Hidden Treasures on FamilySearch

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FamilySearch houses billions of indexed records; however, hidden treasures abound. Currently, 3.5 billion records in 844 historical record collections have not been indexed. Another 1.7 billion unindexed records are accessible only through the catalog. Other collections are incompletely indexed. Indexing is not keeping up with new acquisitions so the number of hidden records is growing. Searching only historical record collections also misses 70 million pages of genealogical books.

Finding records

To use hidden records on FamilySearch, the researcher must first find them. To locate collections, use the catalog, the Historical Record Collections list, the FamilySearch Research Wiki, and Google.

On the catalog page at https://www.familysearch.org/catalog/search, set Search These Family History Centers to Online to limit results to digitized records and books. Enter the name of the place that created or that stores the records. Select the record type and the title. Online records are indicated in two ways. Red text at the top of the notes links to online historical record

collections and books. Most hidden records are found only by looking through the image set notes further down the page. Image sets with online images have a camera icon. A camera icon with a key indicates a restriction. The researcher will need to sign in, or visit a FamilySearch family history center or affiliated library. Click the icon to learn more.

See the Historical Record Collections list by selecting Search at https://www.familysearch.org, Records, and then Browse All Published Collections, under the Collection Title search box. To list digitized collections, select Only Collections with Images at the bottom of the left column. A camera icon within a box indicates the images are viewable on a third-party website, which may or may not require payment.

The FamilySearch Research Wiki links to many online collections on FamilySearch and other sites. Links can be found throughout the wiki, and special pages feature links to online records. At https://wiki.familysearch.org, select Online Genealogy Records in the left column under Getting Started. Choose a locality, scan for a desired record type, and select a link. For example, a link to transcripts of Irish deed memorials can be found under Land Records on the Ireland Online Genealogy Records page.

Restrict Google searches to FamilySearch collections by including "site:FamilySearch.org/search" as a search word. For example, "Vermont birth site:FamilySearch.org/search" finds records

of births in Vermont.

Use several methods to find partially indexed collections. Compare the number of indexed records with the number of images. Check the indexing project list at https://www.familysearch.org/indexing/projects, and look for notes to that effect in the collection description.

Understanding record collections

To use hidden records, the researcher must understand them. Check the catalog entry, the collection description, and the wiki for information such as collection coverage, indexing status, publication progress, record organization, known issues, and other important information.

The images in a collection are grouped for convenient browsing. Waypoints—also called browse points—mark pathways to the image sets. At each waypoint the path branches by locality, date, record type, or another natural division. Waypoints are organized in a hierarchy. FamilySearch often publishes United States county records in state collections with a simple hierarchy: county and then volume.

An image set may correspond to one or more physical volumes, a roll of microfilm, or some other natural grouping. A large alphabetical collection like "United States Mexican War Index and Service Records, 1846–1848" might have ranges of surnames in groups such as A–Ba and Bd–Bron.

Locate online records by selecting Online below Search these family history centers.

See the Historical Record Collections list by selecting Browse all published collections, under the Collection Title search box.

FamilySearch Sign-In

Beginning 13 December 2017, FamilySearch users need to sign in with a free account to see historical records and Family Tree.

With sign-in, FamilySearch can individualize services to users, optimize the website, and assure archives and partners that their records are safe in a secure environment. Individualized services include photograph and digital document storage, personalized home page, user-to-user messaging without the need to share email addresses, incident tracking support, and user-controlled newsletter delivery.

Some record images are still subject to restrictions. If a camera icon has a key, it means that image set is restricted under the user's current circumstances. Not every image is viewable at a FamilySearch family history center or affiliate library. Click the icon to determine the restrictions *before* traveling to a center or library.

To obtain a free account, a user provides first and last names, a username, a password, and an email address or mobile phone number. Users control whether others can see their names or email addresses. FamilySearch does not share personal user information with any third party without consent.

