

# How to Find More at a Genealogy Library

Gary R. Toms

Midwest Genealogy Center, Independence, Missouri [www.midwestgenealogycenter.org](http://www.midwestgenealogycenter.org)

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## Introduction

The best results are achieved by those in the know . . . learn techniques for planning and preparation for a library visit, and what to ask for and look for when you go to a library you haven't visited before, or back to the same one for the umpteenth time.

## Background of this talk

- Working in the Midwest Genealogy Center and assisting patrons, I see many researchers who miss materials which might contain the very information they seek.
- Most libraries have more resources than you might think.
- You have to put forth a little extra effort to learn what those are, and where they are located, and how to use them.
- Let's learn what some of those might be, how to find them, and see an example of how knowing that can help you.

## Plan ahead

- Most libraries now have websites with helpful information pages, including links to online, searchable catalogs, schedules of open hours, parking information, etc.
- Use this information to prepare for a trip.
- Conduct some preliminary catalog searches from home before you go, to make better use of time when you are at the library

## At the library: Getting Started

- Take a tour if available . . . ask questions . . .
- Many libraries offer brochures, floor plans, bibliographies, and other helpful handouts to help you locate and use their collections.
- At some libraries, you can get a brief orientation tour if you ask.

## The lay of the land

- Knowing the arrangement of a library and the particulars of its collection opens up all of what it has to offer.
- Watch for maps in the handouts, ask for a brief orientation tour, or if none is available, ask if a staff member can point out where certain key things are located..

## Don't be afraid to ask . . .

- Any librarian will be happy to answer questions.
- Librarians are always willing to help, to make sure you get the most out of your visit.

## What is available?

- Most libraries have much more to help you with your research than you might think.
- We have six major groups or categories of resources at the Midwest Genealogy Center, as I will explain shortly.

### **How do you find the resources?**

- Use finding aids, both in-house and general . . . bibliographies, collection guides, etc. These open up the full extent of the library's collections to you.
- Check all collections or types of resources which may have bearing on problem.
- These two points are the pivotal lessons of this presentation, which will be demonstrated through a case study.

## **FINDING AIDS**

### **What are finding aids?**

- Briefly stated, they are tools which identify or guide you to resources, or assist you in understanding and making better use of those resources.
- In her article, "Building a Dream Library," noted genealogical columnist and author, Myra Vanderpool Gormley, stated, "*The Dream Library cannot have too many Finding Aids, Directories, References and Dictionaries.*"
- I agree with this philosophy, and believe you will, too, once you become familiar with what those can do for your research.

### **Finding Aids**

- Finding aids can take many forms, both in print and online
- Be alert to these, and seek them out
- Ask staff to direct you to those which may help with your current research problem

## **Finding Aid examples: In Print Form, Three Examples**

### **Bibliographies**

- Generally found in 016 call number area if library uses Dewey Decimal system
- Listings of books or other published or manuscript resources, often with descriptions and sometimes location information
- These can help you identify items to look at which you might not otherwise consider
- Do subject search in catalog for Bibliography.
- If too many hits, or you are working on a particular subject, try that search further limited by a keyword relating to your subject.
- Ask library staff for help in locating those which may apply to your search.

### **Shelf lists**

- Many libraries have these, to assist in locating items which may or may not be in the catalog
- The Midwest Genealogy Center and some other libraries, do not catalog their microfilm and microfiche holdings, and instead provide published lists of their holdings in these formats. Some libraries place lists of their film and fiche holdings online. Watch for these.
- The Family History Library, and others, have some special prepared lists for certain subjects or collections of materials. A good example is the listings of military record source materials at the Family History Library.
- Some libraries, including Midwest Genealogy Center and the Family History Library, offer a printed list of Dewey Decimal numbers to assist in browsing the collection.

- Remember this is a BROWSE tool, just designed to provide quick access to some of the collection.
- It is not a shelf list, or a list of holdings in any form. Use it as a timesaver for quick access, but ALWAYS conduct catalog search to be sure you see everything you need.

### **Indices, both card files and in book format**

- Many libraries used to have card file indices for various collections
- Sometimes had locally prepared index to a local history which was published without an index
- For older books without an index, check for a separate index, usually shelved near the volume, or a reprint edition with added index, or an online indexed version.

