



# **GENEALOGISTS: Know How to Search Library Catalogs? Think Again!**

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*Experienced genealogists know no one library or archive has all the answers. They use a variety of online catalogs to find possible sources (identifying what exists that could be helpful) then use other catalogs to track down copies closer to home, available via interlibrary loan, searchable for a fee, or that they hope to search in the future.*

## **Part #1: NO ONE REPOSITORY HAS ALL THE ANSWERS**

### **A. *Top 10 Genealogy Libraries in USA***

1. Everyone's list is different
2. Some libraries focus on genealogically dense records, but just about every library has something to contribute to your research
3. No one repository has all the answers to your ancestral questions
4. Consider not just hunting for traditional types of libraries (public) but rather take an institutional approach (private, corporate, government, academic, or institutional libraries), a media approach (audio, picture/photographic, or digital libraries), a subject approach (architecture, medical, military, law libraries), or a user approach (genealogist, historian, or antiquarian libraries/archives/collections).

### **B. *Public Libraries (National, State, Regional, County, City)***

1. Non-genealogical numbering/cataloging systems typically scatter genealogical materials throughout the facility under difference classifications
2. Open stacks versus closed stacks (genealogists love to browse open stacks)

### **C. *Academic Libraries***

1. Often have specialized collections that may not be listed in their catalog(s)
2. Often have more than one library on campus which may have a separate catalog and finding aids (do a Wikipedia search on "Finding aid")

### **D. *Private Libraries***

1. Personal
2. Religious

3. Institutional
  - a. Baseball Historical Society Library
  - b. National Railway Historical Society Library

## Part #2: LIBRARY, ARCHIVE, & MANUSCRIPT LOCATORS

Experienced genealogists who use Part #1 also use library, archive, and manuscript collection locators to find more repositories to search.

### A. *Library Locators (www.zroots.com > Links)*

1. LibLinks.org
2. LibrarySpot.com
3. Public Libraries ([www.publiclibraries.com](http://www.publiclibraries.com))
4. State Libraries List ([www.publiclibraries.com/state\\_library.htm](http://www.publiclibraries.com/state_library.htm))
5. USGenWeb.org & WorldGenWeb.org
6. Epodunk.com
7. FamilySearch Research Wiki ([www.familysearch.org/wiki](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki))
8. Wikipedia.org
9. Cyndi's List > Categories > Libraries, Archives & Museums (9801)
10. RefDesk.com > Library Information Services ([www.refdesk.com/factlib.html](http://www.refdesk.com/factlib.html))
11. OpenLibrary.org project (example: *Directory of American Libraries with genealogy and local history collections* by P. William Filby)
12. Z39.50 Gateway to Library Catalogs at LOC site (lists of major libraries in U.S. and worldwide) <http://catalog.loc.gov> > (Z39.50)
13. Yelp.com searches help you find libraries near a location you specify

### B. *Archive Locators*

1. Digital State Archives ([www.digitalstatearchives.com](http://www.digitalstatearchives.com)) (36 of 50 states listed)
2. Use the Internet Archive site ([archive.org](http://archive.org)) to search or browse your way to a unique archive (example: WWII Archive with 1,705 items)
3. Archive-It project (<http://archive-it.org>)

### C. *Manuscript Collection Locators*

1. NUCMC + NIDS > ArchivesUSA & ArchivesUK > ArchiveFinder (US, UK, & Ireland) so check a library near you for old versions or a current subscription
2. ArchiveGrid > free tool owned by OCLC (parent company of WorldCat.org)
3. Europeana ([www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu))
4. Search for regional, state, and local digital projects  
(example: [www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/statememory/](http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/statememory/))  
(example: [vaheritage.org](http://vaheritage.org) )
5. Google Scholar
6. Calisphere ([www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu](http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu) )

## Part #3: “META” CATALOGS

### A. *Advantages*

1. Cover more territory in one search, find institutions previously unknown to you, and find resources in a library nearer to you
2. Standardization of catalog entries (as opposed to trying to determine if the DAR Library has a resource the FHL does NOT have)
3. Metacatalogs are a good place to search by author's name for additional works by someone who has written a resource you found helpful

### B. *Disadvantages*

1. Mega millions of catalog entries mean more mismatches
2. Can you tell if a particular library's catalog is included or not?  
Example: On the WorldCat.org home page just below the search box is a “Find a Library” link. You might think this lists the libraries included in the WorldCat meta catalog. HOWEVER this is a list of libraries that have created a profile in the WorldCat Registry but it does NOT mean their catalog is included in WorldCat.

