

Southern Genealogical Research

Using Maps, Atlases, and Gazetteers for Genealogical Research

Maps, atlases, and gazetteers are important resources for genealogical research. They can provide useful clues in searching for places of residence which are critical for accessing records. Some examples include:

1. Political and historical facts
2. Regional ethnic and religious demographics
3. Climatic information
4. Important local geographical facts that impacted life decisions and migrations
5. Location of bordering towns and rivers
6. Population statistics
7. Identifying neighbors might identify a wife's family of origin
8. Topography of the land defined what crops could or could not be grown. Use these types of maps to see the quality of land.
9. Road and railroad maps, or general maps showing major roads, may give you some insight into how your family migrated to the area of residence.

To find useful maps, you must have strong clues as to where and when your ancestors lived. The best maps for your purpose are ones that:

1. Show in great detail an area around the ancestor's residence
2. Show location within a county or other jurisdiction
3. Name and show the borders of neighboring areas.

Home sources are often especially useful in tracking down places of residence. Genealogical books dealing with specific ethnic groups are helpful sources. They usually contain chapters dealing with migration patterns following the ancestors' arrival in North America. Once you've gathered as many facts and circumstances that impacted their lives, the next step is to locate where the families resided at various times.

This is where maps, atlases, and gazetteers become especially important. These resources can help uncover more specific information or help resolve contradictory facts and circumstances. When used in conjunction with timelines, all three resources may help identify inconsistencies and questionable facts before time and effort is wasted on false leads.

Gazetteers lists place names alphabetically and identify local locations, including historical information. Older gazetteers, published before the turn of the 19th

century, are especially useful for locating towns that are no longer in existence or that have changed names. They often indicate the nearest town for church and vital records. This may provide clues to localities of residence and where to look for written records. Obtaining the knowledge of where to look for your ancestors is the most important part of family history research.

Atlases are a collection of maps. In addition to pinpointing the location of a family's place of residence, commercial atlases may include advertisements of local establishments and biographical sketches of prominent local subscribers or residents accompanied by lithographs or photographs.

Historical atlases often contain a chronological arrangement of maps that span centuries. These can be an invaluable source of information regarding the history of the changing political borders of counties and states. Many towns, counties, cities, and even countries have experienced numerous name changes over the years. Though their names have changed, some of these places may be noted on an old map whereas there is no reference to them in many contemporary sources. The location of some others may be found in sources such as lists of abandoned post offices, local histories, government records, microfilmed records, or clippings from old newspapers, old city directories, or old county atlases kept in the library or archives of a town, city, or county.

Plat books and old fire insurance maps located in town halls or county courthouses may show an outline of your ancestor's house and its placement on the property. Such maps should help you picture where your relatives were born, resided, attended school, worked, shopped, voted, traveled over land or water, courted, married, raised families, and were laid to rest. You may need later maps of the same area to track down ensuing generations. City directories often contain ward maps which can help locate an ancestor in an unindexed census. Census enumerators often determined their areas of coverage using city ward boundaries. The ward information will help narrow your search to the pertinent ward and its boundaries.

Maps usually suggest some patterns of settlement and movement and rule out others. For example, topographic and other relief maps may show hills or mountains that impeded migration or access to certain areas. Rivers bridged now may not have been bridged when kin lived nearby. Yet, a river could usually aid migratory travel because it was easier to travel on water than through dense forests

and undergrowth. It is even possible that your ancestors traveled by waterway to market, to attend church or school, or to pursue a host of other interests.

Maps generally show the location and approximate size of a town including neighboring communities and nearby landmarks, such as rivers, mountains, and important buildings and monuments. Maps covering larger areas may suggest various kinds of trade, employment, and social, recreational, or other interactions among the people of neighboring towns, settlements, or other locales. Analysis of such maps may expand the scope of research beyond nearby county, state, provincial, or national boundaries.

Cadastral maps, when available for a locality, provide an official register of the quantity, value, and ownership of real estate used in apportioning taxes. They often provide information concerning property boundaries, subdivision lines, buildings, and related details.

Fire insurance maps were used by insurance companies to determine the risk factors in underwriting a building. The maps are usually color coded to indicate the use of the building, its construction material, as well as its size and shape, and the location of doors, windows, firewalls, ditches, water mains, and sprinkler systems when applicable.

