
Thomas J. Watson Library

Research Guide

Genealogy Resources

This guide is intended to make researchers aware of the resources available for conducting scholarly genealogy research at the Thomas J. Watson Library and on the web.

Thomas J. Watson Library

The Met Fifth Avenue
1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10028

212-650-2442

For current Library hours visit
us at metmuseum.org/watson

Where to start

Vital Records (birth, marriage, death)

Vital records are often the first type of records that genealogists begin their research with because they offer insight to an individual's basic information. They record life events and important milestones. Be aware that issues such as legibility may arise and as government regulation evolve; different types of information may have been recorded.

- **Birth records** will usually include information such as the proper child's name, gender, date and place born, and the parents' names. Sometimes details like the parent's birth locations as well as occupation may also appear.
- **Marriage records** will usually show both the full names of the bride and groom, date and place, and sometimes the ages as well as the religious denomination of the bride and groom.
- **Death records** of an individual are equally important and can offer additional details on how the individual may have lived. Information such as age, marital status, cause of death, date and place of death and burial, and at times the occupation, the parents' names and their birthplaces. The more recent the death record, the more information can be gleaned.

Census Records

Since 1790, the US Federal Census has been conducted every ten years. Data is available for each census up to 1940– there is a 72 year privacy rule for census records before the next decade's data is released. Be aware, most of the records are hand-written and digitally scanned from microfilm. This may or may not present problems in how the records were transcribed, and/or problems in reading the digital scan.

Easily search census records with [HERITAGEQUEST](#) (learn how under web resources)

Things to keep in mind when searching census records:

- 99% of the 1890 US census records were destroyed in a fire in 1921. Only 6,160 people out of the 1890 population of 62,979,766 are listed. Ancestry.com has developed an 1890 Census Substitute using an assortment of data from national and local sources (more on Ancestry.com below)
- The first six censuses (1790–1840) list only the names of the heads of household, though age brackets for males and females in each household are included.
- 1830–1850 censuses are not indexed, and therefore can only be browsed by locality (ex: Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County NY, 1840)
- From 1850 on, the names of ALL members of a household should be listed in each census; From 1850 on (with the exception of 1890), age, sex, race, birthplace of each person is listed.

-
- From 1880 on, relationship of each member of the household to the head, the birthplaces of each family member, and birthplace of the parents, are listed.

Mainstream Web Resources

[HeritageQuest](#)

This database contains the complete set of U.S. Federal Census Records from 1790-1940 and the searchable full-text of over 25,000 family and local histories. This collection also assembles banking and military records, genealogies, primary source materials, and genealogical and local history serials.

- To search the census, choose “Search Census” from the list of options.
- Basic Search is the default, but there are advanced search options, or browse.
The year or years you are searching will help determine which of these options you’ll want to choose — for example: the census tables from 1830, 1840 and 1850 are not searchable — you can only browse.

Refer to The Census Book (pdf file) for a brief summary of each census. Section 5 of The Census Book lists what questions were asked, which states were included, etc. and a blank copy of each census form showing the categories in a clearer

Other HeritageQuest resources:

Search Books enables you to do a full-text search of over 24,000 publications of family and local.

Search PERSI The PERiodical Source Index – allows you to search periodicals related to people or to local history. Be aware, this is an index only

Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files records from the late 18th and early 19th centuries

Freedman’s Bank Records (1865-1874) this was a bank established for freed slaves during Reconstruction Era

U.S. Serial Set These are records of formal petitions to the US Congress in support of, or in memorial to, individual citizens. For example: A tribute to a fallen soldier.

Ancestry.com

[Ancestry.com](#) is one of the principal websites for genealogy research and contains databases of vital, census, military, and immigration records from around the world, with extensive holdings for the United States and the United Kingdom. New genealogical resources are added to ancestry.com nearly every week.

Access to the full range of resources on ancestry.com is available with a paid subscription. Many libraries, including every branch of the NYPL, offers free access to Ancestry Library Edition – the subscription version of ancestry.com for libraries. Because of contractual issues there are, however a few databases not available in Ancestry Library Edition that are available only to paid ancestry.com members. Some of these databases may be available through other subscription resources either in the Watson Library, NYPL, or area university libraries.

Note: Watson Library does not have full access to this resource but you can access the website at <http://ancestry.com>. Searching is FREE but to view most results, subscription is required.

Basic search in Ancestry.com

Click on Search, than on “Search all Records”-this will allow you to do a broad search on your individual by filling out basic information for searching. If you want to search through a specific collection, click on featured databases from the SEARCH drop-down menu.

For instructions in conducting a more advanced search, you can access the Learning Center drop-down menu on [Ancestry.com](#)’s homepage, located on at the top middle of the screen. The Learning Center offers tutorials on how to get started, how to read records, and an FAQ.

Watson Library Resources

Newspapers and Periodicals

- [New York Times](#) (free via ProQuest 1851-2005) – (Watson Resource)
- [American Periodical Series Online](#) – (Watson Resource)

Since they are both provided by ProQuest, we can search both of these databases at once.

