

# Digging in the Digital Archive: Discovering Your Family's History in Digital Collections

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Digital collections are a great way to discover the details of your ancestors' lives by finding more about the places they lived, the jobs they held, and the communities they were active in, all from the comfort of your own house.

## **Types of places that hold digital collections:**

1. Libraries (Local, State, National, College/Universities)
2. Local History Organizations
3. Museums and Other Cultural Non-Profits

## **Types of materials that can be found:**

Historic photographs, correspondence, family bibles, diaries, maps, oral histories, newsletters, postcards, family cookbooks, and many more!

## **Why use digital collections in genealogy research?**

Sometimes you can get lucky and find a document or object directly related to your ancestors. Even if you are not so fortunate, digital collections can still give you an idea of the general social and historical environment your ancestors lived in.

## **Search tips:**

- Start with a broad basic search and narrow your results using filtering on facets such as date, location, and object type.
- Try various combinations of your search terms and use search operators such as quotes for exact terms and asterisk as a wildcard.
- Check to see if OCR being used in the primary search box. If not, you may want to browse objects manually or conduct a search using OCR if it is an option.
- If you are looking for something specific, used advanced search filters to focus on one collection or media type.

## **How to search an entire website for keywords:**

In the web browser (Chrome, Safari, Firefox) URL bar type:

[Search Terms] site:[www.exampleurl.com/]

Example:

Fred Rogers site:www.pittsburghhistory.com/index/

Note: This search feature does not work for all webpages and may miss some matches.

### **A basic plan for using digital collections:**

1. Identify the qualities of your ancestors that you'd like to use to explore online collections. Some ideas include:
  - a. Surname
  - b. Location
  - c. Ethnicity
  - d. Group Association
  - e. Profession
  - f. Major Life Events
2. Find relevant digital collections
  - a. Google is your friend! Search using the terms identified in step 1.
  - b. Look for libraries, universities, and historic societies close to where your ancestors lived.
2. Search and Browse the collection using the tips and techniques listed above. Use filters and sorting to help find relevant information.

### **Digital collections aggregators:**

Digital collections aggregators are powerful tools used to search across many different databases with a single search. Below are three popular examples:

Digital Public Library of America: <https://dp.la>

This site provides access to digital resources from an extensive network of American libraries from one search box

Europeana: <https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en>

A collection of digital resources from various European libraries, archives, and museums

The Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/>

A large archive of digital material, including over 28 million books and texts