The FamilySearch Catalog, Wiki, and Learning Center are unaffected by the change. For more information, visit https://goo.gl/BWFHZ5.

View the first several images in the set. If scanned from a FamilySearch microfilm, the set may have a title board specifying location, volume title, record type, and date range. If the microfilm is from the United States National Archives and Record Administration, the first images may contain a descriptive pamphlet documenting the records.

If the images are from a record volume, look for the volume cover, spine, and title page. They often indicate record type and date range. Look for instructions, tables of contents, and indexes. Check to see if separate images were taken for the left- and right-hand pages or the front and back of documents. Figure out the numbering scheme for pages, folios, certificates, and other documents. Remember that records are often ordered by recording date, not event date.

Finding indexes

Images of indexes may reside within the same image set as the records or may be in a separate set. They may be in separate collections or on other websites. Waypoints to index volumes may be named obviously or obscurely, just like volumes in courthouses or archives.

A collection that is not indexed digitally on FamilySearch may have a paper index or finding aid elsewhere. Clerks had to find the original records after all. With any luck, an index or finding aid may be online. While getting familiar with a collection, watch for references to indexes.

They may be identified in catalog titles, catalog notes, waypoints, wiki articles, and collection descriptions. Record abstracts in genealogical periodicals or books can be used as finding aids.

Using indexes

Indexes may be organized geographically, chronologically, numerically, strictly alphabetically, or in semi-alphabetical name groups. Entries for surnames starting with the same letter might be grouped together, though not alphabetically within the group.

Name groups can be organized in more complex ways. Names might be grouped by several letters of the surname, the first three letters, the first and third letters, or the first letter and the first vowel. They might be grouped by the first letter of the surname and the first letter of the given name. Common surnames might exist as separate groups. If each group has a set amount of space, overflow may be found in a separate area elsewhere in the index.

An index may have a system to speed scanning such as multiple extra columns containing single letters from the surname or given name. If the index is complex, it may have a guide table—a sub-index or index to the index. The guide table may be at the front of the volume or section, or it may be in the top or side margin of the page. When name groups are out of order, a guide table is essential for finding them.

Deeds are usually indexed twice, once by seller (grantor) and once by buyer (grantee). Grantor indexes are also called forward or direct indexes. Grantee indexes are also called reverse or indirect indexes. The grantee and grantor indexes may be on opposing pages or columns, or they may be in separate sections or volumes. For more information about United States indexes, including Soundex, see "United States Index Systems" in the FamilySearch Wiki at https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Index_Systems.

Navigating images

Once the reference for a record is found, the next step is to locate the image. Navigating image sets is easier than navigating microfilm. The images in a set are numbered. Enter an image number to jump directly to that image. Click on arrows to move one image forward or backward. This ease of use is slightly offset by the fact that image numbers do not match page numbers or other item numbers, but a straight-forward approach can be used to locate an item.

Start by making a note of the lowest and highest image numbers for the image set. They define a range containing the desired item number. Guess the image number of the desired item. With no better idea, use the item number, or try an image number halfway through the range. Jump to that image by entering the number. If it is not the desired item, update the low or high boundaries, keeping the desired item between them. Repeat until arriving close to the item. Then use the arrows to go image-by-image to the desired item.

Consider a search for page 164 in volume 28 of Albany County, New York, wills. Image 35 is page 1 and image 300 is the end of the volume. The image range is 35–300. Start by making an initial guess.

1. A guess of image 170 results in page 269, which is past the target page. Update the image range to 35–170.

2. A guess of image 105 results in page 139, which is before the target. Update the range to 105–170.

3. A guess of image 120 results in page 169. Since that page is close, use the arrows to navigate backward to page 164.

Search for page 164 in volume of 300 images

Image number	Page number	Updated image range
170	269	35–170
105	139	105–170
120	169	105–120

If the page or item number increases in regular intervals, picking the next image number doesn't have to be a guess. If each image has one numbered page or item, just add or subtract the number required to jump to the correct image. If an image contains two page numbers per image, take the number of pages needed to get to the correct page and divide it by two to determine how many images to advance. If a record contains a regular number of images before the item number increases, figure out how many items to advance and multiply it by the number of images per item.

