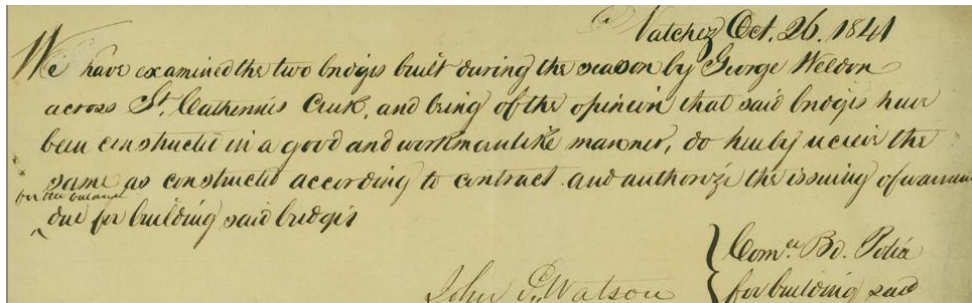


# Using Manuscript and Oral History Collections in Genealogical Research

Heritage Seekers Genealogy Club  
Little Rock, Arkansas

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The Manuscript Collection of the Mississippi Digital Library

Have you researched home sources, analyzed the federal censuses, gathered vital records, read state and local histories, and you still are finding bare branches on your family tree? If the answer is yes, try looking at manuscript and oral history collections - these records may be the fertilizer needed to fill those empty spots.

## Researching Manuscript Collections

Researching manuscripts, oral histories and special collections in libraries, archives and other repositories are often overlooked sources. Because these collections usually are not completely indexed in the manner that we are accustomed to, it takes time and patience to sift through the various documents that you might find and need. Knowing exactly where and what will be found in a manuscript collection can be tricky, but when found, they can create a gold mine of information pertaining to your ancestor. Manuscripts and oral histories can be found in a variety of repositories from libraries, historical societies, universities, and in private collections. In addition, manuscript and oral histories pertaining to your genealogical research may be found in repositories far away from your ancestral home or in the papers of a neighbor, friend, or someone rich and famous. Luckily today, more of these records have “**finding aids**” which will help you locate the various collections.

## What are Manuscripts?

Manuscripts are original records. They serve as primary sources that provide first-hand documentation and evidence of events that shape the development of a society, community and/or family. They were created or gathered by individuals, organizations, or institutions to document their activities for any given time or reason. Manuscript records can be handwritten,

typed, or printed and the information can appear on various size pieces of paper. Manuscripts can be in the form of correspondence, diaries, ledgers, memoranda, minutes, accounts, reports, literary creations, recipes, deeds, or legal documents. A family bible found in a manuscript collection could be the key to documenting your family history prior to or after the civil war. A “finding aid” will help you locate manuscripts in the different repositories.

## **Oral Histories**

Oral histories are stories that living people tell about their past and/or about others. Oral histories capture the past in a way that provides insight into traditions, events, and issues of the time. It is a systematic collection of living people’s testimony about their own experiences or of stories that have been passed down through generations. There are many oral history collections throughout the United States, and they can be found in various libraries and archives. You may find oral history interviews with coal miners, early settlers, business leaders, politicians, doctors, midwives, etc. within manuscript collections, oral history projects. Oral histories can often be found in libraries and archives in the division of **Special Collections**.

## **Special Collections**

In addition to oral histories, special collections hold material which, for various reasons, requires particular care and treatment. Books and manuscripts found in special collections may be placed there because of their value, rarity, and/or fragility. These records normally need special attention to ensure that they survive for future generations. Records found here may need to be handled in a special way when using them for researching.

## **Finding Aids**

A “finding aid” is a detailed description of a collection of archived materials. Finding aids provide information about a collection and its creators and normally do not include a description of individual documents found in the collection. Finding each document inside of the collection requires the researcher to review the collection itself. Finding aids do provide outlines of the collection’s contents. A finding aid may include the manuscript collection’s size, date span and format, i.e., photographs, journals, diaries, letters, etc. It may also contain the description of the collection’s creator, summary of the collection’s contents and a list of the collections content by container, i.e., folder, box, loose papers, microfilm, etc. Once you have identified a finding aid for a collection, you should be able to search by the name of your ancestor, family surname(s), geographical location, name of donor (if known), neighbors, associates and/or businesses.

