



Digging in the Digital Archive

USING DIGITAL COLLECTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

Download slides & handout:
<https://deepgenes.com/downloads>

DEEP
— GENEALOGICAL —
SERVICES

Kristin Britanik, Cranberry Genealogy Club Program, 27 January 2021

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What is a Digital Collection?

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An online database of digital objects that can include text, still images, audio, video, or other digital media formats. Objects can consist of digitized content like print or photographs, as well as originally produced digital content like word processor files or social media posts.

In addition to storing content, digital libraries provide means for organizing, searching, and retrieving the content contained in the collection.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_library

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Who creates digital collections?

- Libraries
- Local Historical Societies
- Non-profits and Museums



University of Pittsburgh



New York Public Library



CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY



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Judge Magazine Front cover, Vol. 88, no. 2254
<https://digitalcollections.nysl.org/items/1aaa2fd0-1f90-0134-9154-00505686a51c>

How can digital collections enhance my research?

- If you're lucky, help you find vital record information and break down brickwalls
- Fill in more descriptive information about your ancestors' lives
 - Learn about where they lived, worked, and what they did for fun
- Give you a general idea of the social and historical environment your ancestors were living in.

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Verso. Pennsylvania, 20 shillings, 1773
https://digitalcollections.library.harvard.edu/catalog/W362629_urn-3:HBS.Baker.AC:1083653

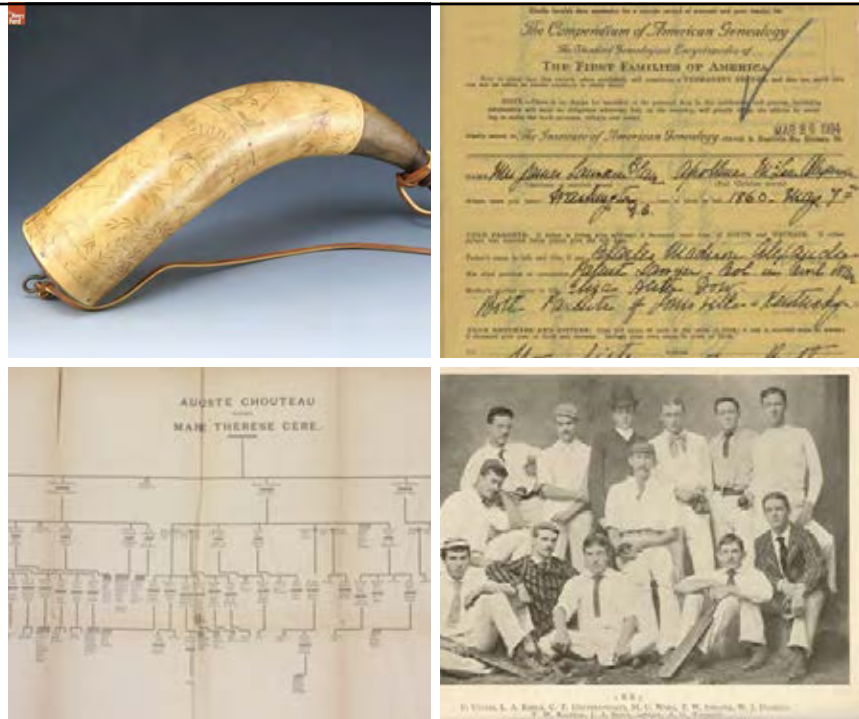
How are they different than genealogy websites?

- Usually free!
- Serves a wider audience than just genealogists
- More diverse range of document and source types
- Typically not indexed in the same way

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What types of documents can I find?



