

Finding Your Way: Locating and Using Maps in Your Research

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Overview

- Focuses on the collections of the Midwest Genealogy Center and the Family History Library to demonstrate how to locate maps in a library collection.
- Discussion also covers different types of maps, their value in your research, and other collections to search both online and in person.

Map collections and atlases

- All principles of search, access, and use apply essentially the same for both loose maps and atlases. In many cases, only the method of storage is different.
- Loose maps may be included in the library catalog, although they will be shelved differently, usually in flat, map cases. This is true of both Midwest Genealogy Center and the Family History Library.
- Atlases are generally listed in the catalog along with the rest of the books in most libraries, and shelved separately in an 'oversize' or 'quarto' section of the stacks. Watch for designation of shelving location.

Some types of maps

- Road maps
- Land plats
- Topographical maps
- Fire insurance maps
- Pictorials
- Battle maps
- Historical maps
- And more . . .

How maps can help

- With maps, you can focus your search
- See proximity of relevant features

- Identify things to seek
- Gain information about ancestors' property, and pinpoint location
- Gather names of neighbors to include in search plan
- Find features which may have bearing
- Identify location of 'lost' place names

How maps can help

- Maps help researcher understand physical relationships of locations, features, etc.
- Researcher can gain even more by using maps in combination with other sources, such as land records, census schedules, or tax lists.
- Comparing several maps of the same locality, either different dates or different types, may yield additional information.
- Use maps of the time period as your research problem for best results
- Early maps can be useful to identify places which have disappeared or changed name.
- Fill gaps in family stories which lacked certain details

Understanding and using maps

Some examples and benefits, by type of map

Road maps

Show distances, routes from where family lived to towns, and other useful features. Familiar to most of us in the form of highway maps we use in travel.

- Atlases are readily available to show current highway maps for a state. One specific to a single state will have maps at a scale which is much more detailed.
- These are a good tool to use in combination with older maps of same locality, to identify locations in terms of present-day roads.

Land plats

Display location, acreage, ownership, perhaps layout of ancestor's land. Some may show other nearby features such as cemeteries, schools, churches, features, bridges, ferries.

- Details can include schools, cemeteries, churches, and other local features, as well as names of landowners, locations of houses.
- Earlier land plats and survey maps can be quite helpful in detail provided. One example used in this presentation shows how tracts of land were acquired, through grants and inheritance, in the latter half of the 18th century in Virginia.
- Survey maps such as this may reveal valuable details.
- **Ancestry** includes a major collection, with almost seven million names indexed, and **Historic Map Works** has an excellent collection of this type, with color digital images.

Topographical maps

Depict terrain, showing potential for farming, timbering, and other activities. Also show roads, bridges, ferries, and other transportation routes. Cemeteries and sometimes other features such as schools and churches may be shown, and are often named.

- Atlases are available showing topographical maps for a state. DeLorme is a major publisher, and many libraries have some. Midwest Genealogy Center and some other, major libraries have the entire series. These are handy for use with land descriptions which name watercourses.

Fire insurance maps

Detailed layout of an urban area, with each structure drawn to scale. Type of construction and purpose are shown. Water hydrants, electrical lines, gas lines, similar features are depicted. Created for insurers as a tool to assess fire risks. These begin in 1867 and are available for about 12,000 cities. Digital Sanborn Maps, a fee-based database available through many libraries, is the largest online resource. It displays in black and white. Color versions can be found in some of the free databases, but the available cities and dates are much more limited.

Informational & Pictorial maps

Present various types of information in the form of a map.

- Bird's eye views are a good example. Especially popular in latter half of the 19th century; visually / artistically depict structures, tree cover, streets, etc. from above at a fixed perspective. If you know location or address of a residence or business, you can probably pick out the structure on one of these maps, and see details such as the number of windows and chimneys, orientation of the buildings, and more.
- Examples showed distribution of clans or areas of influence of certain family groups, in Ireland and Scotland, and home counties of Pilgrims who came to Massachusetts on the *Mayflower*. Map format is good way to display some types of data.
- Most informational/pictorial maps suffer one major shortcoming: not drawn to scale.

Battle maps Arrangement of troops, terrain and local features, etc., and direction of action and events. Good examples can be found online at Library of Congress website, in Footnote.com, and various atlases including the one which accompanies *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War* (originally published 1891 by Government Printing Office, reprinted 1978 by The Arno Press). For Revolutionary War, some atlases are in print and Footnote.com includes some maps.

Additional value . . .

- Maps can be helpful to illustrate shifting boundaries of states and territories. This can be especially valuable if your research deals with families on the frontier.
- Even better, they can help in understanding county lines for specific dates.
- A number of historical boundary atlases have been published, and other historical atlases on a state basis. These are easy to locate in library catalogs.

- A good example is *Atlas of County Boundary Changes in Virginia, 1634–1895*, by Michael F. Doran; Athens, GA: Iberian Publishing Co., 1987.

