, you should absolutely do so. But in recent years, NARA has been recognizing the trend toward digitization and has put a number of useful databases online. Of particular interest to genealogists will probably be the Passenger information for the Famine Irish (1846-1851), the Germans (1850-1897), the Italians (1855-1900), and the Russians (1834-1897). There also military records: enlistment records for WWII, and casualty records for WWII, Korea, and Viet Nam, among others.

Internet Archive <https://archive.org/index.php>

Like Google, this website has the goal of digitizing everything – and they seem to be well on their way. In addition to over 3 million digitized books, this site provides access to a huge online digitized archives of moving images (videos), live music recordings, and audio recordings of all kinds.

Internet Archive is not as easy to search as Google Books because you cannot perform an “every word” search on every book in the archive at once. You must find books that may contain material of interest to you, and search that book individually. You can find a given book, open the book in PDF format and search the entire book. This takes more effort, but Internet Archive has sources that Google Books does not. The Archive also has images of the entire U.S. Census with all the accompanying documents and the Soundex index for the U.S. Census.

If you enter a search on the word Genealogy, you get over 58,000 results. Happily, a breakdown is provided that allows you to select from such sub-categories as “Genealogies” (actual family histories), “Birth Registers”, “Town Records” and so on.

Archive.org also includes the Way-Back-Machine, an archive of the Internet with over a 150 billion web pages archived. Search for that useful site that you used in the past, but which has since disappeared.

Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html>

The physical Library of Congress is a thing of beauty and wonder and a great place to do research for those lucky enough to visit there. Luckily, the Library’s online presence is also a wonderful thing. Departments include: American History & Culture, Historic Newspapers, Manuscript Collections, Map Collections, Rare Books and Special Collections, Hispanic Digital Collections, Folklife Digital Collections, and much, much more. Items that cannot circulate through interlibrary loan can be scanned and images are delivered via the Web. See Interlibrary Loan (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/loan/>).

Family History Books <https://books.familysearch.org/>

Part of the FamilySearch.org website, this is a collection of published genealogy and family history books. Quoting from the website, "The archive includes histories of families, county and local histories, how-to books on genealogy, genealogy magazines and periodicals (including some international), medieval books (including histories and pedigrees), and gazetteers. It is searchable by surname and has an Advanced Search that allows additional search terms.

Town and County Histories, "Mug" Books

The quality of Town and County histories can vary widely, from well-researched historical documents to what are often called Mug Books. These books often come in two parts: the first part being a history of the entity and being addressed, and a second section filled with biographical profiles. The profiles are usually of the prominent founding fathers and families who lived there when the book was published. These books can be valuable because much of the information has been obtained directly from local individuals with first-hand knowledge of the facts. However, these books were typically compiled from interviews or questionnaires complete by locals with enough money to subscribe to the purchase of one of the histories, so and the data was not verified independently. In other words, take advantage of valuable clues, but verify, verify.

City Directories

City directories date back to around 1700 in the United States, and can provide the names, occupations, home and business addresses, spouse's name, and sometimes the names plus other people who live in the same household. Typically, the first place to look for city directories are has been the public library, but they are increasingly available online. Ancestry.Com has a good collection, and the Internet Archive (archive.org) has a substantial offering, and many city directories are available on microfilm from the Family History Library.

College, University or Public Library Special Collections.

The special collections of an institution may contain anything and everything including historical information, artifacts and items that are of great value in genealogy research. You may find photos, letters, maps and more. Files often have newspaper clippings, obituaries and other records of local interest. If you have an ancestor who was a prominent community member or had a large role in a significant event, check the special collections. Remember that "prominent" doesn't necessarily mean wealthy. If you ancestor played a part in the development of a community through charity, profession or circumstance, he or she may be found in special collections.

Find them by locating the Archives or Library in your area of interest and then searching their Library catalogs for Special Collections.

Historical Map Collections

Understanding historical time periods and boundaries is important to knowing where your ancestor's records may be located. Throughout the 1800s and a good part of the 1900s, County boundaries in most states underwent substantial change as new counties were carved out of the original large counties.