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Historic Photographs

"Sunshine"

<https://historicpittsburgh.org/islandora/object/pitt%3A9119B.XXV.12.SH>

Retrographer Project: Historic photographs of Pittsburgh on a Map

<http://retrographer.org/>

Hosted by the University of Pittsburgh Library System

HISTORIC PITTSBURGH

Home Collections Exhibits Chronology Finding Aids Partners Search all collections

"Sunshine"

June 1918
[View this item](#)



Title	"Sunshine"
Creator	Shourek, Edward J.
Date	June 1918
Identifier	9119B.XXV.12.SH
Description	A view of Lettie "Sunshine" Burnette
Place of Publication	Unknown
Type	still image
Subject	Portraits. Girls.
Geographic Subjects	Unknown
Contributor	University of Pittsburgh

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Correspondence

Benson Family Papers

<https://repository.duke.edu/dc/bensonfamilypapers-002045970>

Benson family papers

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

Contact

Limit your search

Year

1810 1811 1812 1813 1814

Format

Subject

Language

Location

Creator

SOURCE COLLECTION

This digital collection comprises selected materials from the following archival collection at David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library:

Benson family papers 1810-1813


Collection #RL30198 | 9 items

ABSTRACT

Letters from Thomas Benson of Kentucky and Ohio to his mother, sister Catherine, and brother John in Philadelphia in which he discusses family news and his conditions in Ohio and Kentucky. He speaks favorably of emigration to Kentucky. Included is a description of the siege of Fort Meigs on the Maumee River in Ohio during the War of 1812. Thomas Benson was wounded during this siege.

Collection Guide »

ITEMS IN THIS DIGITAL COLLECTION (1)



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Family Bibles

Family Bible Records Collection

University of South Carolina Libraries

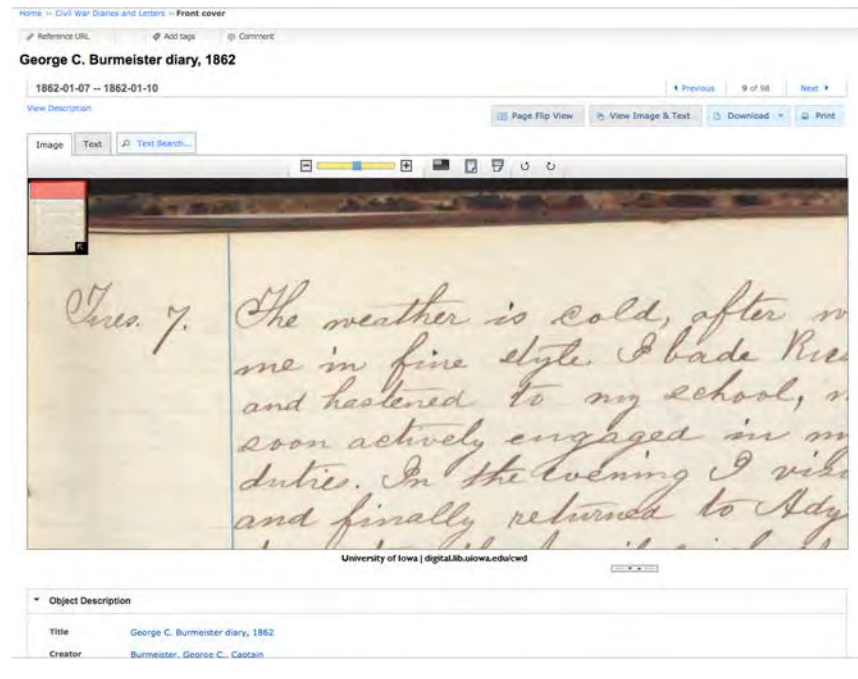
<http://digital.library.sc.edu/collections/family-bible-records/>



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Diaries

George C. Burmeister diary, 1862
https://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/islandora/object/ui%3Aatstc%3A28402_2_7



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Maps

Central Business District
<https://historicpittsburgh.org/islandora/object/pitt%3A20091019-hopkins-0006/viewer>

Map Demo:
<https://historicpittsburgh.org/>



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Oral Histories

Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/voices-remembering-slavery/about-this-collection/>

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

This Collection Search Loc.gov

Library of Congress > Digital Collections > Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories > About this Collection

COLLECTION
Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories

About this Collection Collection Items Articles and Essays

Featured Content

Interview with Uncle Billy McCrea, Jasper, Texas, 1940 (part 2 ...

Interview with Fountain Hughes, Baltimore, Maryland, June 11, ...

