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Beginning Your Search for Ancestors



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National Archives Volunteer

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Agenda

- Family History Overview
 - Why...? How...? Where...?
 - Local DC area resources
 - DAR Library
 - Family History Center
 - Library of Congress
 - National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)
- Genealogy on the Internet – a *brief* Overview
- Beginning at the National Archives

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Ground Rules



- Overview...with a few details.
- NOT an expert.
- Lots of opinions.
- Please interrupt with questions.

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Why look for ancestors?



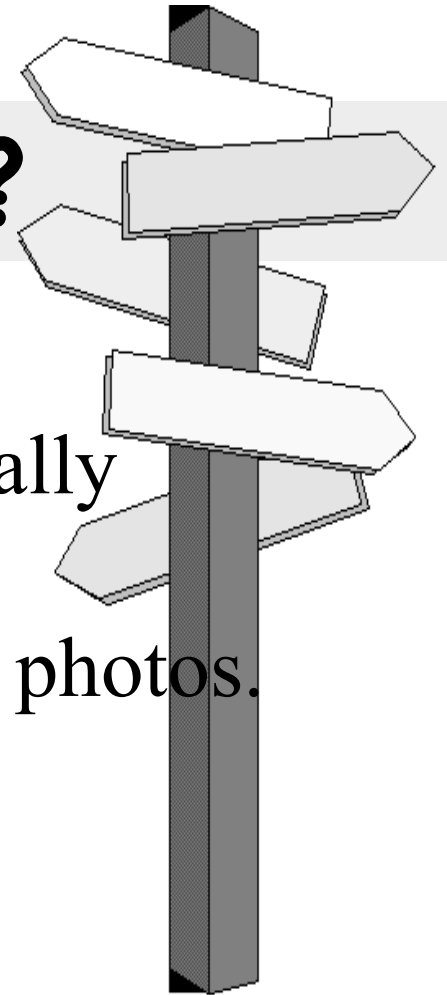
- Who am I?
- Where did I come from?
- Exactly WHO were my ancestors?
- Strengthen family ties.
- Learn about medical inheritance.
- Create a legacy for your descendants.

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Where do I start?

- At the beginning - yourself.
- Interview family members, especially older members.
- Locate & preserve documents and photos.
- Visit local/state/federal facilities.
- **WRITE IT DOWN!**



“The death of an old person is like a library burning down.”
- Alex Haley

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What data should I collect?

- Full names, birth dates and locations.
- Marriage dates and locations.
- Death dates, locations and cause of death.
- Burial dates and locations.
- Occupations, religious prefs, physical descriptions, photos, etc, etc, etc...
- **FULLY DOCUMENT THE SOURCE.**

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Where do I look?

- Home and family, including old letters and Bibles.
- Local libraries.
- State departments of vital statistics.
- State archives.
- Local Resources
 - DAR Library
 - Family History Center
 - Library of Congress
 - National Archives.
- Internet.



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DAR Library

- Free to public
- Orientations available for group visits.
(call ahead: 202-879-3229)
- Hours:
 - Monday - Friday: 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 - Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 - Sunday: closed
- Location: 1776 D St, NW
(entrance on D Street between 17th & 18th)



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DAR Library-Special Collections

- American Indian Collection
 - General History & Culture.
 - Indian Nation histories.
- American Women’s History Collection
 - Role of women in US history.
 - Women’s rights in 19th/20th Centuries.
- DAR Library File Collection
 - Materials submitted for membership.
 - Ex: Bible records, family studies, pamphlets, research notes.
- Genealogical Records Committee Collection
 - Unpublished compilations: Bible, cemetery, family, vital, county, town, church, etc.
- Manuscript Collection
 - Notes, documents, unpublished genealogies & indexes.
- President’s Collection
 - Books on Presidents, Vice-Presidents and First Ladies.
 - Lineage papers from Presidential Families of America
- WPA Collection
 - State record inventories
 - Other indexes & listings
- US Ephemera Collection
 - “odds and ends”