Make sure that you check the Family History Catalogue at <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> since some manuscripts may have been microfilmed in its original state. Also make sure that you check *NUCMC* (*see description below*) to see if there is a manuscript collection(s) outside of your ancestral home relevant to your family history.

## Small Sample of Records Found in Manuscript Collections

Autobiographies Business Records Diaries Family Papers Letters Memoirs Mining Records Contracts Graduation Program Books Legal Papers Genealogist Papers College/University History	Biographies Church Records Journals Funeral Home Records State/Local Histories Newspaper Clippings Social Organization Records Scrapbooks Photographs Court Records Vital Records Records on Slavery	Bibles Voice Recordings Family Histories Store Ledgers Maps <b>Oral Histories</b> Political Papers School Records Year Books Railroad Records Personal Notes Military Records
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### Research Tips

As you research, make sure you check the Family History Library Catalogue *WIKI* at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) which can direct you to manuscript collections across the country. You will be able to search by state and county at [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page). In addition, search on *World Catalogue* using search terms “manuscript collections” and adding your specific county to the search. <https://www.worldcat.org/> Also make sure to check the National Union Catalogue of Manuscript Collection, commonly known as *NUCMC* (*see description below*) to locate manuscript collection(s) outside of your ancestral home.

General internet searches to locate manuscript collections can be used by searching with the following sample terms:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Virginia Manuscript Collections.edu</li> <li>▪ Texas Manuscript Collections.gov</li> <li>▪ Virginia Special Collections.org</li> <li>▪ New York Special Collections.gov</li> <li>▪ New Orleans Louisiana.edu</li> <li>▪ Arkansas archive.org</li> <li>▪ Pittsburgh Pennsylvania Libraries.org</li> </ul> |
|---|

**Find manuscript collections by searching the internet  
using the following extensions on web addresses:**

- **.edu** – Affiliated with universities, colleges & educational sites.
- **.org** – Non-profit organization sites such as PBS or Red Cross
- **.gov** – Sites owned and operated by the government.
- **.com** – Most popular site that might provide “scholarly” information.
- **.net** – Network. Sites may be “for-profit” or “not-for-profit websites.”

**Tips for Using Manuscript Collections:**

**In-person research:**

- Consult websites/finding aides ahead of time.
- Restrictions on material use, i.e., copies, looking at one folder at a time, order materials in advance.
- Call ahead for hours, and parking.
- Follow repository rules.
- Prepare to read without indexes.

**Selected Repositories with Manuscript Collections**

▪ **Library of Congress** [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

This manuscript division has one of the nation’s most valuable collections for the study of American history and culture. The holdings include information about slavery and the slave trade as well as other aspects of plantation life, including papers of slaveholders, journals, and slave narratives. Within the manuscript division you will find The **American Memory Collection for the National Digital Library**; the **Rare Book & Special Collections**; the **Ex-Slave Narratives** of the *Work Projects Administration’s Federal Writers Project*.

○ **National Union Catalog of Manuscript of Collections (NUCMC)**

A web interfaced database through the Library of Congress for searching archival and manuscript collections. The descriptions of these manuscripts are indexed and cross referenced. This information was published annually in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections from 1962 - 1993 and has been online since 1986. It covers 1.5 million manuscripts in public, college, university, and special libraries located throughout the United States. [www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc](http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc)

▪ **The National Agricultural Library** [www.nal.usda.gov](http://www.nal.usda.gov)

Special Collections houses over three hundred manuscript and archival collections containing materials from the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Manuscripts include papers of individuals, correspondence, journals, photographs, and other items related to individuals who participated in agricultural activities.

▪ **Archives Library Information Center (ALIC)** <https://www.archives.gov/research/alic>

A library housed at the National Archives; the pages of this website are designed to provide researchers nationwide with convenient access to content beyond the physical holdings of a traditional library. ALIC provides access to information on American history and government, to the general public. Here you will find a link that will lead to state archives across the country that hold manuscript collections.