Interview with Alice Gaston, Gee's Bend, Alabama, 1941

Interview with Dave White, St. Simons Island, Georgia, July 26, ...

Interview with Susan A. Quail, Johns Island, South Carolina, May...

About this Collection

Listen to this page

About this Collection

The recordings of former slaves in *Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories* took place between 1932 and 1975 in nine states. Twenty-three interviewees discuss how they felt about slavery, slaveholders, coercion of slaves, their families, and freedom. Each individual's time and place of birth are listed, as is the time of their enslavement. It is important to note

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Newsletters

The Echo

<https://historicpittsburgh.org/islandora/object/pitt%3A86083190/viewer#page/1/mode/2up>

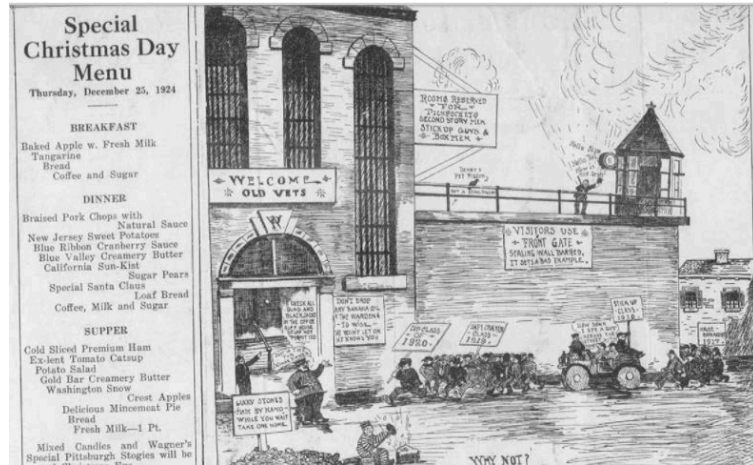


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Newsletters

The Echo

<https://historicpittsburgh.org/islandora/object/pitt%3A86083190/viewer#page/10/mode/2up>



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Newsletters

The Echo

<https://historicpittsburgh.org/islandora/object/pitt%3A86083190/viewer#page/24/mode/2up>

https://digitalarchives.powerlibrary.org/psa/islandora/object/psa%3A532165?overlay_query=RELS_EXT_isMemberOfCollection_uri_ms%3A%22info%3Afedora/psa%3Aacdardpa57%22

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THE ECHO

Devoted to the interests of Prisoners everywhere.

Published monthly by the inmates of the Western State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania.

Subscriptions, One Dollar a year. To inmates free.

Address all communications to A. N. Dunsmore, Director of Education, Box A, N. S. Station, Pittsburgh, Pa.

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Postcards

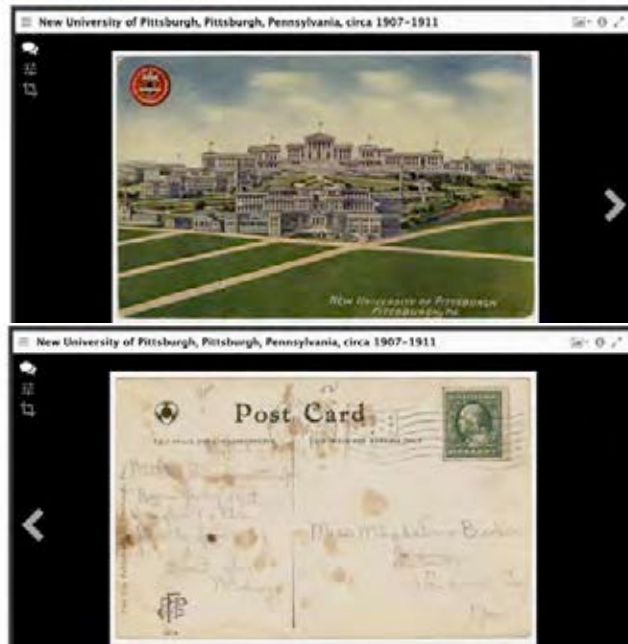
New University of Pittsburgh,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, circa 1907-
1911

<https://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/18840>

New University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, circa 1907-1911