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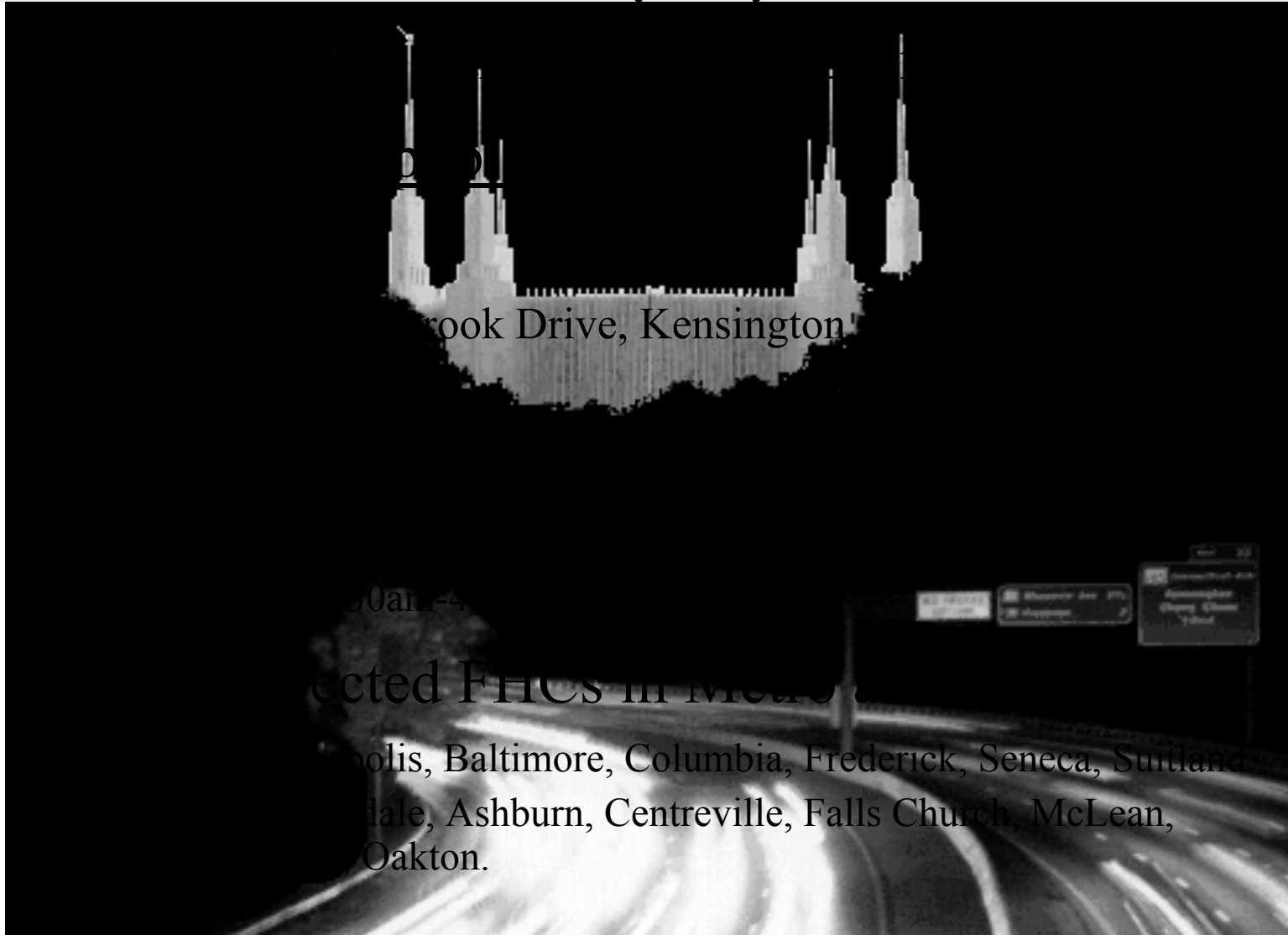
DAR Library-Digital Resources

- Genealogical Records Committee Reports Index
 - Probate, court & land records
 - Cemetery transcriptions
 - Family genealogies
- Bible Records & Transcriptions Index
- Patriots Record Project Index
 - Material related to Revolutionary War

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Washington DC Temple Family History Center (FHC)



