

Using the Legacy National Archives Catalog

The following help page is for the legacy National Archives Catalog. After November 21, 2022 the legacy Catalog will no longer be updated and will not accept Citizen Archivist contributions. The legacy Catalog will be sunsetted in March of 2023. For help with the new National Archives Catalog, please [visit https://www.archives.gov/research/catalog/help/](https://www.archives.gov/research/catalog/help/)

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What is the National Archives Catalog?

The National Archives Catalog is the online portal to the records held at the National Archives, and information about those records. It is the main way of describing our holdings and also provides access to electronic records and digitized versions of our holdings.

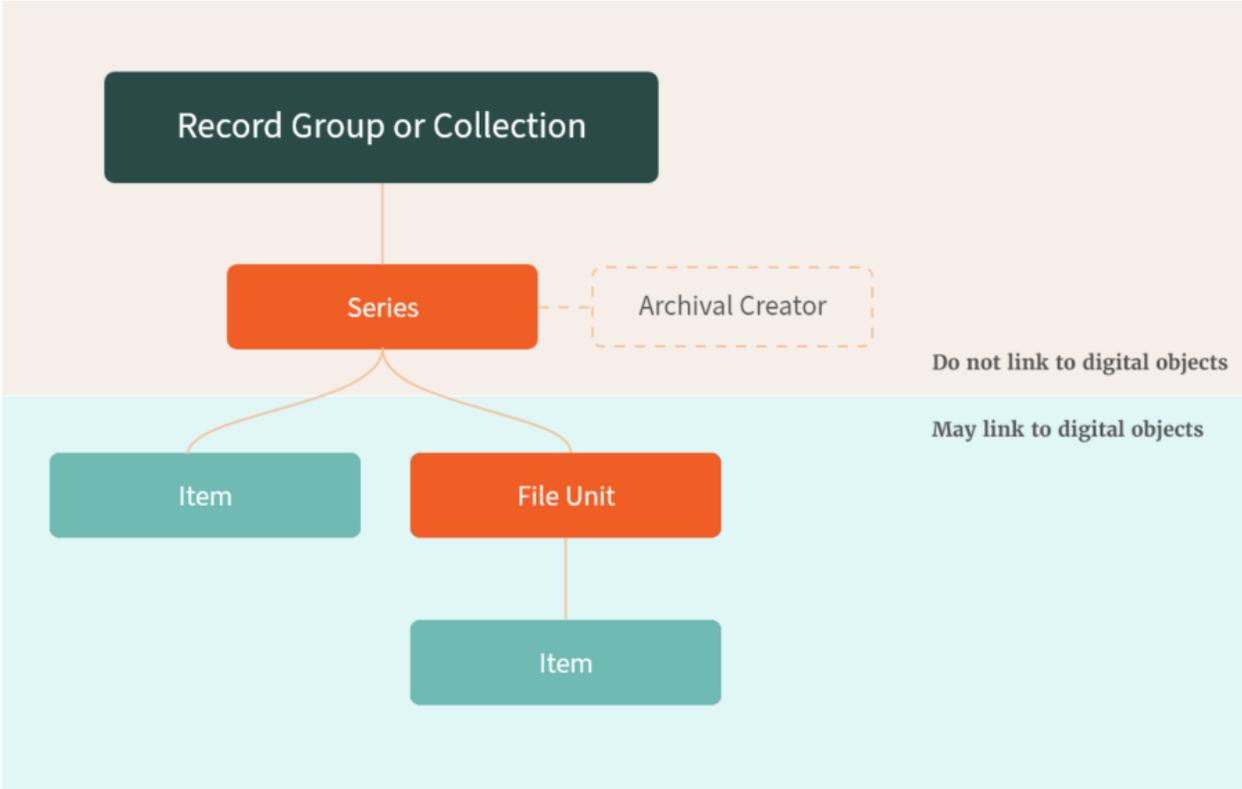
The Catalog searches across multiple National Archives resources at once, including archival descriptions, digitized and electronic records, authority records, and web pages from Archives.gov and the Presidential Libraries. The Catalog also allows users to contribute to digitized historical records through tagging and transcription.

What does the Catalog contain?

The Catalog currently contains archival descriptions of the National Archives' holdings, authority records, and millions of digitized and electronic records. Over 95% of the National Archives' holdings are described at the series level.