### C. *WorldCat versus WorldCat.org*

1. WorldCat: the original (in many instances) is searchable only in-house at subscribing institutions, is searchable via the FirstSearch search engine, and has catalog entries from 77,000 libraries in 170 countries in 470 languages worldwide; whereas the WorldCat.org Project (free online version) has abbreviated entries from 10,000+ libraries worldwide (a subset of WorldCat original) totaling two billion items
2. WorldCat.org has a basic search template, an advanced search template, a link to find a participating library near you, a blog, does user-generated tags, has user generated lists, and user-added content

## Part #4: TUTORIALS (a.k.a. Read the Instructions)

The more you know about a library's (archive's) cataloging system (and the particular standards used in such a system) the more you will be able to find. Yes, this means learning about such things as the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), Machine-Readable Cataloging standards (MARC), International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), and the Daughters of the American Revolution Library's unique cataloguing system (DAR).

### A. *Tutorials*

1. Mid-Continent Public Library ([www.mcpl.lib.mo.us](http://www.mcpl.lib.mo.us)) > Genealogy > ([https://www.mymcpl.org/\\_uploaded\\_resources/MGC-dewey.pdf](https://www.mymcpl.org/_uploaded_resources/MGC-dewey.pdf))

2. YouTube video tutorials (example: “Information Literacy Series” by Dr. Bob Baker at the Pima Community College is brief but very good)
3. Most large institutions with libraries (universities, state libraries, historical societies, etc.) publish (at their Web site or via YouTube) a library research guide for their patrons and students (example: InfoKat for U. of KY Libraries)
4. “Learning to research in the library”(www.ipl.org/div/aplus/library.htm)

## **B. Guides & Training Videos**

1. UCLA Library Research Guides (<http://guides.library.ucla.edu>)
2. [www.dar.org/library/](http://www.dar.org/library/) > Search Catalog > Tips for Searching the Catalog [a must read if you are going to effectively use the DAR Library catalog] [also check under Publications & Guides for DAR Library Guides] “Online Research” from the DAR Library home page is also very useful.
3. Library of Congress = search at Google on “Library of Congress Research Guides” (without quotes)
4. Books (although most are out-of-date you will still learn important details)
  - a. Warren, Paula Stuart, and Jim Warren. *Your Guide to the Family History Library*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 2001.
  - b. Grundset, Eric, and Steven B. Rhodes. *American Genealogical Research at the DAR, Washington, D.C.* Washington, D.C.: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 1997.
  - c. Search WorldCat or Google for a book about a major research library/archive where you plan to do research
  - d. Wikipedia.org and the FamilySearch Research Wiki often link to these types of learning tools (usually toward the bottom of their articles in See Also, Notes, or References sections)

## **Part #5: CATALOG SEARCH TECHNIQUES**

Catalogs have idiosyncrasies that require different search techniques in each catalog.

**A.** Many universities have more than one library on campus which may have separate catalogs and collection finding tools. When you find something in a library catalog be certain you also determine where that collection is housed. (example: in FamilySearch catalog entries under Film Notes it may say Granite Mountain Record Vault for the storage location—thus requiring you to request the film be brought to the library which can take several days—so plan ahead).

The Library of Congress has several off-site storage locations, too.

**Exercise:**

1. Go to <http://catalog.loc.gov/>
2. In the Search box type: *zucknick duelge diem*
3. Click on *Begin Search icon (magnifying glass icon)*

4. You then see the Full Record for that item

5. Note: The Library of Congress has a closed stack system and you are directed to request this item in the Jefferson or Adams Building Reading Rooms.