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DC FHC Resources

- Card catalog (books, microfilm, microfiche).
- Family History Library Catalog.
- International Genealogical Index (IGI).
 - Index of names in FHL computer database.
- Family Group Record Archives (over 8 million names).
- Accelerated Indexing System (Census & related).
- Computers – free access to hundreds of genealogical web sites
- Books – immigration, church records, census, military, maps, atlases

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Sample FHC Classes/Seminars

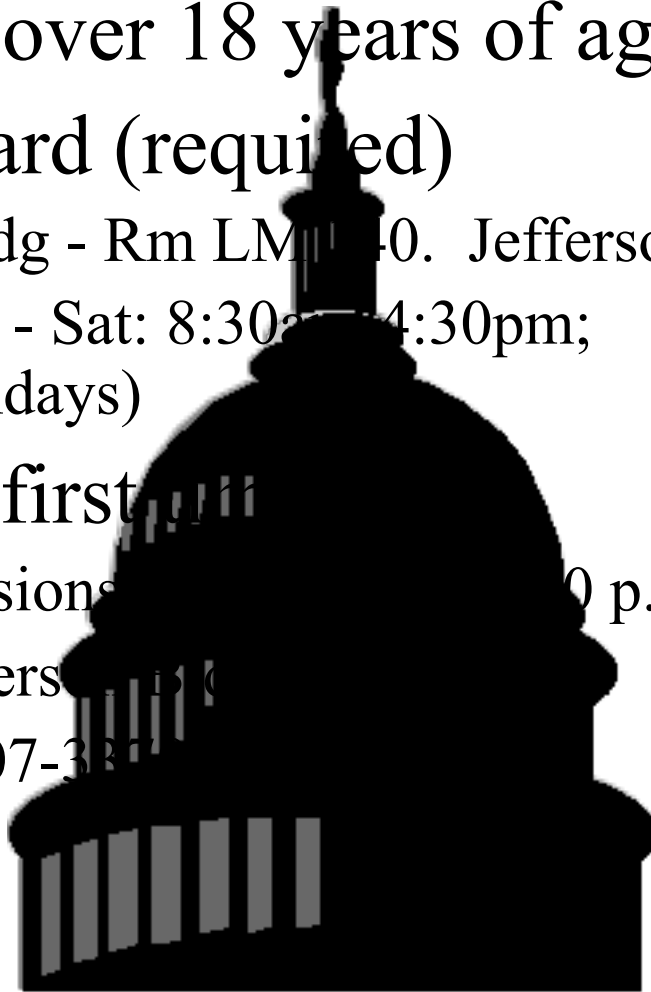
- Beginning Genealogy Group
- Af-Am Special Interest Group
- Irish Special Interest Group
- Eastern European Special Interest Group
- Finding Ancestors in Military Records
- Web Site: <http://wdcfhc.org/wordpress/>

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Library of Congress (LOC)

- Open to all over 18 years of age
- Reader's Card (required)
 - Madison Bldg - Rm LM 140. Jefferson Bldg - Rm LJ 139
 - Hours: Mon - Sat: 8:30am - 4:30pm;
(closed Sundays)
- Classes for first-time users
 - Weekly Sessions: 10:00 a.m. and 6:30-8:00pm
 - Held in Jefferson Bldg
 - Info: 202-707-3377



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LOC–Local History & Genealogy Reading Area

- Location: Jefferson Bldg, Main Reading Room - LJ 100
- Hours:
 - Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday: 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 p.m.
 - Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday: 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 - Sunday and Federal Holidays: Closed
- Orientation (for this area only)
 - Time: 10:30am – Noon
 - Call (202) 707-3399 to register
 - Note: MUST have Reader Card

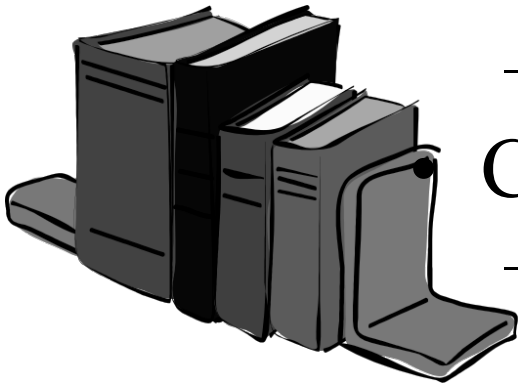
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Local History & Genealogical Collections

- Books

- More than 50,000 genealogies & 100,000 local histories.
- 6,000 indexes, guides and other reference works.