Researchers sometimes encounter roadblocks when trying to locate their ancestors' places of residence, due to the following reasons:

1. Small towns or unincorporated communities may not appear on road maps or atlases. (They do tend to appear in many gazetteers.)
2. Towns may no longer exist or were swallowed up by adjacent communities.
3. The town name may have changed due to an event that occurred long ago.
4. The community may have been a postal drop with a few adjacent houses for workers and their families.

In spite of the many advantages that maps, atlases, and gazetteers offer, they can intimidate researchers. This is especially true for beginners. The following strategies may help researchers move forward.

1. Locate each place on your list using a current map, noting its current county or parish.
2. Find major roads that pass through or close to the area.
3. If you cannot locate the site, consult a gazetteer for the state, city, or county.
4. Determine where the town or community was originally located and then try

- to locate a map from the period that shows the original name.
5. Local and state historical societies are a good source for identifying former town, county or parish names.
 6. Make note of the date of the gazetteer and/or map listing the place and what county or parish it was located in at that time.
 7. Remember that county, parish, and state borders have changed over the years. In most cases where this has occurred, the town or community likely still be in the same state, but now part of an adjacent county.
 8. In most cases where this has occurred, the town or community likely would still be in the same state, but now part of an adjacent county.
 9. If the area is on the border with a neighboring state or county, check the area immediately across the border. The area may have been absorbed into an adjacent state or county.
 10. The following two print sources are considered excellent tools to supplement research using maps, atlases and gazetteers:
 - a. **Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses 1790-1920** by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide. This title is shelved in the Fort Myers Genealogy Collection under the call number: **Genealogy Reference 911.73 Thorndale.**

Compare the location of the town or community, as you know it, with the appropriate map in the book. This will allow you to find the current county and the city or county that existed at the time your ancestors resided there.

- b. **Ancestry's Red Book:** This title provides detailed information about each county or parish, what records exist, and where to write for access. This will enable you to contact the county or parish record repositories that had jurisdiction over the town or community where your ancestor lived. If older records have been moved to alternative sites, this will be noted.

In many counties where the records have been moved, the pre-1900 records have been transferred to the local genealogical or historical society. Another potential location might be the public library serving the area. This title is shelved in the Fort Myers Genealogy Collection at the following call number: **Genealogy Reference 929.1072 RED.**

Maps, atlases, and gazetteers dating from various historical periods to the present are available and can be located in many of the following places:

1. Academic libraries
2. Courthouses
3. Historical society repositories
4. Internet
5. Public libraries
6. State libraries/archives
7. National Archives
8. Library of Congress

Part One: General Internet Sources

American Geographical Society Library – University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee

<http://www4.uwm.edu/libraries/AGSL/>

Ancestry.com

<http://www.ancestry.com>

Boston Public Library – Norman B. Leventhal Map Collection

<http://www.bpl.org/research/nblmapcenter.htm>

Cyndi's List – Maps and Geography

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

David Rumsey Map Collection Database

<http://www.davidrumsey.com>

Historic Map Works, Residential Genealogy

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

Library of Congress – Geography and Map Reading Room

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/gmpage.html>

Library of Congress – Map Collections

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html>

Map Collections: WWW-Virtual Library: History Map History / History of Cartography: THE Gateway to the Subject

<http://maphistory.info/collections.html>

Maps and Charts: United States Army Corps of Engineers

<http://www.usace.army.mil/Library/MapsandCharts.aspx>

Maps in Family Research

http://www.genealogy.com/56_donna.html

National Archives and Records Administration – Cartographic and Architectural Records

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/26-cartographic.html>

National Archives and Records Administration-Search Hints for Maps and Geographic Materials

<http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/topics/maps/geographic.html>

Public Libraries - Nationwide Listings by State

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

Randy Majors Historical United States County Boundary Maps

<http://www.randymajors.com/p/maps.html>

State Library Websites (all 50 states) – Courtesy of the Wisconsin Department of Instruction

http://www.publiclibraries.com/state_library.htm

Union List of Sanborn & Other Fire Insurance Maps

http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanborn_union_list

United States Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records –

<http://www.glorerecords.blm/gov>

United States Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone Map

<http://planthardiness.ara.usda.gov/PHZMWeb>

United States Gen Web Project – Geographical Information, Maps, and More

<http://usgenweb.org/research/maps.shtml>

United States Geological Survey Library – Map Collection

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

United States Geological Survey Library – The National Map – Historical Topographical Map Collection

