Genealogy resources in libraries
WorldCat helpful hints

Libraries house a wealth of unique family and local history archives that support genealogical research. WorldCat represents a “collective collection” of the world’s libraries, expanded and enhanced through the efforts of librarians and individual, regional and national programs.

What kind of resources can I find in WorldCat?

Through WorldCat, you can identify more primary source materials in libraries than through any other service, such as:

- historic newspapers from the U.S. and other countries
- historic photographs, including digitized ones
- family Bibles, church histories and records
- cemetery and burial records
- Civil War and other military records
- town histories and probate records
- general genealogical resources, such as directories, handbooks and magazines
- slavery and antislavery materials and slave records
- indexes of births, marriages, deaths, wills and obituaries
- microfilmed genealogy and local history collections

In addition to library resources, WorldCat contains more than one million records from FamilySearch, a nonprofit family history organization with the largest collection of genealogical and historic records in the world. This gives you depth and breadth into genealogical resources that you won’t find anywhere else.

What if I find something that’s not in my library?

Ask your librarian if interlibrary loan is an option, or ask if the other library could make a photocopy or scan the applicable portions of the material for you.

Drive to a library that owns the material, if it’s close enough, so you can examine the material in person. Find library location information on worldcat.org/libraries.

Locate a researcher near the other library who would be willing to visit the library and determine if the material is useful for you.

WorldCat is a cooperatively maintained catalog for libraries worldwide to share cataloging work and collections. This collaboration helps embed library information into modern research processes so people can discover resources of all formats in libraries nearby and worldwide.
How do I access WorldCat’s genealogical resources?

Ask your librarian how to best access WorldCat. Many libraries use WorldCat Discovery Services or an earlier version of this service called FirstSearch®. WorldCat Discovery offers more modern and streamlined search options, but both services search the entire WorldCat database. In both services, you can see resources in libraries near you, across the country and around the world.

Your librarian may also direct you to WorldCat.org™, which you can access from any computer with an Internet connection. WorldCat.org searches the entire WorldCat database and shows you which libraries have the resources you’re looking for. (Note that only libraries with a WorldCat Discovery subscription will appear in your list of libraries.)

Helpful hints for searching WorldCat

To get the best results with your WorldCat search, use quotation marks and follow these tips.

- Family names: Enter the family name followed by the word “family,” e.g., “marsh family.”
- Specific person: Enter the person’s full name, e.g., “andrew jackson.”
- Organizations: Enter terms to describe the organization, e.g., “presbyterian.”
- Geographic locations: For place names within the U.S., search the place name in combination with the abbreviated and full state name, e.g., “union springs ny” and “union springs new york.”

Narrow your search results by:

- returning to the main search page and entering more specific search terms, e.g., “marsh family bible”; or
- including multiple search terms in one search, e.g., “presbyterian” and “baltimore md.”

Keep in mind that WorldCat won’t search for spelling variants, so try different variations if needed.

Visit oc.lc/genealogy to learn more.

Find answers to common questions, read success stories and get advice on how to use WorldCat in your genealogical research.