1907-1911 · Print · color · Author full details · Request from Special Collections

To view or print an item from this item, use this identifier:
https://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/18840

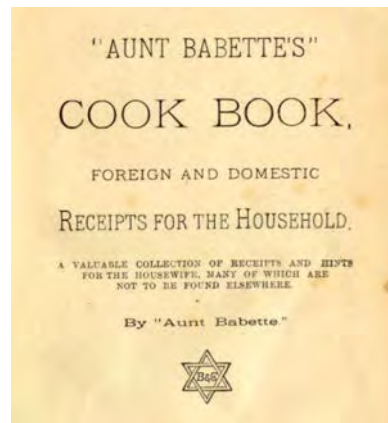


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Cookbooks

"Aunt Babette's Cook Book"

<https://n2t.net/ark:/85335/m5cq2b>



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Scripture natural history & zoology (puzzle pieces in wooden box)

<https://cdm16786.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/childrens/id/812>

Figuring out the Puzzle

Using digital sources for family history research is like putting together a puzzle...

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Japanese Macaque Print

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AW4FFMJZQJVNZ78X/full/AXVNDGQ24YL23L8Z>

Metadata

Metadata is descriptive information about a digital image or object

- Title
- Date
- Subject
- Location

Usually standardized so that digital images can be easily found and searched across multiple platforms

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Metadata

Title
Buffalo Bill

Photographer
Bunker & Atwell, Press Photographers, Chicago

Date Created
1900 (approximate)

Subject
Actors--Photographs

Description
Col. Cody Buffalo Bill saluting farewell; Costumed, on horseback.

Type of Resource
still image

Media Type
jpg

Medium
Gelatin silver prints

Size
6.25" x 8.00"

Source
Louisiana State University Libraries, Special Collections. (<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/>)

Digital Collection
Actors and Musicians Photographs, 1880-1920

Repository Collection
Actors and Musicians Photographs (Misc. 2116).

Repository Collection Guide
<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/sites/default/files/sc/findaid/2116.pdf>

LOUISIANA
DIGITAL LIBRARY


Buffalo Bill

Louisiana State University / Actors and Musicians Photographs, 1880-1920

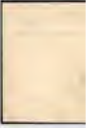
DETAILS SHARE

COMPOUND OBJECT

Buffalo Bill



Buffalo Bill



DESCRIPTION + TAGS



Col. Cody Buffalo Bill saluting farewell; Costumed, on horseback.

ACTORS--PHOTOGRAPHS

Back to Collection

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Metadata

ITEM DATA CITE THIS ITEM

TITLE

Eskimo puppies.

COLLECTION

Cigarette cards
└ Arctic Sights.

DATES / ORIGIN

Place: U.K.

LIBRARY LOCATIONS

George Arents Collection
Shelf locator: Arents Cigarette Cards

TOPICS

Arctic regions
none
Ardath Tobacco Company

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Challenges in Searching

Coverage is dependent on how the institution gets the material. Libraries, archives, and non-profits can have broad or narrow collecting policies.

Example:

Bureau of Police, Department of Public Safety, Pittsburgh, Pa., Records, 1896-1936 AIS.1972.11

Custodial History

These records were discovered abandoned in the loft of the King's Court, 3807 Forbes Avenue, which at one time was the headquarters of the No. 4 (Oakland) police station. Mike Coon, Jack Simpson, and Art Harger, owners of a copying service on the third floor of King's Court and renters of the loft, gave these records to the Archives Service Center.