<http://nationalmap.gov/historical/index.html>

University of Alabama, Historical Soil Survey Maps (nationwide)

<http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/soilsurvey>

World Map Collection: Project of the University Libraries of Florida

<http://palmm.fcla.edu/map/>

Part Two: State Internet Sources

Alabama

Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama Congressional and Legislative Representation Maps, 1819 – 1960

http://www.archives.alabama.gov/legislat/ala_maps/getstart.html

Alabama Secretary of State, Land Plats Inquiry

<http://arc-sos.state.al.us/cgi/SOSLND01.mbr.optsMENU>

University of Alabama, Cartographic Research Laboratory, Alabama Maps

<http://alabamamaps.ua.edu>

Georgia

Georgia Archives, County and Historical Maps

<http://cdm.georgiaarchives.org:2011/cdm/landingpage/collection/cmf>

(county)

<http://cdm.georgiaarchives.org:2011/cdm/landingpage/collection/hmf>

(historical)

Kentucky

Kentucky Digital Library, Maps (includes a variety of maps, including Sanborn insurance maps)

<http://kdl.kyvl.org/?f%5Bformat%5D%5B%5D=maps>

Kentucky Geography Network

<http://kygeonet.ky.gov>

University of Louisville, Digital Collections, Kentucky Maps

<http://digital.library.louisville.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/maps/>

University of Kentucky, Kentucky Atlas & Gazetteer

<http://uky.edu/KentuckyAtlas/>

Maryland

Baltimore City Archives, The Geography of Baltimore City, Sources

<http://baltimorecityhistory.net/research-at-the-baltimore-city-archives/the-geography-of-baltimore-city-sources/>

Maryland Online – Maps

<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/maps/html/00list.html>

Maryland State Archives, The Study of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland, Interactive Maps

<http://slavery2.msa.maryland.gov/pages/MapsSearch.aspx>

Missouri

Missouri State Archives, Missouri County Plat Books

http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/mdh_splash/default.asp?coll

University of Missouri Library Systems, Digital library, Sanborn Maps for Missouri

<http://digital.library.umsystem.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?page=index;c=umcscsanic>

Mississippi

Mississippi Department of Archives & History, Historical Map Collections

http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/series/maps

North Carolina

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, North Carolina Maps

http://library.unc.edu/wilson/ncc/maps_papers_photos/

South Carolina

University of South Carolina, Digital Collections

Historical Soil Survey Maps of South Carolina

<http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/soilsurvey.html>

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of South Carolina

<http://www.sc.edu/library/digital/collections/sanborn.html>

Topographical Maps of South Carolina, 1888-1975

<http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/topomaps.html>

Tennessee

Tennessee Virtual Archive, TSLA Historical Map Collection

<http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15138coll23>

Virginia

Virginia Center for Digital History (University of Virginia), The Valley of the Shadow, Various Maps

<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/index.php?page=Projects>

<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/ECAI.paper.html>

Virginia Memory Project, Alan M. Voorhees Map Collection

<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/voorhees/>

https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn4_maps.pdf

West Virginia

West Virginia Historical Maps

<http://www.mapofus.org/westvirginia/>

https://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/west_virginia.html

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Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, c1995.
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Chambers World Gazetteer: An A-Z of Geographic Information. 5th Edition,
Cambridge, England: Chambers, c1988. **Genealogy Reference 910.3 CHA**

Collier's World Atlas & Gazetteer. New York, NY: Collier & Son, c1949.
Genealogy Reference 912 COL

Florida Atlas & Gazetteer. 3rd Edition. Freeport, ME: DeLorme Publishing,
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NOTE: This study guide is meant to serve as an overview or outline for patrons using the genealogy collection at Fort Myers Regional Library. The compiler emphasizes that the information contained in this study guide should not serve as a substitute for taking the time to read one of the books or articles cited in the bibliography, or attend lectures given by the subject specialists cited as authors.

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