### **Finding the Finding Aids: Where do you find those?**

- Remember the tour, or floor plans? That provided a good opportunity to learn where the finding aids are kept.
- At Midwest Genealogy Center, a rack on the first floor near the elevators and classroom has the Topical Guides to the microfilm and microfiche holdings.
- The same rack also has Pathfinders handouts. These are helpful fliers which provide guidance and suggestions for certain research challenges. The Family History Library and many other libraries provide Pathfinders handouts, also
- One large collection of finding aids, useful on a broad scale for the entire collection, is located on the second floor near Reference Desk No. 4, under a hanging sign, "Ready Reference." These are items relating to certain subjects, to help you make solve problems or make better use of a particular type of materials in the collection.
- Most Finding Aids which provide detailed information about a particular collection or type of record at Midwest Genealogy Center are kept near the items to which they pertain.
  - Directory listings on top of the directory shelves
  - Census helps on top of the shelves with the census index collection
  - Items for specific microfiche collection on top of the microfiche cabinets.
  - Most guides and helps for the materials on microfilm are on the shelves closest to the film room

### **Finding Aid examples – Print Format: Categories discussed**

- Bibliographies (016 Dewey Decimal call no. area, or ask librarian for help to locate)
- Shelf lists (directory lists, topical guides)
- Indices, both in the form of card files and in book format (*Examiner* newspaper obituary index as example at MGC in card file, many book indices in collection)

### **Finding Aid examples – Online**

- Cyndi's List is a major resource, this provides almost 300,000 links to sites useful for genealogical research, so it is a gateway to much which can help
- Other similar lists and gateway sites, such as Yahoo's guide, the Family Tree Maker Family Finder, and Genealogy Gateway... (web addresses given at end of handout)
- Favorites list from FamilySearch.org; useful to download, instructions are provided on the site for how to do this
- U.S. GenWeb: a site all should know and use

- USGS place names server, and similar sites
- Help section of your favorite website; don't overlook this, read the tips and tutorials to maximize your success on each site. Ancestry.com, for example, has a major reference and help center. How many use it?

### **More examples of reference tools and finding aids online**

- Finding where books are located which can provide information you need may be a challenge.
- Ancestry offers a tool for that, a searchable database called "All Genealogical Library Master Catalog." This identifies books and tells libraries which have copies.
- WorldCat, the largest single searchable resource of its type, accesses thousands of library catalogs in a single search.
- Family History Library catalog: This should be searched separately, as it contains many unique items not in WorldCat.

### **Finding Aids Online, Branching Out**

- Many libraries and societies have finding aids and reference tools on their web sites.
- Check sites relating to the locality or special focus of your current research problem.
- In some of your searches you may find items of a more general nature, not specific or limited to holdings that library or society. Examples include a guide to questions in the New York State Census, on the website of a Michigan genealogical society, and A list of Dewey Decimal numbers and a Dewey Decimal map of the U.S., both on the website of the San Mateo County (CA) Genealogical Society.
- Some local finding aids online include indexing of certain items, allowing you to search to see if you need to access a particular book or collection.

### **Finding Aids - Summary**

- Finding aids are especially prevalent in archives, where separate guides may exist for many of the manuscript collections.
- In libraries, finding aids are usually broader in scope, and are prepared with a focus on portions of the collection or special topics.
- The amount of time we've spent on this underscores its importance.

### **A plan for your visit to the library**

- Utilizing the catalog, bibliographies, and finding aids, thoroughly search the book collection.
- You can use online resources before, after, or alternated with book searches.
- Perhaps you already conducted some catalog searches ahead of your visit, to identify items you want to check.
- Remember to look for indices which may be separate from the books, or even online.
- Use all resources library offers to make best and most complete use of the books.

### **At the library**

- After completing your search of books at a library, consider other resources there.
- Did you discover things of interest during an orientation tour, or discussion with a library staff member?

### **Resources at the Midwest Genealogy Center (MGC)**

As an example to show how much can be overlooked, let's look at the Remember the six types/groups of resources at MGC which I mentioned earlier. What are those?

- Reference book collection, 153,000+, including 16,000 circulating volumes
- Multiple online databases
- Microfilm, 77,000+ rolls, and microfiche, approx. 399,000 fiche
- Map collection, over 6,400 maps and steadily growing
- Periodicals: 2,200 titles; 475 subscriptions adding new issues almost daily
- Plus vertical files, archives and items in other media

The Big Question: How many researchers progress beyond just rudimentary use of the first two categories?

### **If you cannot find it in books...**

Ask yourself, Have you . . .

- used the catalog to see all relevant materials?
- consulted maps and gazetteers to pinpoint locality?
- studied finding aids for guidance?
- talked with a librarian for suggestions?
- checked the periodicals collection?
- sought original materials on microfilm / microfiche?
- considered other materials in the collection?

If you are only using books and databases...

- You may be missing valuable information found only in some of the other resources in the collection.
- You are bypassing the richness of what the library has to offer.

### **Case Study**

Let's explore what can be found at the Midwest Genealogy Center as a way of exploring how to use a library collection to its fullest. We will do this quickly, so may not tap into everything relevant for this research problem, but will focus on seeing how many of the collections are helpful, and how to access those.