CD-ROMs

- FamilySearch (Family History Library in SLC)
 - Ancestral File.
 - International Genealogical Index.
 - Family History Library Catalog.
- Social Security Death Index.
- Military Index (Korea & Vietnam).

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LH & G Collections-cont'd

- Internet Subscription Services
 - Fee-based, but free at LOC.
 - AncestryPlus (library version of Ancestry.com).
 - Digital Census images, Gale's Passenger & Immigration Lists Index, Civil War Research Database.
 - HeritageQuest: Census images, family histories, local histories.
- Vertical File
 - Published genealogies indexed by name
 - Other info - States, towns & cities.
 - Misc genealogical research.

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National Archives & Records Admin (NARA)

- Established in 1934, opened in 1937.
- Two major facilities in DC
 - Archives I - Downtown
 - Archives II - College Park
- Regional Archives Branches & Presidential Libraries.

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Local NARA Facilities

- Archives I – Downtown DC
 - Across PA Ave from Archives/Navy Memorial Metro Station (Green/Yellow).
- Archives II – College Park
 - 8601 Adelphi Rd
 - Parking avail - come early, but not before 8:00 am.
 - Shuttle bus avail between I & II.
 - Every hour on hour.
 - Space-available for researchers.

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Regional Archives Branches



- Anchorage
- Atlanta (East Point)
- Boston (Waltham)
- Chicago
- Denver
- Fort Worth
- Kansas City

- Laguna Niguel (L.A.)
- New York City
- Philadelphia
- Pittsfield
- San Francisco (San Bruno)
- Seattle



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NARA Facilities (cont'd)

- Presidential Libraries
 - Roosevelt through Bush
 - Obama Library
 - To be located in Chicago's Jackson Park.
 - Opening some time in 2021
- National Personnel Records Center (St Louis)
- Federal Records Centers
 - Local – Suitland, MD

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Archives I – Useful Records

(not exhaustive list)

- Federal Census.
- Ship Manifests & Passenger Lists.
- Naturalization Records.
- Military Records.
- Pension & Bounty Land Records.
- Records relating to African-Americans.
- Records relating to Native Americans.
- Land Records.



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Genealogy & the Internet (a BRIEF overview)

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Genealogy on the Internet



- Genealogy/Family History—
(Google: >276,000,000 hits)
- 3rd most popular subject on Web.
 - #1... adult-oriented.
 - #2... money.
- Web Sites
 - Commercial & Free
 - Link Sites
 - Message Boards
- Mailing Lists

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Commercial Web Site Samples

- Ancestry (www.ancestry.com)
 - Subscription Categories – monthly, qtrly, annual
 - Thousands of databases.
 - New databases added frequently.



- HeritageQuest Online
 - Thousands of databases
 - Ex.: Census, Freedman’s Bank, etc
 - Avail in many libraries
- Fold3.com (military records)
 - Membership avail monthly/annual
 - Records from National Archives
 - Many useful for genealogy
 - Associated with Ancestry.com

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Free Web Site Samples

- Cyndi's List (www.cyndislist.com)
 - “Mother of all Genie Sites”.
 - Site with links (over 366,000).
 - Great one-stop site.
- RootsWeb (www.rootsweb.com)
 - Run by volunteers/contributions.
 - “Home” for thousands of mailing lists.
- Mormon Web Site (www.familysearch.org)
 - Access point for their databases.
 - Easy to use.
- Find A Grave (<https://www.findagrave.com>)
 - Cemetery listings (many listings with photos)
 - Search by name, county, state & cemetery name

