



9-1-2004

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Downs, Reginald (2004) "Genealogy at the Library of Congress," *BYU Family Historian*: Vol. 3 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byufamilyhistorian/vol3/iss1/5>

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GENEALOGY AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Reginald Downs

The Library of Congress in Washington, DC features one of the world's premier collections of United States and foreign genealogical and local historical publications.

The beginning of the Library's genealogical collection includes works from the 1815 purchase of Thomas Jefferson's library: the Domesday Book, Sir William Dugdale's *The Baronetage of England*, and *Peerage of Ireland*.

In August 1935, a "Reading Room for American Local History and Genealogy" was opened on Deck 47 in the Main Building, today called the Thomas Jefferson Building, "to provide a more adequate service for those coming to the Library from all parts of the United States to consult our unusually large and important collections of genealogy, including states and local history, and to throw proper safeguards about these collections, large portions of which are irreplaceable."

Today, sixty-nine years later, the statement remains true, although the Reading Room has changed locations several times to accommodate the growing collections and expansion of the focus of the room to its present international scope. For example, the reference collection contained 2,500 volumes in 1935; today (2004) it has 6,000. Since 1935, the Local History and Genealogy Reading Room has seen relocation to six physical homes, four administrative changes, varying hours of service, and new generations of staff.

Overview of Collections and Projects

The collections are especially strong in North American, British Isles and Irish, French, German, and Scandinavian sources. The majority of the genealogies are gifts from around the world. The Australians have been particularly generous, and their donations have greatly enhanced British Isles and

Australian research at the Library of Congress. These international strengths are further supported and enriched by the Library's incomparable royalty, nobility, and heraldry collection, making it one of a few libraries in America that offer such comprehensive collections.

In addition to the national and international genealogy and local history collections at the Library of Congress, one may find other related material of great significance to these fields in the areas of archival resources, biography, church history, city directories, folklore, geography, and history. Special collections of manuscripts, maps and atlases, microforms, newspapers, photographs, rare books, CD-ROMs, and other electronic forms, housed in various custodial divisions of the Library also contain important genealogical resources. For further discussion of these tools, read below.

Fortunately, the Library has a number of outstanding tools to help access these collections, *The Library of Congress: A Guide to Genealogical and Historical Research*, by James Neagles (Salt Lake City: Ancestry Publishing, 1990), is a comprehensive handbook for the Library's genealogical collections and inventories the Library's vast city directories collection. Additionally, the Library has more than two dozen reference guides to assist genealogical researchers.

For remote access, the Library of Congress provides many resources and services via the Internet, all of which are detailed or available from the Library's homepage at (<http://www.loc.gov>). The Local History and Genealogy Reading Room's homepage (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy>) provides general information about the reading room (hours; location; requirements for reader registration; information about tours; descriptions of the collections; details for presenting gift books to the Library; the full-text of the reading room's bibliographies and guides; and links to other Internet sources on local history and genealogy).

Equally important, both the Library's and the LH&G's homepages provide access to the Library's online catalog. The Library is beginning to link catalog records to digital versions of actual works, offering some digital versions of books in the collections. More than 300 local histories are digitally accessible on the Library's American Memory site, though currently, no genealogies. To search for citations to genealogies using the Library's online catalog, use the search term "Family" after the name of the family, e.g., Downs Family.

The Library is currently engaged in several digital projects to make its collection more accessible. One is the BECites +Project that began in 1999. The BECites Project's goal is to enhance traditional printed library bibliographies by placing them on the Web in electronic form and by including annotated citations, indexes, table of contents, and back of book bibliographies cited therein. Additionally, there are reciprocal links between all of these data elements and the online catalog record. LH&G has added hotlinks to table of contents, indexes, sources cited, and catalog records for the Immigrant Arrivals biography (http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid_e/immigrant). Another digital project is the Table of Contents Project. The Digital Table of Contents project creates machine-readable data from surrogates of the actual table of contents. The Table of Contents of United States Genealogies Project is an ongoing effort to link the table of contents of United States genealogies with bibliographic records. Presently, more than 800 books have been included.

Aside from digital versions of a few local histories, material in microform for which the Library holds the master negative is available for interlibrary loan. The Library has microfilmed all of its holdings in class CS71 (United States Genealogy), published from 1876 to 1900. Interlibrary loan allows use of a significant part of the genealogical collection in libraries around the country. To identify genealogy titles on microfilm consult *Genealogies Catalogued by the Library of*

Congress Since 1986: With a List of Established Forms of Family Names and a List of Genealogies Converted to Microfilm Since 1983 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1991). The Library of Congress does not permit its books on genealogy, heraldry, and United States local history to circulate on interlibrary loan. The Library's Photoduplication Service can supply photocopies of items located in the Library's collection if there are no copyright restrictions.

The **Local History and Genealogy Reading Room (LH&G)**, a small, specialized, reading room, answers questions about heraldry, royalty and nobility, biography, naval and maritime history, American history, as well as genealogy and local history. The Library has more than 40,000 genealogies and more than 100,000 local histories from the many genealogies that are self-published and given to the Library for many generations from around the world. A "Gifts" information sheet designed to assist authors in donating their family histories to the Library is available by mail from the Local History and Genealogy Reading Room homepage (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy>).

The Library acquires published material in a variety of ways. In addition to gifts, the Library of Congress relies heavily on copyright deposits for additions to its collections. If it is not possible to acquire a publication through donation or copyright, the Library makes every effort to purchase a copy. While the Library's collections are outstanding, one does not find every published genealogy here; to identify genealogies available elsewhere, book catalogs and online tools, including the Internet, are used.

