

Using the National Archives Catalog

What is National Archives Catalog?

The National Archives Catalog lets the staff and public search multiple National Archives resources at once. Catalog searches across archival descriptions, digitized and electronic records, authority records, and web pages from Archives.gov and the Presidential Libraries. The catalog also allows the public to participate in cataloging records by allowing tagging and transcription.

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What does the National Archives Catalog contain?

The catalog currently contains archival descriptions for 85% of the holdings of the National Archives, authority files, and over 2 million digitized copies of records.

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Entering a Search

1. Enter one or more keywords in the search box and click “Search.”

If you enter more than one keyword, the National Archives catalog combines them with an ‘AND’ so that the search obtains results containing all the keywords.

You can also enter more complex search expressions as detailed in [Search Tips](#).

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Viewing Search Results

1. The National Archives catalog groups all search results together under the “All” tab and ranks them based on their relevancy 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 digitized copies of records

- Web – Archives.gov web pages
 - Docs – Digitized textual records
 - Images – Digitized photographic records
 - Videos – Digitized motion picture records
2. By default, 20 results are shown on the first page. To view more results click between pages with the buttons next to the tabs.
 3. By default, 20 results are displayed on the results page. To change the number of results displayed, select the **Results per page** drop down arrow.

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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 large image.
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.

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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
- 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 webpages will drop off, as these results do not have an HMS Entry Number.

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Refining a Search

The search refinements allow you to narrow your search results. The refinement options are:

- Data Source
 - Archival Descriptions
 - Archival Descriptions with Digital Objects
 - Authority Records
 - Archives.gov
- 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 (i.e. reference unit)
- Date (year ranges)


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

1. Enter a search.
2. On the results page, click on one of the search refinement options on the left side of the screen. The search will be automatically re-run based on the new criteria added to the search.
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.

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Printing Search Results

Print a single screen of brief search results by selecting File – Print in the browser. 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.

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Exporting Search Results

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

8. Enter a search. Click a Title or URL to view a full result.
9. At the top right side of the full result display, click “Export.”
10. 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).
11. Select the export format (CSV, JSON, PDF, TXT, or XML).
12. Click the Export button.

Saving a Digital Copy

1. Enter a search. Click a Title or the URL to view a full result.

2. In the full result display, click on the  button to save the image.

OR

1. Users can also right-click on the large image or on any of the smaller thumbnails if there is more than one image. Select "Save Image As".
2. Select the desired location and file format.
3. Click the Save button.

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Bookmarking Search Results

Online Public Access 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.

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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 or Authority Records.

For more information on constructing searches with the parametric search boxes, see [Search Tips](#).

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Accessing Electronic Records Files

All electronic records that are available in Online Public Access 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.

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. These files usually 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. Please refer to the Technical Specifications Summary for details on the format of the files.

Technical Documentation:

Technical documentation is also available for viewing and/or downloading in OPA. 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.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

For a link to acronyms and abbreviations commonly used in the Federal Government, see http://www-lib.iupui.edu/subjectareas/gov/docs_abbrev. The foundation for this resource was the U.S. Government Manual.