

# **Introduction to Genealogy at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) 2014 National Archives Virtual Genealogy Fair**

Claire Kluskens, Reference and Projects Archivist  
National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC

## **Federal Records for Genealogical Research**

Laid side to side, pages in our holdings would circle the Earth over 57 times! Only a small percentage is available for research online—or even on microfilm. Our web site offers tools and guides to help locate records that may be useful to you.

Family history researchers commonly use these records, some of which will be discussed in the 2014 Virtual Genealogy Fair.

- 1. Federal Population Census, 1790–1940.** Taken every 10 years, census records are the basic building block for tracing a family through time. For more information, see [www.archives.gov/research/census](http://www.archives.gov/research/census). Digital images are available on Ancestry.com, HeritageQuest.com (through public library websites), and FamilySearch.org.
  
- 2. Compiled Military Service Records (CMSRs)** for veterans of conflicts from the Revolutionary War (1775–83) through Philippine Insurrection (1899–1902). Digital images are available online at Fold3.com for Revolutionary War, Civil War (Union—selected states), and Civil War (Confederate). CMSRs for veterans of the War of 1812, Mexican War, Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection must be ordered from NARA or viewed in the National Archives Building. For more information about Civil War CMSRs and other records, see [www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/resources.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/resources.html). For information about obtaining military records, see [www.archives.gov/research/military](http://www.archives.gov/research/military).
  
- 3. Military pension records** for veterans of conflicts from the Revolutionary War through Philippine Insurrection. Digital images for Revolutionary War pensions, War of 1812 (selected files), and Civil War (Union—selected files) are online at Fold3.com.  
*Note:* Confederate pensions are held by state archives. For more information, see [www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/confederate/pension.html/](http://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/confederate/pension.html/)

4. **Military draft registration records.**
  - Civil War.** See [www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1994/winter/civil-war-draft-records.html](http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1994/winter/civil-war-draft-records.html) for information. Digital images are available at Ancestry.com.
  - World War I.** See [www.archives.gov/research/military/ww1/draft-registration](http://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww1/draft-registration) for information. Digital images are available at Ancestry.com.
  - World War II.** See [www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/draft-cards-fourth-registration.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/draft-cards-fourth-registration.pdf) for more information.
5. **Immigration records.** Passenger lists of vessels arriving at seaports and lists of persons crossing the U.S.-Canada (1895–1950s) and U.S.-Mexico (1903–1950s) land borders document the arrival of aliens to the United States. See [www.archives.gov/research/immigration/passenger-arrival.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/passenger-arrival.html) for more information.
6. **Naturalization records.** Naturalization is the process by which an alien becomes an American citizen. Depending upon when the record was created, the record may provide a researcher with information such as a person's birth date and location, occupation, immigration year, marital status and spouse information, witnesses' names and addresses, and more. See [www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/naturalization.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/naturalization.html) for more information.
7. **Federal land records** document the transfer of public lands from the U.S. Government to private ownership, whether by cash sale, homestead, or by a military bounty land warrant. See [www.archives.gov/research/land/](http://www.archives.gov/research/land/) for more information.
8. **Post Office Records** about the appointment of postmasters and other Post Office Department employee records. Some records are on microfilm, some are not. See [www.archives.gov/research/federal-employees/reference-reports/515-post-office-employees.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/research/federal-employees/reference-reports/515-post-office-employees.pdf) for more information.
9. **Native American records** consist of lists, censuses, school records, and other materials about persons who maintained their affiliation with a Federally-recognized tribe. See [www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/](http://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/) for more information.
10. **How Did *Your* Ancestor Interact with the Federal Government?** There may be a record.

## Suggestions and Advice for Family History Researchers

1. **Start with yourself.** Organize your knowledge. Fill out a five-generation ancestry chart and a family group sheet for each ancestral couple. Organize and study any family papers you have.