Our objective is to learn as much as we can about the later life of Sarah Owsley, wife of William Owsley of Johnson County, Missouri. In particular, we want to learn

- where she lived,
- when she died, and
- where she is buried.

### **Finding Sarah Owsley First steps, finding her in census, establishing death date**

- Starting with just the facts stated on the previous slide, we conducted searches of census in online databases at the library.
- Found Sarah/Sallie Owsley/Owsley in the 1860 and 1870 census listed with husband, William, a retired farmer, in Rose Hill township of Johnson County.
- The 1880 census lists her as Sallie Owsley, widowed. She is not listed in 1900, when she would be nearly 100 years old.

- A search of other sections of AncestryLE yields a death record, and another version is found at Missouri Digital Heritage.
- Sallie died in 1884 in Rose Hill township, according to county death records.
- THREE VERSIONS of this record online, and two found in print, with some discrepancies / omissions
- Information is essentially the same, but the researcher should carefully compare and seek other corroborating evidence to resolve conflicts
- Wild card searches proved quite helpful in this process, because of spelling variations

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Second step, search the book collection**

- In the book collection, the Dewey Decimal guide gives the call number for Johnson County, Mo.
- A search of the catalog reveals 56 items, and that 18 of those are located elsewhere in the library. Only the catalog reveals this, not the Dewey Call number browse list.
- Searching selected books on the shelves, we find little about Sarah's death or burial.
- Although a multi-volume set of cemetery transcriptions was found, and a master index to the set, Sarah was not listed.

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Third step, return to online sources**

- Since no cemetery listing was found in books, we return to online sources
- A number of sites could be checked for this, but we started with largest, Find A Grave, and succeeded
- We found gravestone which looks to be whom we seek, but there is a discrepancy in some information. We need to see another reading of this cemetery.
- We've already checked books and online sources. What's left?

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Fourth step, search the Periodicals collection**

- Periodicals – MGC has a significant collection
- To access the wealth of info in this collection, we turn to an online tool, PerSI, the Periodical Source Index. This is a subject index to over 2.3 million articles in genealogical and historical periodicals. It is part of Heritage Quest.
- We searched in the Places search in PerSI for Missouri / Johnson (county) / Cemeteries (category)
- Results: 112 cemetery articles, but none for Wall Cemetery where Find A Grave shows her being buried
- While still in PerSI, searched vital records, wills, probate, deeds, land record categories, any one of which could have bearing on our objective
- Found one article to check. It yielded another version of the death record.
- To access the periodicals collection, the library offers several shelf lists and indices. We used those to pinpoint the issue and determine that MGC has it.

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Fourth step, Using other finding aids to explore further**

- Still seeking a cemetery transcription, we turn to other finding aids. Two sets of Missouri cemetery guides are found in the library, one in the Ready Reference Section, and one in the stacks in the Missouri section. Helpful information is found, different in each one.

- One identifies two Wall Cemeteries for Johnson County.
- The other lists five transcriptions for the two Wall Cemeteries.
- This demonstrates the value of checking ALL available finding aids, with Family History Library microfilm numbers.
- A search of a shelf list of microfilm holdings is next. A list of films on long-term loan from the Family History Library, determines that two rolls are here at MGC with readings of Wall Cemetery.

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Fifth step, Narrowing the list of cemetery transcriptions**

- Before following up on the cemetery citations in the films, we checked some other sources to learn more about the cemetery.
- A search of online sites turns up one clue about a Wall Cemetery, but no listing.
- We need more detail about the cemetery where Sallie is buried, to separate the two.
- A recheck of the site which provided the original listing gives a specific location.
- With that, we can search maps if necessary to see which one we should look at first.
- While still online, I checked databases for maps. Little was learned from AncestryLE, which offers a large collection of maps..
- Historic Map Works, a fee-based map database which is also available in a free version, offered great maps, but none for Johnson County for the time period.
- A catalog search provided several atlases at MGC, shelved in the oversize section, not with the Johnson County books in the regular section, so not viewed when we browsed using the number from the Dewey Decimal browse guide.
- We then turned to the one microfilm determined correct, and found a 1948 reading of the Wall Cemetery in which Sarah is buried, which gave an accurate reading of stone.

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Fifth step, final search of printed sources, using information learned thus far and other finding aids**

- Using a later compiled index to an early county history, we find one hidden tidbit which tells us a bit more about Sarah. We find her as a member of the Bear Creek Baptists, with her husband, William, and Anthony Owsley.
- An 1895 history, found elsewhere in the library by using the catalog, was unindexed and no index was available in the library.
- Search of Internet Archive disclosed a copy, but nothing was found in index searches.
- To be certain, a search was made in the FHL catalog. A digitized copy there revealed three hits for Owsley, but no match for Sarah.