6. Note: The call number *CS71 Z864 1991 FT MEADE Copy 2* indicates the second copy is stored in the LOC off-site storage facility at Ft. Meade, Maryland.

B. Search not only by location (a geographic search to find records from a specific location or geopolitical jurisdiction) and surname, but also by topic. About a third of the time genealogists search by location, a fourth of the time by surname or person's name, and only about three percent of the time by subject or topic!

C. When doing a location search do four types of catalog searches (if available):

1. Place Search (not available in non-genealogy oriented catalogs)
2. Keyword Search (most online catalogs today have you select the type of media you are searching for—everything, books, DVDs, Articles, etc.—then have you start your search with just a keyword field—otherwise select their advanced search template where you can select specific fields to search on.)
3. Title Search
4. Subject Search

**TIP:** When a catalog does not have a place search, look for an option to do a keyword search even if you have to do multiple searches mixing and matching identifiers. Do title and subject searches, too.

**Exercise:**

1. Go to <http://catalog.loc.gov/>

2. In the Search box type: *pulaski county kentucky*

3. Click on *Begin Search icon (Magnifying Glass icon)*

4. Notice the list of 33 matches (currently #14 is *Pulaski County, Kentucky, 1860 Census*)

7. Click on the title: *Pulaski County, Kentucky, 1860 census / compiled and published by the Pulaski County Historical Society (1988)* to see the brief record catalog view which again directs you to request it in the Jefferson or Adams Building Reading Rooms.

8. Notice at the right side of this web page you have the option to save, print, or email that catalog record. Choose **SAVE** for a text version and **copy & paste** to cite the source.

```
LC control no.: 90223649
Type of material: Book (Print, Microform, Electronic, etc.)
Main title: Pulaski County, Kentucky, 1860 census / compiled and
           published by the Pulaski County Historical Society.
Published/Created: [Somerset, Ky.] : The Society, [1988]
Description: 362, ix p. : 28 cm.

CALL NUMBER: F457.P8 P83 1988
-- Request in: Jefferson or Adams Building Reading Rooms
-- Status: Not Charged

CALL NUMBER: F457.P8 P83 1988 FT MEADE
-- Request in: Jefferson or Adams Building Reading Rooms - STORED OFFSITE
-- Status: Not Charged

=====
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS ONLINE CATALOG
Library of Congress
101 Independence Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20540
Questions? Ask a Librarian:
http://www.loc.gov/rr/askalib/ask-digital.html
```

**D.** When doing a surname search or searching for a specific person's name do five types of searches:

1. Surname Search (typically not available in non-genealogy oriented catalogs)
2. Keyword Search (if the name is common, use additional identifiers)
3. Title Search
4. Author Search
5. Subject Search (See Part #8 A for more information about a tool to search LOC authorities & vocabularies at <http://id.loc.gov/search/>)

**E.** In keyword fields search on clusters or groups of related people names (not just for the name of one individual). Remember FAN = Friends, Associations, and Neighbors

**EXAMPLE:** do a Google search on: "*nancy bull*" married "*valentine warner*" ohio kentucky  
Call Number searches are sometimes case and space sensitive; other types of searches are typically not case sensitive.

**NOTE:** At the *familysearch.org* site click on **MORE** then **SEARCH** then **Catalog** to search the FamilySearch Catalog (previously called the Family History Library Catalog).

**F.** To **Co.** or not to **County** in various catalogs? It depends on how the catalogers standardized their entries.

**EXAMPLE:** In the FS Catalog (go to [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and click **MORE** then on **SEARCH** then click on **CATALOG** for the basic search template) in the Place Name box type **Pulaski County** and the catalog tells you "No Matching Places." The FamilySearch catalogers do not use the word "County" as part of the place. Click on the **X** at the end of the box to erase your entry and start over. Slowly type **PUL** and notice the long list of matching places beginning with Croatia, Pula (place pick list drops down with largest geopolitical division first then progressively smaller divisions). Click on the **X** at the end of the box to erase your entry, and type **pulaski**. Notice there are 18 entries with **United States, Kentucky, Pulaski** being the 4<sup>th</sup> entry.