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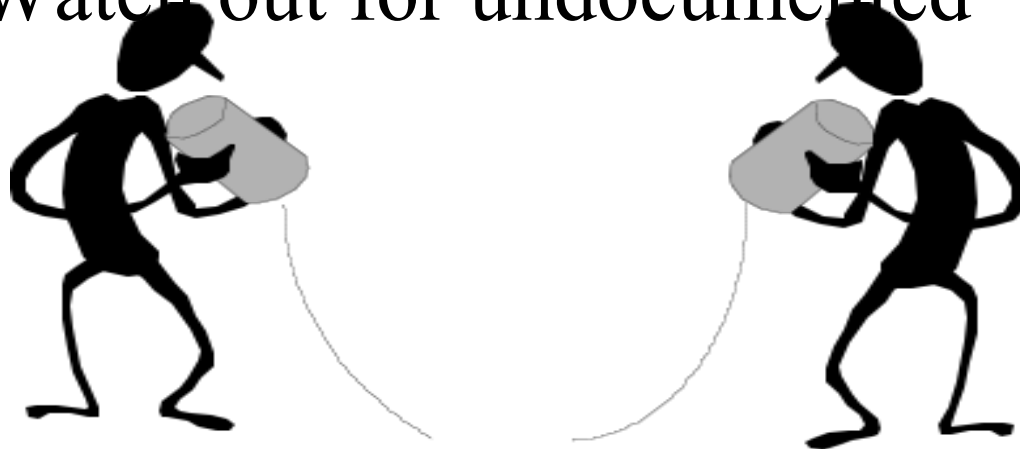
State/County/Surname Message Boards (also free)

- Everyone can read posts and replies
- Can search for specific terms
- State/County
 - Focused on research in a particular state/county
 - Find these on:
 - Genealogy.com
 - Rootsweb.com
- Surname
 - Focused on individual surnames
 - Examples same as above

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The Net – Final Thoughts

- Internet VERY powerful tool for genealogy research.
 - Email may be MOST helpful...
- Thousands of sites.
- Watch out for undocumented “facts”.



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But wait...
How do I begin?



Let's start at the Archives

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First, the bad news...

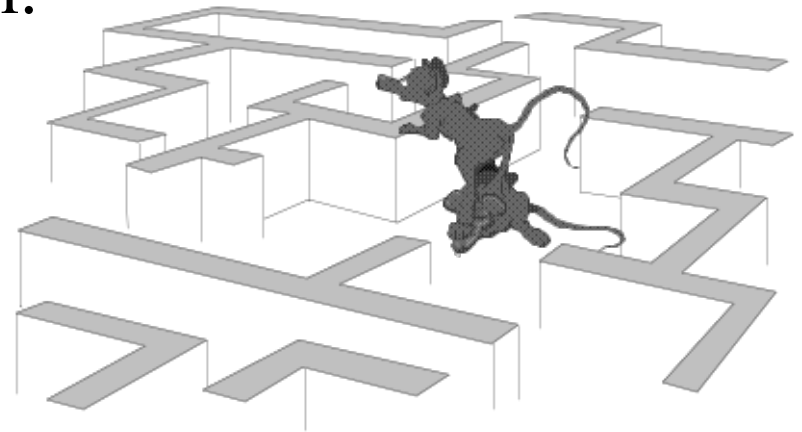
- Federal records only.
 - Useful when ancestor has interacted with Fed Govt.
 - Info on birth, marriage, death best found at family/local/state level.
- Colonial period not documented.
 - Few records predate Rev War.
 - Most described in this presentation from 19th Century.
- Not organized for genealogical research.
 - Maintained as kept by govt agencies.
 - Use by “genie” researchers not considered.

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Even so, where do I start?

- When, how & where ancestor came into contact with Federal government.
- Knowledge of American history & geography very helpful.
- Understanding of immigration, migration and settlement patterns useful.
- Most begin with Census.



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Available Federal Census

- 1790 - 1840
 - Only head of household by name.
 - Others by gender & age only.
 - Age brackets occasionally varied.
- 1850 - 1940
 - All individuals in household named with gender, age, POB, education, etc.
- Census records open to public available on microfilm.
 - Only open to public after 72 years
 - Latest - 1940
- Originals available if needed

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Approach for Census Research

- Begin with 1940 Census and work backwards.
- Determine Soundex Codes for surnames.
 - Soundex Code—based on how surname sounds
 - Indexes arranged by Soundex (1940-1880).
 - Printed Soundex guides available in Research Room
- Using Soundex Files and/or printed Finding Aids, find individual/family in index.
- Using index data, find ancestors in Census.
- Transcribe ALL data or make legible copy with microfilm copiers.