#### **Finding Sarah Owsley Sixth step, Final clean-up, Using other finding aids to explore further**

- After finishing the printed sources in the fifth step, one task remains: a final search of other online resources. Several sites were checked for Johnson County material.
- Found a personal web page of an Owsley researcher with a brief sketch of William Owsley and Sarah. It reveals Anthony is their son, and that William was a Baptist preacher. With this information, we could turn to the Bibliographies to identify collections of ministerial biographies at MGC and search those.
- A search on the Johnson County site in USGenWeb disclosed that Sarah left a will. This is the only additional information found about Sarah. It gives a book and page number, and shows that it has been microfilmed.

- Checking the list of microfilm holdings at the library determines that film is not owned by MGC, and no published version was found in the library, either.
- With the information gained, however, we can search the FHL catalog and order film.
- Checked archive and vertical files collections. Found Owsley material, but not Sarah.
- The only collection not used, directories, could have been if we were trying to come forward on this line.

### **Finding Sarah Owsley: Recap**

- Set out to find more about Sarah, especially when and where she died and was buried.
- Explored almost all types of materials at MGC, and found death details, burial place.
- Gained additional information about Sarah and husband.
- Employed finding aids; some of what was found was only possible because of this.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Explore different types of material; **use finding aids to get deeper into the collections, even beyond the books** and the basic results in major, online databases.
- Seek out all record or resource types which may have bearing on your quest.
- Analyze, evaluate, question what you find. Is this the best source or version?
- Use finding aids to lead to more sources.

### **Final Summary**

- Most libraries have more resources to help than what it may appear at first glance.
- Ask library staff for help, suggestions.
- Library staff knows the collection, and can direct you to resources in the library.
- Use of finding aids, both in library and online, can disclose or lead to additional resources.
- Apply these lessons on your next visit to your library.

### **WEB ADDRESSES**

**NOTE:** Since all web addresses are subject to change, if one of these no longer works, try backing off any extensions back to the domain in order to get to the home page, then find your way to the specific page. If that does not work, try a search for the site name in a general search engine such as Google, Yahoo, or Bing.

#### **Gateway sites**

Cyndi's List [www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)

Yahoo's Guide to Genealogy Sites on the Internet

<http://www.yahoo.com/Arts/Humanities/History/Genealogy>

Genealogy Gateway to the Web <http://www.gengateway.com>

Search for Ancestors <http://www.searchforancestors.com/archives/>

Family Search Favorites Helpful to download and explore.

[https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Family\\_History\\_Library\\_Internet\\_Favorites](https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Family_History_Library_Internet_Favorites)

### **Resource Sites**

#### **General**

U.S. GenWeb [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org) See also <http://usgenweb.org/projects/index.shtml>

Page with introduction to the major projects sponsored by USGenWeb. The Archives



project and the Archives Sub-Projects (further down on the web page) are significant resources for researchers.

RootsWeb <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>

### **Maps and Place Names**

USGS place names server <http://geonames.usgs.gov/>

Historic Map Works Check your library to see if they subscribe to the full version. An online version, free except for purchase of high-quality images, if desired, is here:

<http://www.historicmapworks.com/>

### **Cemeteries and Death Records**

Find a Grave largest online cemetery search, currently at 56 million graves; watch for errors in readings, and note that some cemeteries listed may be incomplete and any additional data given may be undocumented [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)

Interment.net Another large database, but the search is not as simple or effective as on Find A Grave. [www.interment.net](http://www.interment.net)

Missouri Digital Heritage Searched for death record in case study, and also for maps.

Similar sites exist through many states' archives or state historical society or state libraries. Explore the collections. <http://www.sos.mo.gov/mdh/>

Birthdate calculator Useful with cemetery listings, from Olive Tree Genealogy

[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ote/birthcalc.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ote/birthcalc.htm)

### **Library catalog searches**

Genealogical Library Master Catalog, access via Ancestry.com, or Ancestry Library Edition at your local library

WorldCat <http://www.worldcat.org/> While it is possible to access it directly with this URL, I find that the search options when accessed through a library are better.

Family History Library catalog <https://www.familysearch.org/#form=catalog>

MGC catalog Choose "Guest Login" <http://www.mymcpl.org/catalog>

### **Online digitized books**

Internet Archive <http://www.archive.org/details/texts>

Google Books <http://books.google.com/>

Heritage Quest, accessed through your local library if possible, offers 28,000 titles

BYU Family History Archives Currently offers almost 18,000 books

<http://www.lib.byu.edu/fhc/index.php>