**EXAMPLE:** In the DAR (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution) Library Catalog the catalogers did use the designation **Co.** to indicate a county name. Go to [dar.org/library](http://dar.org/library) and click on **Search Catalog** to see **Tips for Searching the Catalog**. Under "Searching Place Names in the subject area" the very first tip is "Type in the name of a county as: Otter Tail Co., Minnesota, **not** Otter Tail County, Minnesota."  
To test the DAR Library catalog's idiosyncrasies, go to the top of the **TIPS** page to the **Search the Library Catalog** template and change **Find:** to **Subjects** and type **pulaski** in the **word(s)** box then click on the green **SEARCH** button. Notice the results include "Pulaski's Legion" and "Mt. Pulaski" and a number of Pulaski Counties in various states. Go back and type **pulaski county** and notice only three matches are found. Then search on **Pulaski Co., Kentucky** and notice 32 entries match exactly. It does pay to read the instructions.

**G.** Search all the geopolitical (jurisdiction) levels for places of interest. Do **NOT** search just the county level! Do city, county, region, state, and national level searches. Example: In

the FamilySearch Catalog newspapers are catalogued on a town basis and are not listed when you search on the county level only!

**TIP:** Go to [www.familysearch.org/research/places/](http://www.familysearch.org/research/places/) to access the newest version of the FamilySearch Place Finder. Type in a place name (like the city name of Bromberg, Posen, Prussia, Germany as it was called in 1907) and notice there are places called Bromberg in Austria, several Duchies in Germany, Poland (Bydgoszcz is the current name for the city my ancestors departed from in 1907), and even South Africa. This is a very useful tool for finding place name changes or at least an indication there were geopolitical shifts.

**H.** Know the dates when jurisdictions and place names changed (example: when Bromberg became Bydgoszcz). Check the FS Research Wiki for help with geopolitical shifts in your regions of interest. Then determine if the catalogers for that catalog followed those changes or have some modern date chosen for their geopolitical designations.

Example: The FamilySearch Catalog uses the counties (powiats) in Poland as they were in the 1960s and not as they were changed (doubled in number) in the 1970s then changed again in the 1990s.

Another source is *Wikipedia.org* with its excellent content for places including geography, etymology, subdivisions, history, demographics, languages, etc.

**I.** How does each catalog handle diacritics? (**DŪLGE** vs. **DUELGE** vs. **DULGE** vs. **DIILGE**) Remember: a Polish Ł is usually listed after the L's in your search results lists. Again, the FamilySearch Research Wiki has many articles, word lists, handwriting help, and where to find and how to interpret foreign language gazetteers. See **MORE > BOOKS** at *FamilySearch.org* for a large number of gazetteers that have been digitized and are usable online. The FS Catalog does allow the use of wildcards so a search on **d\*lge** should find the catalog equivalent of **DŪLGE**.

**J.** Records migrate just like people. Example: DAR GRC for Texas contains a biography of CANNONS and their migration from NC > TN > TX. Don't be too narrow in your place searches. Study migration patterns for people and consider the records they took with them and the records they later created about the places they previously lived.

**K.** Hot genealogy search terms for keyword searches include words like **collection** or **index**. Search on a location, surname, or topic/subject plus the word **collection** or **index**.

**L.** Many catalogs prompt you to "Use reference" or "See" or "Similar items." You can learn a great deal by tracing down these additional references. Professional genealogists love bibliographies. They actually read and use them. *Wikipedia.org* has excellent references at the ends of its articles under See Also, References, Further Reading, and External Links. In the FamilySearch Research Wiki in the center of portal pages—like the one for the State of Tennessee—is a blue box titled "Tennessee [or other place name] Online Records" that leads to a list of links to sites with searchable databases. While the FamilySearch Catalog has red links to digitized versions of its materials, it may someday

also include other colored links to resources in other institutions and/or online. This was one of the reasons for changing the catalog name from the Family History Library Catalog (referencing materials contained in that one building in Salt Lake City) to the FamilySearch Catalog (with a much larger vision of what a catalog can do for genealogists).

