

Proving Our Worth: Genealogy Resources in Depository Libraries

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Why use government publications for genealogical research?

Usually the term “government documents” refers to those that are **published**. With the explosion of electronic publishing, the preferred term now is “government publications.” The U. S. Government Printing Office (GPO) is the world's largest publisher—everything from *Aarugha!* to *Zimbabwe*.

- All genealogists already use “government documents”—after all, that's what all of those county records, census records, etc., are.
- Some documents will contain actual data.
- Histories and chronologies will help you “flesh out” an ancestor's life or time period or help you analyze the clues you have.
- Maps can help you locate where an ancestor lived as well as give you clues about the area or a migration route.
- Many researchers are already familiar with the *American State Papers* and the *U.S. Serial Set*, two of the largest collections of government documents that are potentially useful to genealogists.
- When the title or subject doesn't say “genealogy”—look for bibliographies, indexes, maps, chronologies, biographical directories, histories, etc. Be creative!

Tools for Finding U. S. Government Publications

Catalog of U.S. Government Publications at <<http://catalog.gpo.gov/F>>.
1994– .

Also available in print as *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Print Office, Superintendent of Documents, 1895–2004 .

Available in CD-ROM from 1976–2000. GP 3.8:

The basic index to both depository and non-depository documents from all agencies

U.S. Government Bookstore at <<http://bookstore.gpo.gov/>>.

Index to all publications currently *for sale* by the GPO.

Browse Topics at <<http://www.browsetopics.gov/>>.

A pathway to any publicly accessible government information. Arranged by subjects and also searchable. Maintained by volunteer librarians.

National Archives and Records Administration

Archival Research Catalog (ARC) at <<http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/>>.

Access to Archival Databases (AAD) at <<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/>>.

Congressional Information Service, Inc. *CIS/Index*. Monthly. Bethesda, Md.: Congressional Information Service, Inc., 1970– . Available electronically as *ProQuest Congressional*.

Comprehensive index to all U.S. Congressional publications.

American Statistics Index. Monthly. Bethesda, Md.: Congressional Information Service, Inc.,

1973– . Available electronically as *ProQuest Statistical Insight*.

Comprehensive index to all U.S. government publications that are statistical in nature.

A Sampling of Government Publications for Genealogical Research

Documents mentioned in the presentation:

- Brown, Sharon A. *Slateford Farm, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Pennsylvania*. [Denver, Colo.]: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1985.
- Coleman, Roger E. *The Arkansas Post Story: Arkansas Post National Monument*. Southwest Cultural Resources Center professional papers, no. 12. Santa Fe, N.M.: Division of History, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, Southwest Region, National Park Service, Dept. of the Interior, 1987.
- Cunningham, Alfred A. *Marine Flyer in France: The Diary of Captain Alfred A. Cunningham, November 1917-January 1918*. Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1974.
- Edwards, Everett E. "American Agriculture—The First 300 Years." In *Yearbook of Agriculture 1940: Farmers in a Changing World*, pp. 171–276. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940. Available at <http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/IND43893716/PDF>
- Forstall, Richard L. *Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790 to 1990: From the Twenty-One Decennial Censuses*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population Division, 1996.
- French, Francis O., and John J. McDonough. *Growing Up on Capitol Hill: A Young Washingtonian's Journal, 1850–1852*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1997.
- Geological Survey (U.S.). *State of Tennessee, Base Map with Highways and Contours*. Reston, Va.: The Survey, 1977.
- Geological Survey (U.S.). *United States of America, Showing the Extent of Public Land Surveys, Remaining Public Land, Historical Boundaries, National Forests, Indian Reservations, Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, and Monuments*. Reston, Va.: The Survey, 1965.
- Guide to Tracing Your American Indian Ancestry*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Office of Public Affairs, Indian Affairs, 2011. Available at <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo26239>
- Lyman, Sarah Joiner, Max Wyss, Robert Y. Koyanagi, and Doak Carey Cox. *The Lyman Hawaiian Earthquake Diary, 1833–1917*. U.S. Geological Survey bulletin, 2027. Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1992.
- United States. Social Security Administration. *America's Centenarians. Reports of Interviews with Social Security Beneficiaries Who Have Lived to 100*. [Washington]: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1963–.
- United States. *Tennessee River Navigation Charts: Paducah, Kentucky to Knoxville, Tennessee*. [Nashville, Tenn.]: US Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, 2003.

Other government publications of interest:

- Geological Survey (U.S.). *Maps Can Help You Trace Your Family Tree: How to Use Maps in Genealogy*. Reston, Va.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, 1991. [now updated online]
- Hawkins, Kenneth, comp. *Research in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office: Record Group 49*. General information leaflet no. 67. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2007.
- Heitman, Francis B. *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army: from Its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*. Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1903.
- Lawson, Sandra M. *Generations Past: A Selected List of Sources for Afro-American Genealogical Research*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1988.
- National Endowment for the Humanities. *My History Is America's History: 15 Things You Can Do to Save America's Stories*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1999.
- Paul, Karen Dawley. *Guide to Research Collections of Former United States Senators, 1789-1995: A Listing of Archival Repositories Housing the Papers of Former Senators, Related Collections, and Oral History Interviews*. Washington: Supt. of Docs., G.P.O., 1995.
- United States. Library of Congress. *Genealogical Research at the Library of Congress*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001.
- United States. National Archives and Records Administration. *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2000.
- United States, Robert B. Matchette, and Jan Shelton Danis. *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1995. Web version available at <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/>

Selected Government or Government-Sponsored Web Sites

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present

url: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>

Brief biographical sketches of all members of Congress. You never know—you may be related to somebody famous!

