

Finding Genealogical Records in Online Books

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What are archives

1. Archives are collections of information – otherwise known as records. These come in many forms such as: letters, reports, minutes, registers, maps, photographs / films, digital files, photos, sound recordings.
2. Archives can contain records with a local focus or specialized in a particular themes. IE: Census
3. National Archives (NARA) is the largest archive in the United States, but there are many other, smaller archives that may have records to help with your research.

Difference between a National Archive and a Library Archive

1. A National Archive has records pertaining to the government
2. Organizations create records that relate to peoples daily lives for their own purposes. These records archives may be 3x times that of records found in a Government archive.

Is an archive like a library? No

1. Books in a library are often secondary sources of information, whereas records in an archive are primary sources. Archives provide first-hand information or evidence relating to historical events or figures. Information in books come from records at an Archive.
2. Library books are arranged by subject and author, whereas information in the archives are arranged according to the person, agency or organization that created it. (EX: Naval). This means that you will probably need to look at records from more than one source, or more than one archive, as you gather information.
 - Library Special Collections often contains materials from individuals, families, and organizations deemed to have significant historical value. Usually special collections repository will be a department within a library.

Understanding digital records

When we refer to digital records, we mean records can view on a computer screen, tablet or mobile phone app. Digital records exist either because a digital version has been made from 1) a “paper record” or 2) they were ‘born-digital’.

Many “paper records” have digital versions, such as Naval service records or wills. These paper documents were scanned and the images made available on a digital collection website.

“Born-digital” records are records that were created originally in a digital format. They are mainly text-based documents such as word-processed documents, spreadsheets, presentation slides and emails, including videos, 3D models and photographs.

Understanding your search results

Usually returns of search results come in lists, ranked according to the number of times your search words appear in a document description and contents. In search engine results jargon this is known as ‘relevance’ though your idea of what is relevant may be very different to the results you receive.

1. Results usually can be re-sorted by date, reference or title rather than by relevance, depending on how your results are presented.
2. Many search result displays the following information: (depending on the site)
 - the title and a short description of the record
 - where the document is held

- the date range of the record
 - a unique catalogue reference – the format of the reference will be different for different archives and institutions, and is usually the key to requesting and viewing records and other finding related records
3. There are different ways to view records depending on which archive they are held by. If the record is held at the website archive site:
 - you can see it (and sometimes make your own copy) if it is online.
 - you can order a copy of it if you are offsite or record is restricted.
 4. If the record is held at another archive other than archive site researching in, there will usually be a “Held-by” link or contact details on how to access the record. If the relevant archive has its own website, the “Held-by” link will take you to the holding website for additional information including how to access their records.

Information displayed in the ‘Record creators’ search results tab

The search results will display the name of the institution or person that originally created the record. and a link to the archive holding the record.

Each result indicates:

- whether the original creator of the record was an organization, business, person, or family
- the number of collections created by that creator and where they are now held
- the covering dates of the collections or lifetime dates of an individual set of records

Too many results

A search might get too many results if:

- your search was too broad – such as searching just for ‘Churchill’
- your keyword could appear in different sorts of documents for different reasons – such as if it is a surname and a place name

Use filters to narrow down (or ‘refine’) your results. There are a number of filters you can use. If you have less than 1,000 results you can usually ‘export results’ into a spreadsheet. This may be a simpler way of viewing lots of records.

Few or no results

There could be a number of reasons why a search doesn’t return the results you expected:

- the keyword you have used doesn’t appear in the record description
- the record you want might not be described or have much detail so that a keyword search doesn’t find it
- the spelling used in the record description could be different to the one you are searching with. Check the spelling

Suggestions for improving your results:

- check your spelling and try variations or wildcards
- try different keywords or work off other keywords
- use fewer terms – start with a broad search and increase, decrease, or change words used

Downloading a record

If your record is held at the Archives and available to view online you can usually download it.

- Many larger digital records are delivered as compressed zip files which may contain multiple pdfs. Although zip is a well-established format be aware that a small number of operating systems do not come with unzipping software or applications. (For example, the iOS mobile operating system from Apple.) If your device does not have unzipping software/applications you will need to obtain this app to unzip the download otherin order to view the digital records.

Citing online catalogue web pages

Citation of online catalogue webpages should include the following elements:

1. The name of the website, and section of the website, separated from with a colon.
2. The catalogue reference (separated from the previous element by a colon):
3. The title or brief description. A comma should be placed at the end of this element.
4. The url where found <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/Details?uri=C258>
5. The precise date when the information was accessed and taken from the website. (accessed 24 July 2013)

Resources:

Society of American Archivists <http://www2.archivists.org/usingarchives>

A Guide to Effective Research download Guide - FREE

http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/UsingArchives_Final.pdf

DPLA for Genealogy and Family History, "Select Collections For Genealogists in DPLA"

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BzpQeSFqkiZKaUZpeENXOHd5bVU>

The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, UK

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/discovery-help>

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