**NOTE:** The large WorldCat.org meta catalog by OCLC is now searchable via a link at the FamilySearch site and the FS Catalog is now searchable via WorldCat.

**M.** Remember to do an author search to find other works by anyone who wrote about your location, surname, or subject of interest via meta catalogs and *openlibrary.org* project.

**N.** Leave no field in a catalog entry uncovered. Always scroll down and look at all the fields in an entry. There are reasons the cataloger took the time and effort to enter each field of information in an entry. Don't look at just an abbreviated catalog entry, either. Do compare catalog entries from different libraries/archives referencing the same item/work.

**O.** Use wildcards in a call number search (or truncate the call number) to virtually scan the spines of books located next to each other on the shelves. (Not all catalogs allow wildcard searches.)

**EXAMPLE:** In the FamilySearch Catalog do a call number search for **976.872** to see a list of all the books whose call numbers start with these seven characters (the designation for Campbell County, Tennessee).

**TIP:** The FamilySearch Catalog uses a Modified Dewey Decimal System. See the Dewey tutorial at: <http://library.mtsu.edu/dewey/>

TIP: Go to the FamilySearch Wiki and search on **catalog dewey** (63 matches including the helpful "FamilySearch Catalog Call Number Search" which includes the section "How Does the Catalog Use Call Numbers?").

Review each catalog's advanced search features (like truncation, Boolean operators, adjacency, proximity, and phrase searches to name a few).

**P.** You may be able to find big record collections easier via an author search on the authoring institution/individual than by a place search.

**Q.** Consider searching on synonyms or alternate terms to find more in a catalog.

**R.** Mix and Match identifiers (example: search in Keyword fields on both **CANNON** and **Cannon Family** and **Cannon Families**)

## **Part #6: VARY YOUR SEARCH MEDIA (not just on Web sites!)**

Any one library (archives, etc.) may have more than one version of their catalog (plus research guides, union catalogs, finding aids).

**A.** Don't stop with searching just one version of that institution's catalog (even if an older catalog version is not up-to-date). You'll be surprised what additional sources you locate if you search different media versions of a catalog.

Search not only the online but also the:

1. specialized in-house electronic catalog(s)
2. any legacy card (paper) catalogs
3. any disc version of the catalog (possibly sold on CDs or DVDs)  
(example: the Family History Library's Catalog was sold on microfiche and later on a CD that was last updated in 2003—but the CD version has some unique advanced search features not found in the more up-to-date online versions of the catalog)

**B.** Searching a catalog via an API often returns different results

1. WebCrawler (meta search engine)
2. Dogpile.com (search with a site: switch and keyword)

**C.** Use a search engine SITE: switch ( works at Google, WebCrawler, and Dogpile, but with differing results) (example: site:www.familysearch.org renick)

## **Part #7: APPLY GOOD RESEARCH SKILLS**

**A.** Suspect the veracity of any book's contents. Just because it is in print (on paper or online) does NOT make it accurate or complete. Just because it is listed in the catalog doesn't make that listing accurate, either.

**B.** Remember book titles often lie! Example: books on marriage records in early Carter and Campbell Counties, Tennessee have only a few dozen marriages listed for the first couple dozen years—years included in their titles. The early marriage records in both those counties are incomplete for a number of reasons including the fact marriage licenses were required but NOT required to be registered in Tennessee counties until the mid-1830s!

**C.** Many catalogers use "genealogy" as a junk drawer, but that topic can be a gold mine for genealogists. In many academic and public libraries it is the social history section that contains hidden treasure for genealogists.

**D.** Always look in a catalog entry for when the item was published, filmed, extracted, recorded, etc. How accurate is the family tree information likely to be that goes back to

1776 in a bible published in 1976? Was the book published three years after the compiler's death date?

**E.** Always determine if an institution has retro-cataloged to include entries from their earlier paper card catalogs in their later electronic catalog versions. Some institutions have not had the budget or resources to retro-catalog!

## **Part #8: MORE THAN JUST A CATALOG**

Library and archive Web sites often contain more than just a catalog to help genealogists.