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Microfilm Records Available

(not an exhaustive list)

- Census & selected Indexes.
- Selected military records.
 - Individual & Unit Records.
 - War Dept Records.
 - Confederate Service Records.
- Selected Land Records.
- Passport Applications.
- Naturalization Index Cards.
- VA Payment Cards.
- Passenger Manifests.
- Selected Indian Records.
- Pension Indexes.
- Freedmen's Bureau.
- US Court Records.
- Southern Claims Commission.

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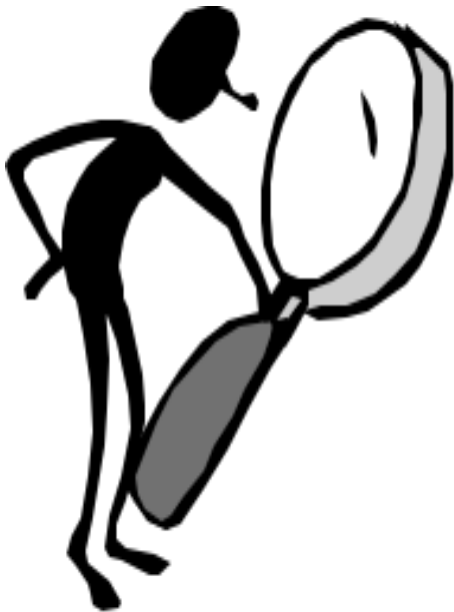
General Info – Archives I

- Ground Floor Research Room
 - Use Penn Ave Entrance
 - Mon thru Fri: 8:45am–5:45pm.
 - Closed Sundays & Federal Holidays.
 - Volunteer Genie Aides available for assistance
 - Microfilm Records, printed Finding Aids & Library
 - Computers – Ancestry.com, HeritageQuest & other online databases available for use.
- Researcher Card Required
 - Need photo ID
 - Review Researcher Orientation presentation
- 2nd Floor – Actual Records

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Archives – Things to remember...



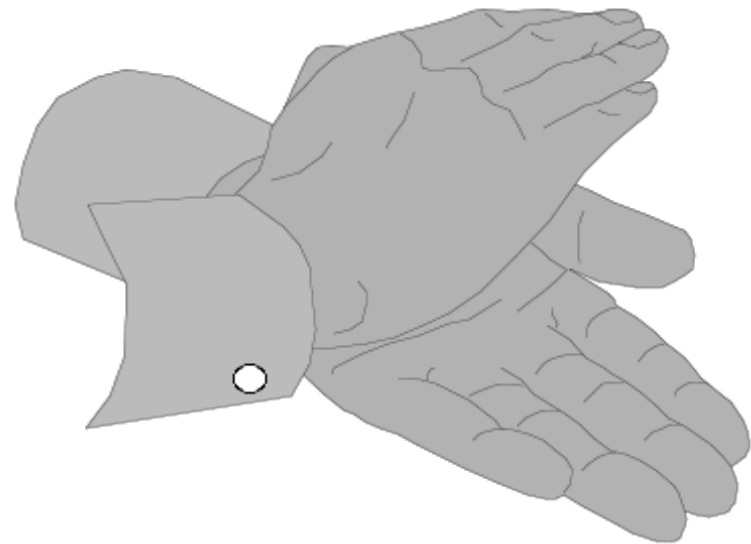
- Organized differently than a library; doesn't function like one.
- Records belong to the Federal Government.
- Records are arranged by record group.
- Each group comprises records of a major Federal Government dept/agency.
- Records of one agency are kept separate from those of another.
- Records are kept in the same order in which they were created.
- Earliest records in NARA date from First Continental Congress (c.1774).
- Records housed in facilities across the country; majority in Washington, DC area.

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Postscript

- Thanks for attending.
- Questions?



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