<https://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/state-archives.html>

- **Presidential Libraries** <https://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/research>  
The Presidential Library system is composed of fourteen Presidential Libraries. This system formally began in 1939, when President Franklin Roosevelt donated his personal and Presidential papers to the Federal Government. Before the creation of the Presidential Library system, Presidents or their heirs often dispersed Presidential papers at the end of the administration. Though many pre-Hoover collections now reside in the Library of Congress, others are split among other libraries, historical societies, and private collections. Sadly, many materials have been lost or deliberately destroyed.

The *Presidential Records Act of 1978* established that the Presidential records that document the constitutional, statutory, and ceremonial duties of the President are the property of the United States Government. After the President leaves office, the Archivist of the United States assumes custody of the records. The Act allowed for the continuation of Presidential libraries as the repository for Presidential records. The following libraries should always be researched: Herbert Hoover; Franklin D. Roosevelt; Harry S. Truman; Dwight D. Eisenhower; John F. Kennedy; Lyndon B. Johnson; Richard Nixon; Gerald R. Ford; Jimmy Carter; Ronald Reagan; George Bush; William J. Clinton; George W. Bush; and Barack Obama.

- **The National First Ladies Library** <http://firstladies.org>  
A non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that operates at First Ladies National Historic Site in a partnership agreement with the National Park Service in Canton, Ohio. The site consists of the Ida Saxton McKinley House, the family home of First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley and the longtime residence of William and Ida McKinley, and the Education and Research Center. The Center preserves, promotes and educates about the significant role of First Ladies of the USA and their contributions throughout history. Under the “research” tab, links will take you to various repositories which hold manuscript collections for the First Ladies of the United States <http://firstladies.org/biographies/>
- **University of Arkansas (University Library Special Collections)**  
<https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/manuscripts/>  
Manuscript collections include personal, professional, and family papers; business and organizational records; and other unique, typically unpublished historical documents in a variety of formats, from scrapbooks to correspondence to digital media. They offer primary sources for research, exploration, and discovery on a variety of topics, many of which relate to Arkansas and the Ozarks region. Each collection is most commonly described by a finding aid, a guide to a collection and its contents. The finding aids are available online through [ArchivesSpace at the University of Arkansas](#).
- **Central Arkansas Library System (Digital Collection)**  
<http://bc-digital.org/arkansas-and-the-great-war/manuscript-collections.html>

- **University of Central Arkansas** <https://uca.edu/archives/collections/>  
 The UCA Archives currently has over 350 Manuscript Collections consisting of one or more boxes of papers, records, correspondence, and other material donated by a person or entity. The **Map Collection** contains a variety of maps from the national to municipal level. You may also find roads, highways, and interstate maps which connect cities and towns. **Oral Histories** consists of interviews with one or more subjects with first-hand account of a specific event or time period. These oral histories range from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arkansas to the Little Rock School District desegregation of the late 1950's. The **Photograph Collection** has over 53,000 images which typically contain printed images, and negatives-film or glass. In the **Rare Newspaper Collection**, the archives have over 20 boxes of rare newspapers documenting Arkansas history as well as national events.
- **New York Public Library Manuscript and Archives Division** <http://archives.nypl.org/>  
 The Division holds over 29,000 linear feet of manuscripts and archives in over 5,500 collections. The strengths of the Division are the papers and records of individuals, families, and organizations, primarily from the New York region. These collections support research in the political, economic, social, and cultural history of New York and the United States.
- **Samford University (Special Collections)** [www.library.samford.edu](http://www.library.samford.edu)  
 This collection contains the most complete resource on Alabama Baptist Church Records. It also contains newspapers, county histories, pardon petitions & amnesty papers, Draper Manuscripts, Freedman's Bureau Papers, Internal Revenue Assessments (1865-1866)
- **University of Michigan** <https://bentley.umich.edu/>  
 The Bentley Historical Library collects materials for and promotes the study of the histories of the State of Michigan and the University of Michigan. The 11,000 research collections range from the papers of governors of Michigan, to the records of students and faculty life at the University and surrounding areas. Digitized manuscripts and photographs, plus maps and primary source materials are available at the Bentley Library.
- **University of South Carolina (South Caroliniana Library)** [www.sc.edu/libraries](http://www.sc.edu/libraries)  
 Holdings of the manuscript division include letters, diaries, and other unpublished papers of families and individuals; genealogical collections; plantation account books; folklore, local history. The Division also holds church records, clubs, business records of small country stores, etc.
- **Archives West** <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/>  
 This site provides access to descriptions of primary sources in the western United States, including correspondence, diaries, or photographs. Digital reproductions of the materials are available in some cases. You can research this site by repositories in the following states: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Searching can also be done by social life & customs, immigration and American expansion, places, and material types, i.e., architectural drawings, maps, oral histories, scrapbooks, etc.
- **University of Pittsburgh** <https://www.pitt.edu/>  
<http://www.library.pitt.edu/asc-archival-collections>  
 The Archives & Special Collections (A&SC) division of the University of Pittsburgh collects records, manuscripts, and personal papers. While most focus on people, places, and histories