Five-generation chart: [archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms/ancestral-chart.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms/ancestral-chart.pdf)

Family group sheet: [archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms/family-group-sheet.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms/family-group-sheet.pdf)

2. **Talk with your relatives.** They may know information about your ancestors that you don't know.
3. **Begin your census research with the 1940 census and work your way backwards. Find all members of the extended family for a complete picture of the family.** The more you know about the whole family, the easier it will be to work yourself around "brick walls."
4. **Use the clues you find in one record to help you locate other records.** For example, the 1920 census might indicate your immigrant ancestor arrived in the U.S. in 1901 and naturalized in 1907. Those are good clues—but don't expect them to be 100% accurate.
5. **Census, military service, military pension, immigration, naturalization, and land records** are some of the most useful Federal Records for genealogical research. Other Federal records may be useful to you depending on what relationships your ancestors had with various federal agencies. Read more on the National Archives website, [www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/index.html](https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/index.html)
6. **Birth and death records** have been kept by state bureaus of vital statistics since "about" 1900. (The year that state registration began varies by state.) Contact the state archives or appropriate state agency. Birth and death records before 1900 may have been kept at county records offices.
7. **Marriage, divorce, land, mortgage, tax, voter registration, and other records** were kept by county records offices. Contact the appropriate office or state or county archives. Some records may also be available on microfilm rental through local Family History Centers. See <https://familysearch.org> for more information (click on "search" then "catalog" then do a place name search for the county).
8. **Libraries have local history and genealogy collections.** You'll find published records of all types, compiled genealogies, and local newspapers on microfilm.
9. **Learn... then learn more....** Read books and online articles on how to do genealogical research. Join genealogical societies (national, state, and local, both where you live and where your ancestors lived). Attend your local genealogy society meetings and classes.

10. **The name may not be spelled in various records as *you* expect it to be spelled.** Be flexible. For example, Hayford might be Heyford, Hafford, Haford, Hefford, Heford, and so forth. Remember that immigrants' first names may be in their native language, for example: John might be Jan, Ivan, Iwan, Johannes, Johann, and so forth, depending on his native language—or the native language of the person creating the record.
11. **Many people had the same or similar names** so don't assume that the person is your ancestor. Distinguish between same-named people based on all the clues from all the records you find. Does it make sense? If your ancestor "always" lived in Baltimore, he probably didn't become naturalized in Nebraska....
12. **Write your family history as you go....** Don't wait for someday. Analyzing what you've found and writing it down will help you become a better researcher. Share your writings with other family members. Publish in genealogical society publications.

## **The National Archives Website—An Overview**

Laid side to side, pages in our holdings would circle the Earth over 57 times! Only a small percentage is available for research online—or even on microfilm. Our web site offers tools and guides to help you locate records that may be useful to you. To complete your research and use the records, you should want to visit us.

NARA Home Page

[www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)

Splash page with lots of links to the most popular parts of the website

NARA Genealogy Home Page

[www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/index.html)

Reference Reports for Genealogical Research

[www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/reference-reports.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/reference-reports.html)

Official NARA 1940 Census Page

[1940census.archives.gov/](http://1940census.archives.gov/)

Official NARA 1940 Census Information

[www.archives.gov/research/census/1940/](http://www.archives.gov/research/census/1940/)

*Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1995), 3 vols., free online version at [www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records](http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records)

**Online Public Access (OPA)** [www.archives.gov/research/search/](http://www.archives.gov/research/search/). Online catalog of NARA's nationwide holdings. OPA allows you to perform a keyword, digitized image, and location search. OPA's advanced functions also allow you to search by organization, person, or topic. The content continues to grow.... Do visit again....

Access to Archival Databases (AAD) System

[www.archives.gov/aad](http://www.archives.gov/aad)

AAD has approximately 475 data files. AAD gives you:

- \* Access to over 85 million historic electronic records created by more than 30 agencies of the U.S. federal government and from collections of donated historical materials.
- \* Both free-text and fielded searching options.
- \* The ability to retrieve, print, and download records with the specific information that you seek.
- \* Information to help you find and understand the records.
- \* AAD highlights: Various series regarding military personnel in World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam Conflict; also Irish Famine Immigrants (1840s).

NARA How to Obtain Copies of Records

[www.archives.gov/research/order/#genie](http://www.archives.gov/research/order/#genie)

Tells you your options: online, by mail, in person, by hiring a private researcher....

Order Online!

<https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>

"Made to order" reproductions of original records are done in specific response to information you provide during the ordering process for these records:

- \*Census Pages
- \*Immigration Records
- \*Land Files
- \*Military Service and Pension Records
- \*Native American Records

Microfilm Catalog: (Order Online)

<https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/>

Our microfilm catalog is online. Click on the microfilm tab. Using advanced search, you can search for microfilm by number, title, keyword, record group, and other features. When you find a title of interest, click on the title, then click on important publication details which will allow you to download a PDF file of the descriptive pamphlet or roll list. Note: You do NOT have to register or buy anything.