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Challenges in Searching

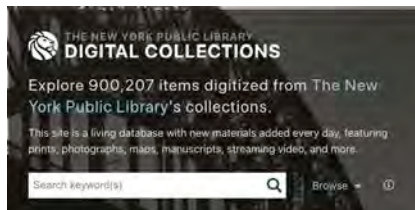


- Functionality and search capability vary widely by each different site
- Limitations of metadata cataloging: Family Bible, Family Record, Genealogy Chart, Family Tree, Family Register. All ways to describe the same object
- Metadata is imperfect

Charley Wallace, prospector
<https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt000016kh/?brand=oac4>

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Basic Search



- Most sites have a search box on the main page where you can enter in search terms and all fields across all digital objects
- Some sites only let you search at preset collection levels
- Basic searching often returns a lot of results that will then have to be narrowed down using filters to weed out unnecessary results
- Try a variety of search terms

Historic Pittsburgh Demo



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Advanced Search

Select certain metadata fields and search only those fields

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Full Text Search

Many digital collections make typewritten text searchable using Optical Character Recognition (OCR)

OCR is far from perfect

Only works for standard typewritten text

It is not always searched by default in digital collections



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Original

Report of the Kingsley Association

[Go to item description](#)



OCR

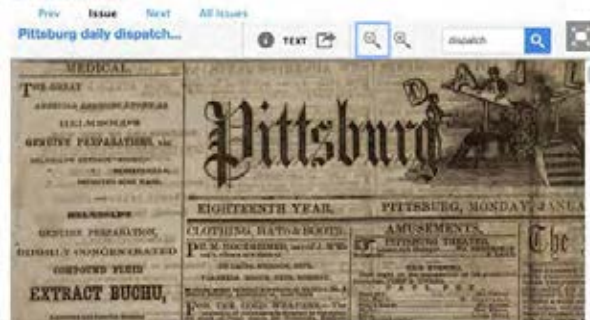
illegible text from the original document. The text is garbled and difficult to read, likely due to OCR errors. The visible text includes: "illegible text from the original document. The text is garbled and difficult to read, likely due to OCR errors. The visible text includes: Another year of our work has come and gone. We firmly believe that these past twelve months have been productive of much good to many of our Kingsley boys and girls, who are to be future men and women of Greater Pittsburgh. To detail the work of Kingsley House Association in a brief report would be as impossible as it is unnecessary. The "Record," published monthly under the auspices of the Association, keeps us all familiar with the progress that is constantly being made. I express the hope that this pamphlet be carefully read, as it comes to you from month to month. A Kingsley House Association is not merely a building on Bedford Avenue used as an assembly place for 1,500 to 2,000 boys and girls who can there study the

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Original

The Pittsburg daily dispatch

Go to item description



OCR

L A L A :LAL.*..A.'..A:..'.Ah....._....._ « ANTED A—
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 WA3H _ L - L A used as a stud .near Grant or Ross
 and Third sts. L A A L A L «L -: AAAA LALLAAAAA
 AAAAAAA 'A

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Full Text Search Tips

Try a variety of combinations of your search terms.

Use Search Operators:

Quotes for exact matching

* Denotes a wildcard, meaning it will match any character



Woman with man looking at Fair site map

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5e66b3e9-1393-d471-e040-e00a180654d7>

Searching for Fred Rogers:

- Fred Rogers
- "Fred Rogers" or "Rogers Fred"
- Rogers
- "F. Rogers"
- Rog*

If the quality is poor, browse records manually as you would the original objects. Check for indexes.

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Browsing Digital Collections

Given the difficulty in making collections fully discoverable (OCR limitations and challenges of cataloging and creating metadata) sometimes it's better to **browse** collections to explore.

Look for the terms **Browse, Explore, View All** or if you can't find those features put the * character in the search box.

Browsing can be narrowed by filters (or facets) created based on metadata. Filter by fields such as date, creator, location, subject

[NYPL Demo](#)

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Non-Digitized Collections

Just because it isn't online doesn't mean it's not accessible

Archivist create **finding aids** to make items more discoverable

There are tools that allow you to search finding aids across many collections. www.archivegrid.org

If you find something that might help your research, contact the institution to find out more and how to access the collection

Even if it's long distance, some institutions may have a process for lookups

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Finding Aids

[PHMC Demo](#)

The screenshot shows the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission website. The main heading is "Personal Papers, 1828-1861, undated | Pennsylvania State Archives". Below this, it says "By Archives Staff". The "Collection Overview" section includes:

- Title:** Personal Papers, 1828-1861, undated
- ID:** MG/117/1
- Primary Creator:** Spencer, John (1802-1884)
- Extent:** 0.0 - [More Info Below](#)
- Arrangement:** Papers are filed alphabetically by type, then chronologically thereafter.