Another Value

Some maps are created especially for genealogists, and can be quite helpful in the research process.

- The Census Maps are of inestimable value to researchers. *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790–1920*, by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987).
- The *Family Maps* . . . series of books is an outstanding and growing resource. Published by Arphax Publishing Company and authored by Gregory A. Boyd, these provide clear, easily understood maps of the first land entries on a county-by-county basis, with other features and excellent indexing.
- Also quite helpful are atlases by Carrie Eldridge, such as *An Atlas of Appalachian Trails to the Ohio River* and *An Atlas of Southern Trails to the Mississippi* (both privately published by the author, 1998 and 1999, respectively).
- Find these and others with catalog searches at your library, the Family History Library, or in **WorldCat**.
- Note that atlases and maps seldom circulate on interlibrary loan, so you may have to travel to the nearest library owning a copy, or send specific request, or hire a researcher there.
- Many maps can be found online, and often contain information of use for genealogical researchers. For example, one is an interactive map showing foreign-born population in the United States, county by county, from 1880 to 2000. It is depicted by decade, based on census data. The site address is:
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/03/10/us/20090310-immigration-explorer.html?hp

How to locate and access — In the library

- Library catalogs will usually identify atlases within the book collection. Note that these may be shelved in a separate area.
- Many libraries have also catalogued their loose map collections.
- Some may have them in a hand-list, instead, especially if the collection is small. Ask library staff.
- May be able to limit catalog search to ‘Maps’ as an item type (note that this generally will not include atlases). Use Advanced Search option to see if you can do this.
- For atlases, in advanced search option, enter a locality as Subject and “atlas” in Keyword” field.

How to locate and access — Online

Note that URL address for each specific site given is listed at the end of this handout.

- Check both fee-based and free websites

- **Ancestry.com & Ancestry Library Edition** have large collection. Several large databases are especially enticing, such as the “U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918,” which indexes nearly seven million names.
- **Footnote.com** has others, as they occur in archival collections; check especially for Civil War and Revolutionary War items.
- Several fee-based and free databases are devoted specifically to maps. See web addresses at end of this handout.

Selected examples of fee-based map sites

- **Historic Map Works** Appears to be by far the largest, fee-based online collection, with over 800,000 maps online, fully searchable. International in scope, with multiple types . . . especially good for land plat maps and historic maps, with some bird’s eye views and other types. Note that results are sorted into three categories, by tabs at top left: Atlases, Maps, and Directories. A free, searchable version is also available, with option to purchase high-quality prints of maps found.
- **Digital Sanborn Maps**, significant collection of fire insurance maps, beginning with 1867; wide coverage. Can zoom to examine detail. Note that this site, the largest online collection of this type of map, offers them in black and white. Some full-color versions can be found through the David Rumsey Collection (see below), Missouri Digital Heritage (for some Missouri examples), and perhaps other state sites.
- Other subscription map databases may be available through your local library.

Free webs sites for maps are out there; a few examples

Note that while these sites may offer to sell quality reproductions of maps, the sites themselves mostly offer free searches, viewing, and downloads.

- University of Texas-Perry Castañeda Library Map Collection; one of the best known, offers its own collection and extensive links to others
- Library of Congress American Memory Collection; has many types of maps, selected from its extensive collection
- David Rumsey Map Collection; excellent digitized collection of a variety of 18th and 19th century maps
- Norman B. Leventhal Map Center (Boston Public Library), worldwide collection with emphasis on New England
- United States Digital Map Library, a USGenWeb Archives Project; includes Indian land cessions collection

More map help, on a free site:

- **U.S.G.S. Geographic Names Information Service (GNIS)** can serve as index to identify location of features found on U.S.G.S. maps; Omni Gazetteer volumes do the same.
- For additional resources of this type, check the “Maps, Gazetteers...” category in **Cyndi’s List**.

To find more, both fee-based and free

- Download and explore “Favorites” from **Family Search** (instructions for download are on site); includes many map site links
- Consult **Cyndi’s List**; Map category contains over 700 links. Beyond just sites with actual maps, there are also links for such things as How To, Publications and Software, and Interactive Online Map Creation.
- Check the annual website issue of *Internet Genealogy* magazine, and others
- Look for links on related, locality sites, such as **USGenWeb** site for the county or state you are searching, historical/ genealogical society sites for the county or state, and libraries in your search area
- Use various online search engines, with searches structured to locate map(s) for the time and place

Summary

- In my research, I have enjoyed finding and using maps. Having a depiction of an area and its features increases understanding of the local setting, and sometimes suggests other records to seek, or can provide understanding of how or why the family did certain things.

Learn more about it

- Books — Search individual library catalogs, **WorldCat**, FHL catalog
- Articles (search in PerSI, the Periodical Source Index in **Heritage Quest**) — Use record type, “maps,” with a locality selected in the Place search section, or in ‘How To’ section, and add keyword(s) as desired
- Online tutorials — **Cyndi’s List** has lists of tutorials, and other articles can be located through FamilySearch Wiki and the Learning/How To section of **FamilySearch**.