New NARA Microfilm Publications Issued in 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, and 2000

[www.archives.gov/genealogy/microfilm/2011.html](http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/microfilm/2011.html) gets you to the 2011 page and you can go to previous years from there. The current year (and previous years) are updated from time to time. This will help you figure out what's new.

General Information Leaflet 17, Citing Records in the National Archives of the United States, [www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/17-citing-records.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/17-citing-records.pdf) will help you craft a citation so that you and future researchers find that great nugget again.

*Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration*  
[www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/](http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/)

### **Prologue Genealogy Notes Page**

[www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/genealogy-notes.html](http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/genealogy-notes.html)

If you don't read *Prologue*, you are missing a great deal of useful information about unique and useful records.

NARA Archives Library Information Center (ALIC)

[www.archives.gov/research/alic/](http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/)

ALIC is more than a traditional library. ALIC provides access to information on American history and government, archival administration, information management, and government documents. Physical library locations are in the National Archives Buildings in Washington, DC, and in College Park, MD.

Guides to Research by Selected Topic

[www.archives.gov/research/topics/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/topics/index.html)

Links to information about selected topics in NARA records. Please note that this represents only a small fraction of possible research topics in the records of the National Archives.

NARA's Regional Archives Selected Guides and Research Aids

[www.archives.gov/research/guides/regional-resource-aids.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/guides/regional-resource-aids.html)

Links you to lots of guide to records held by our 13 Regional Archives.

NARA Publications Home Page

[www.archives.gov/publications/](http://www.archives.gov/publications/)

Links you to information about free and fee publications from NARA.

NARA Published In-Print or Online Finding Aids

[www.archives.gov/publications/finding-aids.html](http://www.archives.gov/publications/finding-aids.html)

Links to available Guides, Inventories, Preliminary Inventories, Reference Information Papers, and Special Lists.

NARA Digital Classroom (Educators and Students) Homepage

[www.archives.gov/education/](http://www.archives.gov/education/)

The Teaching with Documents link gets you to lesson plans on various aspects of U.S. history. Brush up on your own education and see some great historical records here.

NARA Calendar of Events

[www.archives.gov/calendar/](http://www.archives.gov/calendar/)

Speakers, movies, and more, and mostly free!

NARA Online Exhibit Hall

[www.archives.gov/exhibits/](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/)

Index to the Final Rolls of Citizens and Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory (Dawes Roll)

[www.archives.gov/research/arc/native-americans-final-rolls.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/native-americans-final-rolls.html)

Index to the Applications Submitted for the Eastern Cherokee Roll of 1909 (Guion Miller Roll)

[www.archives.gov/research/arc/native-americans-guion-miller.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/native-americans-guion-miller.html)

World War II Casualty Lists

[www.archives.gov/research/arc/ww2/](http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/ww2/)

Guide to the Records of the U.S. Senate at the National Archives (Washington, DC: 1989) (Record Group 46) is online at [www.archives.gov/legislative/guide/senate/table-of-contents-short.html](http://www.archives.gov/legislative/guide/senate/table-of-contents-short.html)

Guide to the Records of the U.S. House of Representatives at the National Archives (Washington, DC: 1898) (Record Group 233) is online at

[www.archives.gov/legislative/guide/house/table-of-contents-short.html](http://www.archives.gov/legislative/guide/house/table-of-contents-short.html)

Blogs

Blogs about records in various parts of the National Archives

[www.archives.gov/social-media/blogs.html](http://www.archives.gov/social-media/blogs.html)

National Archives on.....

Facebook—US National Archives

[www.facebook.com/pages/Nationwide/US-National-Archives/128463482993](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Nationwide/US-National-Archives/128463482993)

Facebook—Research at the US National Archives

[www.facebook.com/pages/Research-at-the-US-National-Archives/129424269765](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Research-at-the-US-National-Archives/129424269765)

Flickr

[www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/)

Twitter

[twitter.com/archivesnews](http://twitter.com/archivesnews)

YouTube

[www.youtube.com/USNationalArchives](http://www.youtube.com/USNationalArchives)

**What's on "Partner" sites—(some of the) Microfilm Publications and Original Records Digitized by Our Digitization Partners**

[www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners.html](http://www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners.html)