

# Using the National Archives and Library of Congress Websites for Genealogy

## The Library of Congress

To access records, go to <http://www.loc.gov>. Click on “Digital Collections,” and then the collection title. You can also sort by topic – such as War & Military – or by material type. Collections in bold are especially popular with genealogists.

- 1) Read your ancestors’ own words.
  - a. *American Life Histories* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/federal-writers-project/about-this-collection/>) were recorded between 1935 and 1940. Taken by members of the Federal Writers Project, these interviews tell the stories of citizens of twenty-four states.
  - b. *American Notes* (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/travels-in-america-1750-to-1920/about-this-collection/>) contain travel narratives describing American life between 1750 and 1920.
  - c. *Born in Slavery* (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>) consists of interviews with former slaves recorded by the Federal Writers Project between 1936 and 1938.
  - d. *California as I Saw It* (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/about-this-collection/>) contains narratives describing life in early California.
  - e. *Capital and the Bay* (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/washington-and-chesapeake-bay-narratives/about-this-collection/>) contains narratives describing early Washington.
  - f. ***Chronicling America* (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) includes a digital newspaper database and directory dating covering 1836-1922 and sometimes more.**
  - g. *Pioneering the Upper Midwest* (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/pioneering-the-upper-midwest/about-this-collection/>) contains stories of early settlement in that region.
  - h. *Prairie Settlement* (<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/nbhihtml/pshome.html>) covers the early years of settlement in Nebraska.
- 2) Hear what your ancestors might have heard:
  - a. *The Library of Congress Celebrates the Songs of America* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/about-this-collection/>) traces the history of American music.
- 3) Learn about the major events that shaped your ancestors’ lives:
  - a. Military Service:
    - i. *The Spanish-American War in Motion Pictures* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/spanish-american-war-in-motion->

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- [pictures/about-this-collection/](#)) allows you to see where and how your ancestors fought in that war.
- ii. **Veterans' History Project** (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/>) records the personal stories of those who served. If you don't have an immediate ancestor included, you might be able to find the records of another person who served in the same area or time period.
  - iii. *World War I Posters* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-posters/about-this-collection/>) allows you to glimpse how your ancestors were encouraged to fight for the cause.
- b. *Slavery: Voices from the Days of Slavery* (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/>) helps you learn what your enslaved ancestors may have experienced.
  - c. *The Great Depression: Voices from the Dust Bowl* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/about-this-collection/>) documents life in migrant worker camps from 1940 to 1941.
  - d. *Women's Suffrage: National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection* (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/naw/nawshome.html>) lets you see the material your suffragette ancestors would have read.
- 4) See your ancestors' lives through pictures and movies:
- a. African-American life:
    - i. *African American Photographs Assembled for the 1900 Paris Exposition* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/african-american-photographs-1900-paris-exposition/about-this-collection/>) covers African-American life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As part of the 1900 Universal Exposition, an extensive series of photographs of African-American life were prepared.
    - ii. *The Gladstone Collection of African-American Photographs* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/gladstone-african-american-photographs/about-this-collection/>) depict African-American life during the Civil War.
  - b. *Adult Labor: America at Work, America at Leisure: Motion Pictures from 1894-1915* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/america-at-work-and-leisure-1894-to-1915/about-this-collection/>) contains images of work, school and home during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - c. Child labor: Did your ancestor have to work as a child? The *National Child Labor Committee Collection* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/national-child-labor-committee/about-this-collection/>) documented conditions for working children between 1908 and 1924.
  - d. **Civil War: An extensive collection of images, *Civil War*** (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-war/about-this-collection/>) covers all aspects of the Civil War.

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- e. Daguerreotypes: A kind of photography, *Daguerreotypes* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/daguerreotypes/about-this-collection/>) includes a number of images of individuals.
  - f. **Historic American Buildings Survey: Begun in 1933, HABS** (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/historic-american-buildings-landscapes-and-engineering-records/about-this-collection/>) inventoried the nation's historic buildings.
  - g. Life in America between 1930-1945: The Farm Security Administration and Office of War information built an extensive photography database of both black and white (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-black-and-white-negatives/about-this-collection/>) and color photographs (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-color-photographs/about-this-collection/>).
  - h. "Lots": If you're willing to do some sorting, the "Lots" database (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/groups-of-images/about-this-collection/>) contains a variety of related photographs.
  - i. Panoramic pictures: Covering all fifty states, the *Panoramic Photographs* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/panoramic-photographs/about-this-collection/>) database includes photos between 1851 and 1991. Photos cover everything from beauty pageants to Navy ships.
- 5) Use maps to see where your ancestors lived and who lived near them in certain time periods.
- a. American Revolution:
    - i. *American Revolution and Its Era* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/american-revolutionary-war-maps/about-this-collection/>) contains maps documenting North America and the West Indies between 1750 and 1789. While the collection can't be searched by town, it can be searched by colony (now state).
    - ii. *Rochambeau Map Collection* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/rochambeau-maps/about-this-collection/>) includes the maps used by the French soldiers who supported the American Revolution.
  - b. Civil War:
    - i. *Civil War Maps* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-war-maps/about-this-collection/>) can show you where your ancestors were on the battlefield.
    - ii. *The Hotchkiss Map Collection* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/hotchkiss-maps/about-this-collection/>) looks specifically at Confederate battles.
  - c. Louisiana: Did your ancestors come from the historic area of the Louisiana Purchase? *Louisiana: European Exploration and the Louisiana Purchase* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/about-this-collection/>) traces the history of that area using maps.