How are records in the Catalog organized?

Records described in the Catalog are organized according to NARA's archival hierarchy, which is defined in the Lifecycle Data Requirements Guide (LCDRG) - NARA's standard for archival description.



Record groups and collections are the highest level of archival description. Record groups most often contain accessioned records from federal agencies. Collections are generally made

up of non-federal records that were donated to NARA, usually from presidential administrations.

Beneath the record group or collection is the series. A series is a group of records that are related as the result of being created, received, or used in the course of the same activity. The series is the descriptive level that is connected to the archival creator - the person or organization who created and/or maintained the records.

And beneath the series are file units or items. File units contain a more specific collection of related records within a series. A file unit often contains multiple discrete records, for example a grouping of memos. File units are always contained by series, while items can be contained by either series or file units. An item often reflects a specific record, for example a single memo. Both file units and items can contain digital objects, such as digitized pages produced from analog holdings.

How to Search

Enter one or more keywords in the search box and press enter on your keyboard, or click on the magnifying glass icon.

If you enter more than one keyword, the Catalog combines them with an 'AND' so that the search obtains results containing all the keywords.

Viewing Search Results

The Catalog groups all search results together under the "All" tab and ranks them based on their relevance to your search terms or parameters. Users may narrow what types of records they are looking for by clicking on one of the following tabs:

- Online – All digital copies of records
- Web – Archives.gov web pages
- Documents – Digitized textual records
- Images – Digitized photographic records
- Videos – Digitized motion picture records

1. By default, 20 results are shown on the first page. To view more results, click on page numbers or the arrows to advance to additional pages.

2. To increase the number of results displayed on each page, select the Results per page dropdown arrow.

Sorting Search Results

By default the search results are ordered by the most relevant first. Change the sort order by choosing an alternative from the drop down Sort button at the top of the search results screen.

The sort options include:

- Relevance (default)
- Title
- National Archives Identifier
- Local Identifier
- HMS Entry Number

Note that if a sort is selected that does not apply to a result, then that result will be removed from the result set being viewed. For example, if you select to sort on HMS Entry Number, all Archives.gov web pages will drop off, as these results do not have an HMS Entry Number.

Viewing Full Results

1. To view a full result, click on the Title link in the results display.
2. If there is a digital copy, navigate between pages of a document using the < and > buttons or by clicking on one of the thumbnails below the image viewer.
3. If there is a digital copy, click the link at the bottom of the screen to view Additional information about this item. Scroll down to view the full description details. Click the Additional information about this item link to collapse or close the additional information.
4. To go back to the search results page, click Return to Search Results in the upper left corner of the screen.

Refining a Search

The following search refinements allow you to narrow your search results:

- Data Source (Archival Descriptions with Digital Objects, Archives.gov, Archival Descriptions, Authority Records)

Level of Description (Record Group, Collection, Series, File Unit, Item)
Type of Materials (e.g. Textual Records, Moving Images, Sound Recordings)
File Format (e.g. Image (JPG), Portable Document File (PDF))
Location (e.g. reference unit)
Record Group / Collection
Date (year ranges)

Search refinements are provided on the left side of the search results page.

1. Enter a search term or keyword phrase.
2. On the results page, click on one of the search refinement options on the left side of the screen. The search will be refined further based on the new criteria added.
3. The selected refinement will be displayed at the top of the search results followed by an "X" (e.g., Refinements: Type of Archival Materials: Moving Images x). You may select additional refinements to further narrow your search results.
4. Click on the red "X" following a refinement to remove the refinement and return to the original set of search results.

Searching Within a Record Group, Series, or File Unit

You may also perform a “search within” to search only for records contained within a particular Record Group, Series, or File Unit. To do so, navigate to the main description page for the Record Group, Series, or File Unit, and click on the blue hyperlink “Search within this Record Group/Series/File Unit.”

This will take you to a page where you can search within using keywords in the search bar. Remove any existing words from the search bar at the top left of the page and type a name, subject, or other keyword in the search bar.

Using the Advanced Search

If you wish to specify your search more precisely than is possible using a basic search, click on the Advanced Search link next to the main search text box.

Please note that all of the Advanced search options except for Data Source only apply to Archival Descriptions, Archival Descriptions with Digital Objects, or Authority Records.

For more information on constructing searches with the parametric search boxes, see Search Tips.