**A.** Library of Congress Web site has a tool to search authorities & vocabularies (<http://id.loc.gov/search/>) that helps you explore possible Subject headings for Subject searches in other catalogs (like the FamilySearch Catalog)—just remember to change All to Library of Congress Subject Headings in the drop down box.

**B.** Look for maps of the library's collection layout (copy stations and bathrooms, too)

**C.** Additional information (hours of operation, search services, in-house databases, web-site databases, special collections, info for beginners, members only areas, contact information [to call and verify they really will be open the days you plan to be there], ask a librarian, etc. etc.)

**D.** Instructional articles

**E.** Collection finding aids and searching tools

**F.** Lists of links to resources elsewhere

**G.** Lists of free genealogy classes

## **Part #9: DATABASE ACCESS**

Almost every library (and many archives, too) have subscriptions to online databases that are available only at subscribing institutions (or online to those with a library card and password from that subscribing institution).

**A.** BYU's Harold B. Lee Library web site includes links to its Online Collections. Two links at this site of interest to genealogists are the BYU Family Historian Collections and the BYU Family History Archive. There is also a link to the Mountain West Digital Library Consortium. This includes excellent early Utah photographic and newspaper collections (if

you can work your way down to find them).

**B.** The California Digital Library contains information on more than 3.6 million volumes that have been digitized, nearly three hundred thousand digital images, access to more than one hundred thousand different journals and publications, and more than six hundred million web files. It provides access to Melvyl which is a platform for the UC Libraries union catalog that has now moved to a WorldCat Local Interface. A typical database at this site is the Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives (JARDA) including photographs, documents, manuscripts, paintings, drawings, letters, and oral histories as primary source material about the World War II Internment Camps.

**C.** The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution Library in Washington, D.C. is a treasure trove of unique material for historians and genealogists. One such collection is their Genealogical Records Committee Reports (GRCs). In 1913 the DAR established its Genealogical Research Committee (subsequently renamed the Genealogical Records Committee) to coordinate a nation-wide attempt to save historical records. Over the intervening years, they have produced more than twenty thousand typescripts [typed books] of records from across the country. Much of this material consists of copies of original sources like bible records and gravestones copied in the early 1920s. This database is searchable online via the DAR Library web site.

**D.** The DAR Library also lists at its Web site the subscription databases searchable in the library including American Ancestors (NEHGS), Ancestry Library Edition, Find My Past, Fold3.com, Heritage Quest, Early American Newspapers, and others.

**E.** The Mid-Continent Public Library and its Midwest Genealogy Center have genealogy databases (searchable if you have a library card and password—but not available for non-residents) to America's Genealogy Bank (historical newspapers), America's Obituaries & Death Notices, Ancestry Library Edition, Archive Finder, Biography and Genealogy Master Index, Digital Sanborn Maps, Fold3, HeritageQuest Online, and ProQuest Obituaries. It has more than thirty history database subscriptions and more than twenty newspaper databases (many of which are not listed under Genealogy Databases) and much more.

**F.** The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has literally thousands of unique database collections searchable only on the computers in the library. Example: *Fentress County, Tennessee genealogy database* by Bruce E. York CD-ROM no. 2701 is a Personal Ancestral File database which contains genealogies of nearly every family to live in Fentress County from its foundation.

## **Part #10: DO YOUR HOMEWORK BEFOREHAND**

Before you actually go to a library to do research, make sure you do your homework beforehand for a better experience.

**A.** Consult the library's Web site so you know (before you arrive) where to park, where the restrooms are located, and how to make copies. This saves reference librarians for the important questions like "What collections do you have that are unique to this library?"

**B.** Check in detail on the methods of copying allowed in that institution. Will you be allowed to use your smartphone's camera to capture images? Will you even be allowed to take your FlipPal or wand scanner into the collection rooms? Archives are especially particular about what researchers are allowed to take with them into rooms where original records are accessed.

**C.** Check the institution's Web site maps and instructions to determine what copy services and/or copy machines are available in the rooms or areas where you will be doing your research in that building. Do you need to take a thumb/flash drive to store images taken? Can you email images to yourself?