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- d. Maps of Individual Cities: *Cities and Towns* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/cities-and-towns/about-this-collection/>) contains maps of America's largest cities, including Boston and Providence.
- e. **Panoramic Maps: A bird's eye view of cities and towns, *Panoramic Maps*** (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/panoramic-maps/about-this-collection/>) **shows what your ancestor's town looked like in the late eighteen and early nineteen hundreds.**
- f. Railroad Maps: Did your ancestor work for the railroad? *Railroad Maps* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/railroad-maps-1828-to-1900/about-this-collection/>) shows the layouts of their lines.
- g. **Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: A well-known collection, *Sanborn Maps*** (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/>) **provide extensive details about an ancestor's town.**
- h. Transportation and Communication: Wonder how your ancestors got around? *Transportation and Communication* (<http://www.loc.gov/collections/transportation-and-communication/about-this-collection/>) can help you figure that out.

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*Access to Archival Databases (Hint: Many of these records are also on FamilySearch.)*

To access records, go to <http://www.archives.gov> and click on "Research our records." Under search online, click on "Access to Archival Databases" and then "genealogy/personal history." To search, use the first search button.

### 1) Passenger Records:

- a. NARA's *Access to Archival Databases* has indexes of passenger records, sorted by ethnicity. These records are helpful if you don't know when or where your ancestor arrived. For all files, search the data file with the individual's name. Use the manifest identification number from the data file entry to search the manifest header file for the ship's name and information. Databases are available for the following ethnicities:
  - i. German (which includes groups commonly mistaken for Germans, such as Luxembourger), 1850 to 1897: <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4432&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl&col=1002>
  - ii. Russian, 1834 to 1897: <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4434&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl&col=1002>
  - iii. Italian, 1855 to 1900: <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4433&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl&col=1002>
  - iv. Irish, 1846 to 1851, **New York only**: <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=639&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl&col=1002>

### 2) Military Records:

- a. World War II
  - i. *World War II Army Enlistment Records* contain basic enlistment information for both the reserve corps and active duty. If you know your relative or ancestor fought, this is a helpful resource: <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=3360&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>.
  - ii. Prisoner of War Information:
    1. *Records of World War II Prisoners of War* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=644&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) covers basic information on prisoners of war between late 1941 and 1946. This does not include prisoners reported by the Red Cross. This database is useful in tracing an ancestor who might have been captured.
    2. *World War II Prisoners of the Japanese* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4277&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl&col=1215>) covers records of those interned in Japan between 1941 and 1945.
  - iii. *Records About Japanese Americans Relocated During World War II* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=623&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) contains the personal data of those Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

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- b. Korea
  - i. Two databases provide information on the Korean War dead and injured.
    1. *Records of Military Personnel Who Died as a Result of Hostilities During the Korean War* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=518&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) documents those who died in hostilities between 1950 and 1957.
    2. *Records on Korean War Dead and Wounded Army Casualties* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=531&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) lists all casualties between 1950 and 1953.
  - ii. *Records of American Prisoners of War During the Korean War* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=488&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) provides basic information on Korean prisoners of war between 1950 and 1953.
- c. Vietnam
  - i. Multiple databases document Vietnam War casualties.
    1. *Records on Military Personnel Who Died, Were Missing in Action or Prisoners of War as a Result of the Vietnam War* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=512&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) contains information on prisoners, injuries, and deaths between 1956 and 1998 and information on repatriated prisoners of war between 1962 and 1979.
    2. *Records with Unit Information on Military Personnel Who Died During the Vietnam War* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=3053&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl&col=1183>) traces Vietnam War deaths between 1956 and 2003.
  - ii. *Awards and Decoration System Translated File* (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=3976&cat=GP21,22,23,24,44&bc=,sl>) lists military awards between 1967 and 1972.

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## The National Archives

### *National Archives Catalog*

As a new update to the website of the National Archives, the catalog has been “improved” to include digital images of records. To access the catalog, go to: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>.

Click on “Advanced Search” and fill in any information you might know. For the search to be most effective, pay attention to a few things. First, click on the “Archival Materials Online” option in the “limit search to” boxes. Second, chose the appropriate material in the “Type of Archival Materials” drop down menu. Finally, chose appropriate search terms. The more specific the wording you use, the more likely you are to return useful results.