Bureau of Land Management - Eastern States, General Land Office Records Automation

url: <http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>

Use this site to search the federal land patent databases. Search by name, county, legal description of land, and other information.

Library of Congress American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library

url: <http://memory.loc.gov/>

Explore manuscripts, maps, photographs, and other collections.

National Park Service: Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System

url: <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>

Find very basic facts about servicemen who served on both sides during the Civil War. Other information includes histories of the regiments, links to descriptions of 384 significant battles of the war, and other historical information.

USGS Geographic Names Information System

url: <http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic>

Locate your ancestor's land, nearest town, or cemetery with this great resource. Find geographic features using a surname of interest.

Some Non-Government Web Sites Providing Access to Government Information

Ellis Island American Family Immigration History Center

url: <http://www.ellislandrecords.org/>

Search the ship manifests for the port of New York for the years 1892 to 1924. View the original manifests or transcripts; see photographs of the ships. Registration is required but is free.

Google Patent Search

url: <http://www.google.com/patents?hl=en>

Easier to use than the official site. **All** dates are keyword searchable. Links to images.

Official Records of the War of the Rebellion

url: <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/browse.monographs/waro.html>

Cornell University's Making of America series includes full page images from *The War of the Rebellion*. The pages are also searchable.

Social Security Death Index

url: <http://www.familysearch.org>

Available online from a variety of commercial services and free at FamilySearch. The SSDI contains a listing of everyone who had a Social Security number, is deceased, and whose death was reported to the Social Security Administration.

United States Historical Census Data Browser

url: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>

Statistical data for US for each state and county from 1790 to 1960. Create a comparison table. Map the results.

Sources and Suggestions for Further Reading

Comfort, Jan. "Finding Grandpa's Patent: Using Patent Information for Historical or Genealogical Research." *Science & Technology Libraries* 22 (2001): 39-56.

Describes strategies for helping patrons in historical patent research.

Croom, Emily Anne. "Asking Uncle Sam." *Family Tree Magazine* 1 (December 2000): 48-52.

Nice overview of using federal records, particularly census, federal land, and military records. Includes a plug for using depository libraries.

Croom, Emily Anne. *The Genealogist's Companion & Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 2003. [see Chapter 7: "Special Collections: Maps," pp. 246-262; and Chapter 8: "Libraries: U.S. Government Publications," pp. 291-294]

Discusses government maps and documents as genealogical resources, giving specific examples illustrating their use.

Fales, Susan L. and Monahan, Michael A. "Missing Links: Family History and the Documents Collection." *Government Publications Review* 14 (1987): 495-512.

Provides a selective overview of the types of government publications useful for family history research. Discusses the Serial Set, military records, biographical directories, WPA records, and other sources.

"Genealogy in Cornette Library Government Documents." Cornette Library, West Texas A & M University. Last updated September 25, 2011.

<http://www.wtamu.edu/library/govt/genealogy.shtml>.

Helpful overview of both print and electronic documents from various government agencies.

Meyerink, Kory L., ed. *Printed Sources: A Guide to Published Genealogical Records*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1998. [see Chapter 15: "Documentary Collections," pp. 545-571]

Discusses all types of documentary records, including federal, regional, and state. Valuable bibliography.

Sears, Jean L. and Moody, Marilyn K. *Using Government Information Sources: Electronic and Print*. 3rd ed. Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Press, 2001. [see Chapter 3: "The Basics of Searching," pp. 10-22; Chapter 17: "Genealogy," pp. 111-127; Chapter 52: "Historical Searches," pp. 482-501; and Chapter 53: "National Archives," pp. 502-509]

The best source for finding out how to find government information. Organized by topic or type of record, it discusses the key documents, shows example pages from them, and gives references to finding aids.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis. "Unlikely Sources: Government Documents: No Genealogy Here?" *Ancestry* 12 (January/February 1994): 24-25.

Although perpetuating the negative image of librarians, this article is useful as a brief introduction to using government documents for genealogical research. Discusses the Serial Set, War of the Rebellion records, and other specific documents. An inset by Curt B. Witcher presents the arrangement of a documents collection.

Williams, Sandra Q. "Government Documents Go to School." *Teacher Librarian* 32 (June 2005): 8-13.

Gives practical examples of using government information in the classroom. Shows the range of materials available. Includes a discussion of the Library of Congress American Memory site.

Witcher, Curt B. "Delving into Federal Government Publications." *Ancestry* 16 (September/October 1998): 53-57.

Excellent overview of how and why to use government documents.