Other newspapers & periodicals available through Watson:

- [Times – London](#) (1785-1985) (Watson Resource)
- [Brooklyn Daily Eagle](#)
- [Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers](#)
(free resource linked from portal)

More Newspapers can be found under [Historical Newspapers](#) in the Electronic Resources section of the portal.

Watson Library Digital Resources

[Biographical Resources](#)

The Watson Library has a number of biographical resources that can help serve as a starting point for research into a person's background. Visit our [e-resources page](#) on the portal for a selection of Biographical Resources.

[Eighteenth Century Collections Online \(ECCO\)](#)

ECCO, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, is a digital collection which includes full text access to over 30,000 English language and foreign language titles printed in the United Kingdom, along with thousands of important works from the Americas, between 1701 and 1800. ECCO contains the fully searchable, digitized image of a variety of materials including books, auction catalogs, artists' biographies and handbooks, treatises on painting and architecture, pamphlets, broadsides, and ephemera. Our subscription includes titles in the Fine Arts and Social Sciences.

[Farber Gravestone Collection \(American Antiquarian Society\)](#)

The Farber Gravestone Collection is an unusual resource containing over 13,500 images documenting the sculpture on more than 9,000 gravestones, most of which were made prior to 1800, in the Northeastern part of the United States. Though this database pertains to the sculpture on gravestones, the images are very high quality and the information on the gravestones can be easily read, which may make it helpful in researching names, birth and death dates.

[Maps and Geography](#)

Maps can be used as aids in your genealogical research. For example: using historical maps to find locations that no longer exist or have changed names. There are links to a number of resources on [Maps and Geography](#) on the Watson Library Portal.

[Oxford Reference Online](#)

Full-text versions of many Oxford reference books that may be helpful at the beginning of a genealogy search. For example:

The Oxford dictionary of local and family history / David Hey; A UK-focused guide to genealogical terms that may come up during your research.

Concise dictionary of world place-names / Everett-Heath, John; "This dictionary gives the history, meanings, and origin of an enormous range of country, region, island, city, and town names from around the world."

Dynasties of the world / John E. Morby; Lists of ruling families from around the world and throughout history.

The full list of titles available through Oxford Reference Online Premium is available on [Watsonline](#).

Recommended websites

[Association of Professional Genealogists \(APG\)](#)

The APG is a non-profit organization in the United States that supports the work of both professional and amateur genealogists. The website offers information on finding a research specialist, on the association's educational conferences, and their publications.

[Bibliothèque virtuelle humaniste \(humanities digital library\)](#)

About 2000 documents from 15th-17th centuries coming from local older collections. 10 to 20 % are in text mode. Free access. French Language only.

[Documenting the American South](#)

[Ellis Island – Port of New York Passenger Search](#)

Database of ship's registries and passenger lists. Free, but requires registration.

[Handbooks for Foreign Genealogical Research](#)

From the Library of Congress, also gives a brief history of immigration to the US

[Hungary: Jewish Census of 1848 / Conscriptio Judaerum. 1848.](#)

A survey of Jews in Greater Hungary compiled after the Revolution of 1848. Includes parts of Slovakia, Croatia, Ukraine and Romania.

[The Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy at the New York Public Library](#)

Located in Room 121 of the New York Public Library at Fifth Avenue 42nd Street. "The Milstein Division collects materials documenting American History on the national, state and local level, Genealogy, Heraldry, Personal and Family Names, and Flags." In 2008, the New York Genealogical and Biographic Society donated their 75,000 volume collection to the Milstein Division of the New York Public Library.

[JewishGen](#)

Portal and online community for researching Jewish ancestry

Within JewishGen: Info Files Index – <http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/> – links to libraries, vital records databases, immigration information, and other sites

[LDS Family Search](#)

FamilySearch is the largest genealogy organization in the world. You can access their resources and services online at FamilySearch.org. Highlights of their collection include over 2 million rolls of microfilmed genealogical records; 700,000 microfiche; 360,000 books, serials, and other formats. You can search records from the United States, Canada, the British Isles, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. A majority of the records contain information about persons who lived before 1930.

[Miriam Weiner Eastern European Archival Database](#)

Archival holdings from archives and historical institutions in Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Israel and Romania. Data is mostly in Russian.

[National Archives and Records Administration \(NARA\)](#)

National Archives Regional Facilities provide access to both federal and area-specific microfilm and original records at branches across the United States. Facilities in the Northeastern US include the following: New York, NY ; Boston, MA ; Philadelphia, PA

[National Archives of the United Kingdom](#)

Information on census records – conducted every ten years – from 1841 through 1911 – for England and Wales; passenger lists for departures and arrivals to the UK from 1878-1960; vital records; and wills. Within the National Archives, UK website: Research Guides A-Z, lists the types of records that may aid in research, provides some

background information about the record, and suggests print and online sources.

[National Genealogical Society](#)

[New York Genealogical and Biographical Society](#)

Have a question?

Reach a reference librarian at watson.library@metmuseum.org or use our virtual chat service, Ask a Librarian, Monday-Friday, 10am-5pm.

Last updated 12/2020