It is necessary for you to know what county the town was in when your ancestors lived there. Brick walls can grow from simply looking at the wrong locations. These are two of my favorites:

- **The Newberry Library Atlas of Historical Boundaries**
<http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html> This collection of maps shows how each county's boundaries changed as populations increased and more counties were created to handle government for the increased numbers of people.

- **The Darlington Digital Library:** <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/d/darlington/> – An excellent collection of old Atlases that can show you the lay of the land during the periods your ancestors lived there
- **Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection :** <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/> – Great maps of the entire country and an excellent series on U.S. Territories from 1775 to relatively modern times.

. Home and Family Sources

Every beginner level genealogy course admonishes us to start with what we know – the natural extension of that axiom is that we should also make the records, artifacts and memorabilia still in the possession of family and friends our first research target. But in the digital age, how many of us actually do it? Unfortunately, too many of us tend to go straight to our computers and the lure of online treasures without ever fully exploiting the treasures closer to home.

Possible home sources can vary from old photographs to original land patents and everything in between. They come in so many different forms, shapes, and sizes that it is impossible to list them all here. Go to my website <http://www.genjack.com/Lectures.html>, to the 2nd lecture topic and download the handout for an extensive list of possible home sources that many of us might not automatically think of as genealogy sources.

The key thing to remember is that while not every home will be blessed with a variety of such sources, these valuable treasures do not necessarily have to be in YOUR home to be beneficial to you. Relatives, former family neighbors, or even former business associates of the family may possess correspondence or photographs exchanged a generation or more earlier. Or these persons may have knowledge of more distant holders of such treasures. Talk to EVERYONE. Remember, a little tact, patience, and gentle persistence can lead to the discovery of a treasure trove of memorabilia in another's possession.

Family and Home Information Sources Checklist

Use this checklist as a guide to sources of information you might find in your home or the home of a relative.

Check each source you find.



Sources of Information about ...

... Birth

- Baby Book
- Adoption Record

... Marriage

- Wedding Announcement
- Wedding Book
- Anniversary Announcement

... Divorce

- Papers

... Death

- Obituary
- Funeral Book
- Will
- Memorial Cards

... School

- Report Cards
- Honor Roll
- Awards
- Graduation Diplomas
- Transcripts
- yearbooks

... Religious Activity

- Blessing
- Baptismal Record
- Christening Record
- Confirmation Record
- Ordination Record
- Ministerial Record

... Every Day Life

- Journal
- Diary
- Biography
- Letters
- Photographs
- Autograph Album

- Publications/ newspaper clippings (about the person)
- Scrapbooks

... Employment

- Social Security Card
- Apprenticeship Records
- Citations
- Achievement Awards
- Disability Records
- Pension Records
- Membership Records
- Income Tax Records
- Union Records
- Severance Records
- Retirement Records

... Military Service

- Selective Service Records
- Pension Records
- National Guard Service Records
- Citations
- Disability Records
- Service Medals
- Ribbons
- Insignias
- Discharge Records
- Sword
- Firearms
- Uniform

... Land and property ownership

- Deeds
- Land Grants
- Water Rights
- Mortgages
- Leases
- Tax Notices
- Abstracts of Title
- Estate Records
- Financial Records

... Civil and Legal Activity

- Bonds
- Summons
- Subpoena
- Guardian Papers
- Contracts
- Bounty Award

... Family

- Bible
- Lineages
- Genealogies
- Histories
- Bulletins/ newsletters
- Coat of Arms

... Health

- Hospital Records
- Medical Records
- Immunization Records
- X-Rays
- Insurance Papers
- Vaccination Records

... Household Items

- Engraved Items
- Dishes
- Silverware
- Stitched Sampler
- Tapestries
- Quilts
- Needlework

... Licenses

- Business
- Occupation
- Professional
- Hunting/Fishing
- Firearms
- Drivers
- Motor Vehicle

... Citizenship Papers

- Naturalization Papers
- Alien Registration
- Deportment Papers
- Passport
- Visa