 The "Scope and Contents of the Materials" section describes the collection as containing John Spencer's correspondence to his father, William Spencer, discussing health, personal matters, the climate and religious affairs; and letters to and from Spencer to other ministers conversing about religious services and publications, the preaching of other ministers, the health of friends and relatives, and economic conditions. It also mentions a letter from John Spencer to Reverend Samuel Swan, dated January 21, 1832, requesting an explanation of a book on Methodism that Swan had written. Two notable items among his minister papers include a note regarding the debate between Owen and Campbell held in Cincinnati in 1829, which was subsequently published; and an account list of subscriptions to buy and free the wife and children of John Hughes, a freed man in Pennsylvania. The newspapers included in the collection are pages from the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate (Pennsylvania), August 20, 1845; the Wellsville Union School Offering (Ohio), March 3, 1852; and The Wellsville Patriot (Ohio), July 16, 1861.

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Web Page Search Tip

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the query "Jones site:https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu". The search bar shows the query and the Google logo. Below the search bar, it says "About 710 results (0.38 seconds)". The results are listed as follows:

- Jones and Williams Family Genealogical Chart, 1937.**
<https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/02949/>
 Abstract, Allen Jones (born 1887) and his wife, Helen Iredell (Williams) Jones, were both from prominent North and South Carolina families. The collection is a ...
- Jones and Patterson Family Papers, 1777-1933**
<https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/00578/>
 Edmund Jones (1771-1844) of Wilkes County, N.C., and later Caldwell County, was a state legislator almost continuously from 1798 to 1838. Jones was a ...
- Cadwallader Jones Iredell Papers, 1856-1865.**
<https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/00363/>
 Abstract, Cadwallader Jones Iredell was a captain in the 1st North Carolina Cavalry Regiment, Confederate States of America. The collection includes letters, ...

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Digital Collections Aggregators

DPLA

Digital Public
Libraries of
America



Europeana

Managed by the
European union



Archive.org

Non-profit



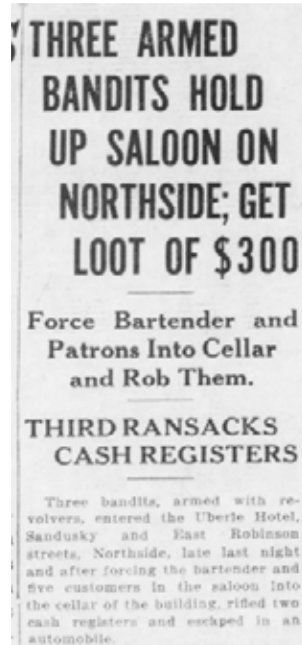
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Basic Plan for Using Digital Collections

1. Identify 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!
 - b. Look for libraries and universities close to where your ancestors lived.
3. Search and Browse the collection using the tips and techniques outlined in this presentation.

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Case Study: Mugshots



While searching newspapers, I learned Max T. Ruff was a bartender who was robbed stick-up style on 6 February 1919 in Pittsburgh. Further newspaper searches revealed Peter Coops and John Snyder were the perpetrators.

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Case Study: Mugshots

I wondered if there were any police records for the City of Pittsburgh during that time that might have a police report with more information.

So I searched Historic Pittsburgh for police records. I only searched the words **Police** and then another for **Crime**. I knew that Historic Pittsburgh was limited to Pittsburgh area records only.



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Case Study: Mugshots

I narrowed the search results based where Type of Object = Finding Aid.

- a. In the results I found a promising record for Guide to the Bureau of Police, Department of Public Safety, Pittsburgh, Pa., Records, 1896-1936 AIS.1972.11
- b. Within this record I found that the Criminal Photograph Album from 1919-1920 has been digitized (note it's not classified as mugshots)
- c. I opened the record and fortunately it had an index and I could look up the surnames Snyder and Coops

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Questions?

Contact: Kristin@deepgenes.com

Download Slides & Handout:
<https://deepgenes.com/downloads>

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