URL addresses for websites cited in presentation

Note that web addresses change, so if one does not work try a search for the title or a descriptive phrase to locate the current URL.

General

FamilySearch

<http://www.familysearch.org/eng/default.asp> *for standard (old) site*

<https://www.familysearch.org/> *for new site*

The major website sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), this includes extensive, searchable databases, including the Family History Library Catalog. From the home page, through links entitled “Research Helps” (old site) or “Browse Articles” (new site), researchers can access the FamilySearch Wiki, an encyclopedic resource with helpful information on many genealogical topics.

Cyndi's List

<http://www.cyndislist.com/maps.htm>

This must-use resource is a categorized gateway site which currently offers over 291,000 links of use for genealogical researchers. As of this writing, 727 of those are in the Maps, Gazetteers and Geographical Information section. Most are to sites which offer digitized maps, from all over the world, but there are others, also. Ethnic Group maps, Google Earth, How To, Interactive Online Map Creation, Software, and Surname Maps are some of the other sub-topics for links in the Maps, Gazetteers and Geographical information category.

Midwest Genealogy Center

www.midwestgenealogycenter.org or www.mymcpl.org, then select "Genealogy"
Includes links to catalog, Topical Guides (including Pathfinders), and full-text, past issues of Newsletter with helpful, short articles.

Map Sites

Two Library Map Databases, with limited, home access available

To access these sites, check with library to see if the sites are included in their database subscriptions. Both are ProQuest databases.

- Historic Map Works (currently offers over 1.5 million images including 616,000 maps, half of which are geo-coded) You can search for free, and view maps, but to zoom in or print, you must have a paid subscription or access the site through a library with a subscription. <http://www.historicmapworks.com/>
- Digital Sanborn Maps (over 660,000 maps, 1867–1970, for over 12,000 cities) This link will tell the coverage that is available for a particular state:
<http://www.proquest.com/en-US/promos/sanbornmaps.shtml>

Library of Congress American Memory Collection

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

Map collections, 11 in all, range from one which begins with 1500 to one specific to World War II Military Situation Maps for 1944 and 1945. Excellent search tools within the collections, but the navigation features once a map is selected leave a bit to be desired. Many types of maps are to be found here.

Allan M. Voorhees Collection: See Virginia Memory Collection.

David Rumsey Map Collection

<http://www.davidrumsey.com/index.html>

Rare 18th and 19th century maps and atlases of North and South America are the focus of the collection, which contains materials for other parts of the world, as well, with over 24,000 maps and images online. The site, which is on Twitter and Facebook, also features a blog and videos, as well as links to other sites.

University of Texas-Perry Castañeda Library Map Collection

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/>

One of the best known, this site offers digitized images of many maps from the noted collection, as well as links to many other sites. One link under Historical Map Web Sites is to another site featuring a collection of more than 22,000 map-related links.

The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at Boston Public Library

<http://maps.bpl.org/>

A worldwide collection with emphasis on New England and the Boston area; well-organized site with good quality images. The collection consists of over 200,000 maps and over 5,000 atlases. A selection of several thousand items from this impressive collection is online at the site.

Missouri Digital Heritage

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/mdh/collections.asp>

Maps is just one collection area within this site, and includes extensive digitized atlases and maps of varying time periods. Some are statewide, others are local in scope and quite detailed. One special collection, Tri-State Mining Maps, offers over 5,000 maps related to lead and zinc mining in southwestern Missouri, southeastern Kansas, and northeastern Oklahoma. A collection of county atlases offers 1930 atlases for all except three counties in the state.

Virginia Memory Collection

http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/collections_by_topic

Includes several significant collections, including the Allan M. Voorhees Collection; the Civil War Map Project; and the Fry-Jefferson Maps, Surveys and Derivatives. Focuses on Virginia, but some early maps include other states or even most/all of the colonies.

Hargrett Library Rare Map Collection

<http://www.libs.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/colamer.html>

Focus is the southeastern U.S., from Colonial era through late 19th century.

United States Digital Map Library, a USGenWeb Archives Project

<http://usgwarchives.net/maps/>

The stated purpose is “to make available to genealogists, useful, readable, high quality

Indian land cessions

<http://usgwarchives.net/maps/cessions/>

A special collection of maps within the United States Digital Map Library, keyed by number to treaties. Includes link to the Kappler Project, with digitized text of 366 of the 375 recognized Indian treaties.

Other

USGS Geographic Names Information Service (GNIS)

<http://geonames.usgs.gov/>

Index to over 2,162,000 features, providing name and feature type, county and state, latitude and longitude, and the name of the U.S.G.S. map on which it appears.

New York Times Interactive Map of Immigrant Populations

www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/03/10/us/20090310-immigration-explorer.html?hp

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