

Using Online Public Access

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What is Online Public Access (OPA)?

One of the central goals of Online Public Access is to let the staff and public search multiple National Archives resources at once. Currently, researchers perform separate searches for archival descriptions or catalog records in the Archival Research Catalog (ARC), authority files in ARC, and web pages from Archives.gov and the Presidential Libraries. The OPA system illustrates a streamlined search experience for users.

What does OPA contain?

The OPA prototype currently contains all of the ARC data, including the archival descriptions or catalog records, authority files, and digital copies.

Entering a search:

1. Enter one or more keywords in the search box and click the *Go* button.

If you enter more than one keyword, OPA 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](#).

Viewing brief results:

1. OPA displays an Initial Grouping Page of brief results. Results are grouped into the following possible groups: Results with Online Holdings, Results with Description Only, Results from Archives.gov, and Results from NARA's Authority Files.

Results with Online Holdings are catalog records from the Archival Research Catalog (ARC) with digital copies attached, and selected archival data records from Access to Archival Databases (AAD).

Results with Description Only are catalog records that do not include a digital copy and consist of only a description of the records.

Results from Archives.gov are web pages from the Archives.gov website.

Results from NARA's Authority Files are Organization and Person authority records from the Organization Authority File and Person Authority File in ARC. These contain organizational histories and personal biographies.

2. Up to three results are shown for each grouping on the initial grouping page. To view more results in a group, click the **View all...** link in the top right corner of the box (e.g., View all Online Holdings).
3. On the expanded results page, browse the list of results using the scroll bar on the right of the page. To view the next page, click the page number or **Next** link shown at the top and bottom of the page.
4. By default, 20 results are displayed on the expanded results page. To change the number of results displayed, select the **Results per page** drop down arrow.
5. On the expanded results page, each brief result is followed by three small icons:



- clicking this icon will open the result in a new browser window



- clicking this icon will open a preview of the full result inline within the results page



- clicking this icon will show where that result falls within the topic clusters. The applicable topic clusters on the left side of the screen will be highlighted in yellow.

Viewing full results:

1. To view a full result, click on the Title link or the URL in the brief display.

2. If there is a digital copy, navigate between pages of a document using the *Prev* and *Next* 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 link again to collapse or close the additional information. You can click on a digital copy to see the full-sized version in a new browser tab.
4. To go back to the Brief Results page, click *Return to Search Results* in the upper left corner of the screen.

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 box at the top of the expanded results screen. There are no sort options for Archives.gov results.

The Sort options include:

- Title (apply to all results)
- National Archives Identifier (all Archival Description results)
- Local Identifier (all Archival Description results)
- HMS Entry Number (all Archival Description results)

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 Archival Data Records (from AAD) will drop off, as these records do not have an HMS Entry Number.

Refining a search:

The search refinements allow you to narrow your search results. The refinements only apply to catalog records from ARC. The refinement options are:

- Data Source (Archives.gov, Archival Descriptions, Archival Descriptions with Digital Objects and Authority Records)
- Type of Archival Materials (e.g., Artifacts, Moving Images, Textual Records)
- Hierarchical Level of Records (Record Group, Collection, Series, File Unit, Item)
- Date (by year)
- File Format (e.g., ASCII, .mp4, .jpg, .pdf, .wav)
- Location (i.e., Reference Unit)

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.

Topic Clusters:


1. At the top left side of the search results screen is a section for *Topic Clusters*. Document clustering is the automatic organization of search results into groups of related content that are known as clusters. They give you a quick overview of the main themes in the results and let you focus on topics of interest.

Enter a search.

2. On the results pages, topic clusters will be displayed at the top left side of the screen.
3. The top 15 Topic Clusters are displayed by default. The number of search results found within each Topic Cluster is displayed in parentheses after the topic, (e.g., “President Abraham Lincoln (6)”).
4. If there are subtopics under a particular Topic Cluster, a “+” sign will be displayed to the left of the Topic Cluster. Click on the “+” to expand and display the subtopics. To collapse the subtopics, click the “-” sign.


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 this page* .
3. In the print selection box, select the desired printer and click *OK* to print.

Saving a search 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 on the icon to *Save this page* .
3. A box will appear with the title “Opening file.html”. Click the radio button to “Save File”. Click *OK*.
4. In the Save Selection box, select the desired location to save to, enter the file name and file type. Click the *Save* button.

Saving a digital copy:

1. Enter a search. Click a Title or the URL to view a full result. In the full result display, right-click on the large image or on any of the smaller thumbnails if there is more than one image.
2. Select “Save Image As”.
3. Select the desired location and file format.
4. Click the *Save* button.

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.

Exporting search results:

You may export a selection of one or more brief search results. Full results pages cannot be exported at this time.

1. Enter a search. Click to expand a grouping such as *View all Online Holdings* or *View all Description Only*.
2. At the top of the expanded results page, click the checkbox to *Select/deselect all on this page*, or click selected checkboxes next to individual search results to select one or more

results. To select the entire result set (not just the ones on the first page), click on the link to *Select all ### results*.

3. At the top of the results page, there are three different options for exporting your search results:



– Clicking this icon exports the selected brief descriptions into a new browser window in HTML format. In the new window you can save the descriptions as an .html file.



– Clicking this icon exports the selected brief descriptions into a new browser window in Text format. In the new window you can save the descriptions as a .txt file.



– Clicking this icon exports the selected brief descriptions into a new browser window in XML format. In the new window you can save the descriptions as an .xml file.

4. After selecting the desired checkboxes, click on an export option.

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 and Search Request Timeout, only apply to Archival Descriptions or Authority Records.

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

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 “Online Holdings” grouping of search results.

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

Please see our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information about accessing electronic records in Online Public Access.

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.

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.