Catalog Accounts

Users are unable to login to the legacy National Archives Catalog. Please visit the [National Archives Catalog](#) to create or login to your National Archives Catalog account.

Citizen Archivist

Users are unable to login and contribute to the legacy National Archives Catalog. Please visit the [National Archives Catalog](#) to contribute as a Citizen Archivist.

Printing Search Results

Print a single screen of brief search results by selecting File, and then Print in your web browser menu. You can also print the full display of a single archival description with or without digital copies.

1. Enter a search. Click a Title or URL to view a full result.
2. At the top right side of the full result display, click on the icon to print.
3. Select either "Results on Page" or "Top 500 Results."
4. Click the Print button.
5. In the pop-up window, select either "Brief" or "Full" descriptions. Also select "Yes" or "No" for thumbnails.
6. Click the Print button.

Exporting Search Results

1. Enter a search.
2. At the top right side of the full result display, click "Export."
3. Select either "Results on Page" or "Top 500 Results."
4. Click the Export button.
5. In the pop-up window, select either "Brief" or "Full" descriptions. Also select "Yes" or "No" for thumbnails and which user contributions to include (i.e. Transcriptions, Tags).
6. Select the export format (CSV, JSON, PDF, TXT, or XML).
7. Click the Export button.

Exporting a Full Result

1. Enter a search. Click a Title or URL to view a full result.
2. At the top right side of the full result display, click "Export."
3. In the pop-up window, select either "Brief or "Full" descriptions. Also select "Yes" or "No" for thumbnails and which user contributions to include (i.e. Transcriptions, Tags).
4. Select the export format (CSV, JSON, PDF, TXT, or XML).
5. Click the Export button.

Saving a Digital Copy

1. Enter a search. Click a Title to view a full result.
2. In the full result display, click on the download button  (blue icon with a downward-facing white arrow) beneath the main image viewer to save the image.
3. Select the desired location and file format.
4. Click the Save button.
5. Users can also right click on the download button and select Copy Link Address to get the URL for the file, which can be pasted into a new window to view.

Bookmarking Search Results

The National Archives Catalog allows you to bookmark search results in the browser window. From any search result list or full result display:

1. In Mozilla Firefox, select Bookmark – Bookmark This Page.
2. In Internet Explorer, select Favorites – Add to Favorites.
3. In Chrome, select the star icon at the right side of the address bar to bookmark the page.

Please note that when a complex search is conducted that results in a URL that exceeds 2,000 characters, the URL cannot be bookmarked in certain browsers.

Electronic Record Files

For more information, see [Accessing Electronic Records](#)

All electronic records that are available in the National Archives Catalog for viewing and/or download are linked to an archival description in the "Available Online" tab within search results.

The descriptions have options for viewing and/or downloading available files, as well as supporting technical documentation as appropriate.

Viewing Electronic Records:

Click on the "View/Download" link to open the file in the appropriate application as determined by your browser. Or, the browser may prompt you to select the appropriate application. Once the file opens in the application, you may save the file.

Downloading Electronic Records:

Click on the "Download" link to open the browser's Open/Save As dialog box. You may then save the file. We suggest saving the file as "All Files".

Please note that files containing raw data are usually only available for download. Please refer to the Technical Specifications Summary for details on the format of the files.

Many electronic record files do not contain a standard file extension that indicates the format or file type, so these files are usually not appropriate for viewing within the browser

Technical documentation is also available for viewing and/or downloading in the Catalog. This consists of the materials or information needed to interpret raw data or otherwise use the electronic records. These may include agency-prepared record layouts, field descriptions, code lists or meaning, user notes, and the sample questionnaires or forms the agency used to collect the data.

The Technical Specifications Summary is also provided as part of the technical documentation. This is a list of all the electronic records files for a Series or File Unit description that are available online. This list includes the technical metadata for each file, such as the byte count, file format, record length (for fixed-length records), number of records, and file identifiers and names. This metadata is usually needed for using the files after they have been downloaded.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

For a link to acronyms and abbreviations commonly used in the Federal Government, see <https://ucsd.libguides.com/govspeak> . The foundation for this resource was the U.S. Government Manual.

Contact Us

For general or research questions, please visit <https://www.archives.gov/contact>

If you are experiencing an error or you have a question about your National Archives Catalog account, select *Login or Account Issues* on the contact form.