of Western Pennsylvania, it also encompasses subjects of national and international importance. An online digital collection that should not be overlooked is entitled *Free at Last*, a collection which contains accounts of transactions involving slaves freed by their owners, records of sales in Pennsylvania and other states. The original manuscripts of this collection are housed at the **Senator John Heinz History Center**.

- **HBCU Library Alliance Digital Collection**, a consortium that supports the collaboration of information that provides an array of resources from HBCU libraries and archives. Collections are contributed from Nineteen member libraries, including the University of the Virgin Islands, and includes photographs, university correspondence, manuscripts, images of campus buildings, alumni letters, memorabilia, and programs from campus events.  
<https://hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu/digital/>
- **Tuskegee University** <http://www.tuskegee.edu/libraries/achives.aspx>  
Founded in 1881 as “Tuskegee Normal School” and later “Tuskegee Institute” in Tuskegee Institute, Alabama. **The Hollis Burke Frissell Library** is a non-circulating special collections library “by and about” African Americans in all parts of the world. In 1999, a separate Rare Book Room which contains which contains publication dates in the 19<sup>th</sup> century dealing with slavery and early African American literature was created. The University Archives is the repository of historically valuable records of Tuskegee University. The archive is the home to one of the largest and most comprehensive newspaper clipping files in the US. The newspaper files have resulted in the compilation of the Lynching Records (1881-1953), Race Relation Report (1854-63), The Negro Yearbook (1912-51) and the Bibliography of the Negro in African and America (1928).
- **University of Georgia (Hargaret Rare Book and Manuscript Library)**, a repository for over six million individual documents including diaries, letters, family histories and organization papers. The library also holds over five hundred thousand images consisting of paintings, photographs, tintypes, slides, and negatives. This collection is about Georgia and its native people and are strongest with 19<sup>th</sup> century materials. The University of Georgia also includes the Digital Library of Georgia, Special Collections, Map Collections, Music Collections, etc. <http://www.libs.uga.edu/hargrett/>
- **University of Virginia Library** <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/small/collections/manuscript.html>  
The manuscript collection of this repository totals approximately thirteen million items in over 14,000 collections and over 250,000 photographs and small prints, over 8,000 reels of microfilm and 8,000 microfiches. The collection includes political, domestic, economic, religious, agricultural, and educational records in the form of manuscripts, letters, and diaries.
- **The Portal of Texas History** <https://texashistory.unt.edu/>  
The Portal to Texas History is a gateway to rare, historical, and primary source materials from or about Texas. Created and maintained by the University of North Texas Libraries, the Portal leverages the power of hundreds of partners across the state to provide a vibrant, growing collection of resources. The Portal holds 12,200 manuscript collections which include newspapers, photographs, letters, oral histories, and maps.  
<https://texashistory.unt.edu/search/?q=manuscript+collections&t=fulltext&sort=>