The Local History and Genealogy Reading Room, with a staff of ten, is located on the Ground Floor of the Jefferson Building, LJ G-42; it offers specialized card catalogs that index genealogy, heraldry, and local history in the collections. The Reference Desk maintains an inventory of the Library's extensive collection of city

directories. Primary Source Microfilms' *City Directories of the United States*, in the Microform Reading Room, is a microform collection of directories from selected cities and towns, dating from the colonial period to as recently as 1960. See *U.S. City Directories in the Microfilm Reading Room* (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/microform/uscity/>) for a list of cities and towns. The Library's extensive collection of unclassified city directories in paper supplements these microforms.

The LH&G Reading Room also offers public Internet terminals and subscription databases. Of special interest are *AncestryPlus* and *Heritage Quest Online* that offer digital images of the U.S. federal census. The latter database also provides thousands of family histories, local histories, and primary sources in full image. Much of this material is in the Library's collection. Another important electronic resource is *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* that offer full text and full image articles from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*.

In addition to its genealogy collection, many of the Library's twenty-one reading rooms offer essential sources for genealogy. The Library's historic **Main Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/>) through its catalogs, 70,000 volumes of print reference works and a wide variety of electronic resources, is the primary entrance into the Library's general collections. It is the principal reading room for work in the social sciences and humanities.

The **Microform Reading Room** (<http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/microform>) offers much of interest to the genealogist. In addition to published family histories and local U.S. histories that have been filmed for preservation, the reading room has the British Manuscript Project collection, a selection of materials from the ninth through the eighteenth centuries that include manuscripts, archival records and rare printed material from major public and private collections in England and Wales. The Irish Genealogy Manuscripts Collection offers genealogical

material filmed at the National Library of Ireland from medieval to modern times. Anne Toohey's *Irish Genealogical Office Manuscripts: A Guide to Microfilm* unlocks this collection. The Challen Typescripts are transcripts of parish registers [predominantly from London and vicinity]. Additional parish register lists are in the Microform Reading Room's Card Catalog. The microform collection of city directories of the United States is complemented by the New York City telephone directories, from 1878-1959, for the boroughs of New York City plus selected towns in the surrounding areas of New York and New Jersey, also available on microfilm. Other important microform collections include:

- Slave narratives, which are interviews with former slaves recorded between 1936 and 1938 by the Federal Writers Project. (Copies of the original transcripts are in the Manuscript Division and digitized on American Memory (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtm/snhome.html>))
- The Barbour Collection, which indexes vital records transcribed from pre-1850 records for most Connecticut towns.
- Massachusetts Vital Records to 1850, and for some towns until around the beginning of the twentieth century. (Also available electronically on *AncestryPlus* and *New England Ancestors*.)
- "A Genealogy of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence," comprising twenty typescript volumes.

The **Manuscript Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss>) provides public access to one of the Library's premier collections. A researcher may consult microfilm of the Draper Manuscripts, historical and biographical material amassed by Lyman C. Draper, covering the period from 1735 to 1815 in areas east of the Mississippi from New York State to Charleston, South Carolina. The American Loyalists Claims from the British Public

Records Office (PRO), Audit Offices 12 and 13, as well as copies of other records from the PRO, are other sources. For German-Americans, useful resources are microfilm of the Hamburg ship passenger lists, listing those emigrating from Hamburg from 1850-1873. The "Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America, Diocese of Alaska, 1733-1938" is another large collection of genealogical value. Almost all collections of personal papers in the Division contain some family data.

The **Genealogy and Map Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/>) has a strong international collection of material that can help researchers identify geographic locations-- particularly in Eastern Europe, where numerous name and political affiliation changes have occurred. This Division's collection of gazetteers and atlases greatly aids identifying place names and locations. These tools may help locate the place of origin of families who emigrated from America in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. County atlases from 1825 show land ownership; some 1500 county land ownership maps date from the early nineteenth century; and ward maps are essential in obtaining ward numbers needed to undertake census research in major cities. U.S. Geological Survey Topographical Quadrangles from the 1880s are helpful in locating cemeteries as well as boundary lines described on plats and deeds. Fire insurance maps from 1867 to the present in the Sanborn collection indicate the size, shape, and construction of dwellings in 12,000 cities and towns. The Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970, are digitized and searchable at the Library.

The **Newspaper and Current Periodicals Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/>) has a large collection of U.S. and foreign newspapers on microfilm and in hard copy. The Reading Room's reference collection has a number of indexes to newspapers and abstracts of marriage records, such as *Marriage Notices from Richmond, Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1840*, death notices, obituaries, and other data

of genealogical interest from a wide variety of local newspapers.

The **Rare Book and Special Collections Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/>) has some material of interest to historians and genealogists, including the *Confederate States Imprints*; almanacs; printed documents of the Colonial Congress and the colonial governments of New England; and the Charles H. Banks' material pertaining to early Pilgrim families in Massachusetts. Large numbers of local histories, published and unpublished genealogies, pre-1861 city directories, and the Library's collection of works published prior to 1801, are all accessible in the Rare Book Room.

Other reading rooms are also very useful for researching genealogy. The **European** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/european/>), **Hispanic**, (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/>), **Asian** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/>), and **African and Middle Eastern** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/>) reading rooms can be essential for genealogical research in these areas. The European Reading Room reference collection contains works relating to coats-of-arms for families in Eastern Europe.

While the Library is rich in collections of manuscripts, microfilms, newspapers, photographs, maps, and published material, it is not an archive or repository for unpublished or primary source county, state, or church records. Researchers seeking county records will need to visit the courthouse or a library in the county of interest, the state archives, the Family History Library in Salt Lake City or one of its many Family History Centers, all of which may have the original county records or microform copies. Libraries, archives, and genealogical and historical societies at the national, state, and local levels are all vital resources in this complex puzzle of genealogical research.