- **Ohio History Connection** <https://www.ohiohistory.org/learn/archives-library>  
 The Archives & Library has online research guides that include links to forms, and books in the library's collections. These research guides cover such resources as adoption & guardianship, land, mental health, land deeds, military, naturalization records, religious records, newspapers, photographs, prison records, vital records, and more. As you research make sure that you do not miss the extensive collection of newspapers, photographs, manuscripts, maps, and government records. Check the online catalog.  
<https://ohiohistory.on.worldcat.org/discovery>
- **Digital Public Library of America** <https://dp.la/>  
 A database that brings together the riches of America's libraries, archives, and museums, and makes them freely available to the world. Many universities (including historical black colleges and universities), public libraries and other public-spirited organizations have digitized materials that can be found through this portal. The DPLA brings these collections together in a single platform, providing open and coherent access to our society's digitized cultural heritage.
- **Archives Grid** <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>A database that includes over five million records describing archival materials. Through this database you will find links to historical documents, personal papers, family histories, and more. With over 1,000 different archival institutions represented, ArchiveGrid helps connect researchers to primary source materials held in archives, libraries, museums, and historical societies. Some collection descriptions include links to images, sound recordings, or other online materials.
- **North Carolina State Archives** <http://www.archives.ncdcr.gov/>  
 The Archive's collection consists of private collections, organization records, maps, pamphlets, sound recordings, photographs, and film. It also holds the official records of the state, county, and local governmental units, and copies of federal and foreign government materials. Documents found in the North Carolina State Archives collections are by far the most valuable assembly of manuscripts in North Carolina.
- **Maryland Historical Society** (The H. Furlong Baldwin Library) [www.mdhs.org](http://www.mdhs.org)  
 Established in 1844 as a private nonprofit institution to collect, preserve, and interpret the objects and artifacts that illuminate the state's history. The manuscript collections include American Civil War, Women's History, Paintings, and photographs. Its African American Collection includes plantation and slave owner records which include account books, inventories, letters, slave ledgers, and personal papers. The holdings also include abolition, emancipation, manumission, and reconstruction records.
- **Draper Manuscript Collection\_(The State Historical Society of Wisconsin)**  
 This collection contains works, notes, diaries and papers regarding explorations and military campaigns concerning the early history of much of the trans-Allegheny West which includes portions of the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, the entire Ohio Valley and the Mississippi Valley. Collected by Lyman Draper, most of the approximately five hundred volumes of material cover the period from the 1740's through the 1810's. There are several indexes and subsets. Each collection has been assigned a letter or letter and then subdivided into volumes. Also included are twenty-two interviews with survivors of the Nazi Holocaust.

These interviews can be found in “Oral Histories Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust.” The main general guide to the collection is the *Guide to the Draper Manuscripts*.  
<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/>

- **Library of Virginia** <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/>  
This is the home of **Virginia Memory** which is an online portal that has digitized parts of the Library’s collection to make the material widely available to the public. The Library of Virginia holds a variety of materials such as manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, maps, etc., which help to tell the history of the commonwealth and its people.
- **Filson Historical Society** <http://www.filsonhistorical.org/>  
The oldest privately supported Historical Society in Kentucky. They have been collecting and preserving Kentucky and the Ohio Valley information for 127 years. The Filson Historical Society has over 1.8 million documents, including 50,000 books. They own over 15,000 digitized manuscripts and prints about the First American West, along with photographs of Louisville and Kentucky.

### Websites/Databases/Finding Aids

- **Google Books** <https://books.google.com/>  
A website that searches the full text of books. It allows public-domain works and other out of copyright material to be downloaded in PDF format.
- **World Catalog**  
The world’s largest global catalog of library collections. This archival research database connects to more than 10,000 libraries worldwide and is often the only place to find corporate archives, church records, historical society records, etc. [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)
- **Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War.** The index to the guides for these records can be found at the following link on FamilySearch.org.  
[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African\\_American\\_Slavery\\_and\\_Bondage](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Slavery_and_Bondage)  
The index includes detailed descriptions of the contents and will direct the researcher to the appropriate university manuscript collection.
- **The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands**, (also known as The Freedmen’s Bureau) was established in 1865 by Congress to help millions of former black slaves and poor whites in the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. FamilySearch has digitized these records [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). The original manuscripts are housed at NARA in Washington, DC.

### Sample Guides to Repositories with Manuscript

Altham, Elizabeth. *Index to Personal Names in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, 1959-1984. Vol. 1 A-K. Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994.

Altham, Elizabeth. *Index to Personal Names in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, 1959-1984. Vol. 2 L-Z. Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994.

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- Library of Congress. *Library of Congress Manuscripts: An Illustrated Guide to Manuscripts*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1993. <https://guides.loc.gov/manuscript>
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- Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking (Editors). *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Provo, UT: Ancestry, A Division of MyFamily.com, Inc., 2006.
- United States, National Historical Publication and Records Commission. *Directory of Archival and Manuscript Repositories in the United States*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1988.