Examples of calculations to locate images

Page numbers increasing by two for every image

In a volume of wills where both left and right pages have page numbers and both are visible in the same image, look for page 100. The first guess finds that image 60 contains pages 10 and 11. To advance by 90 pages to page 100, advance by 45 images: 60 + 90/2 = 105. Enter 105 as the image number. Small irregularities may cause numbering to be off by a few images; use the arrows to move to the desired image.

Search for page 100 in volume where page numbers increase by two for every image

Image number	Page number
60	10 and 11
+45 (90/2)	+90
105	100 and 101

Page numbers increasing by one for every two images

In a census volume for which left pages were photographed separately from right pages because the volume was too wide, only the right pages are numbered, so page numbers increase by one for every two images. Look for page 100. The first guess finds that image 60 contains page 10. To advance by

90 pages to page 100, advance by 180 images: 60 + 90 x 2 = 240. Enter 240 as the image number. Repeat or use the arrows.

Search for page 100 in volume where page numbers increase by one for every two images

Image number	Page number
60	10
+180 (90 x 2)	+90
240	100

Document numbers increasing by multiples

In a volume of naturalization petitions with four pages plus an arrival certificate, look for petition 100. The first guess finds that image 60 contains petition 10. To advance by 90 to petition 100, advance by 450 images: 60 + 90 x 5 = 510. However, image 510 is petition 25! Obviously, something is wrong. Further examination finds that often the petition lacks an arrival certificate. Revert to tracking low and high values containing a range of images that contain the petition.

Use the hidden treasures on FamilySearch. Elusive ancestors could be waiting to be found!

Resources

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FamilySearch Book Collection

With the help of several partners, FamilySearch is creating an online collection of digitized genealogy books. These hidden treasures are not searched by the standard historical record collections search form. The book collection currently contains about 350,000 books and periodicals, and more are being added constantly.

Use the FamilySearch catalog to find books of interest, or go to http://books.familysearch.org and perform an every-word search of the entire collection. Use quotation marks to find exact phrases such as book titles or ancestors' names.

Selecting a book title loads a PDF file. Large books may take a while to download, so exercise patience. The user experience varies depending on browser type and PDF settings. Some browsers allow immediate access to downloaded pages while other browsers may wait until the entire book is downloaded.

Copyrighted books are indicated with a faint circle-slash icon over the bottom corner of the book thumbnail.

These digital books can be viewed only on a library computer at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, or any of its branch family history centers. By viewing a copy, a researcher "checks it out." Reloading the browser page or trying to download the book may return an error message and make the book inaccessible until a timeout period expires.

The error message is the same, whether the book has already been checked out (inadvertently or by another person), or a researcher is not using a properly configured library computer: "You do not have sufficient rights to view the requested object."

Filters along the left side of the simple search page and advanced search page allow the filtering of results by material type, language, author, subject, and the donating institution. Searching within a book is governed by the particular PDF viewer, to match an exact phrase.

13. Annapolis, Maryland: The Hall of Records Commission, 1963. See pages 20–36 in the introduction for an explanation of indexes. Available online, http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000546/html/index.html.

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FamilySearch Indexing

FamilySearch Indexing is a volunteer effort to make valuable genealogical records freely searchable online. Since FamilySearch Indexing began in 2006, this unprecedented crowdsourcing project has indexed more than one billion searchable records. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers from around the world have participated. Through their selfless efforts, millions of people worldwide have found information and discovered stories about their ancestors.

Eighty-one thousand volunteers indexed over sixty-eight million records in 2017. Indexers are currently choosing from 367 projects in 21 languages from 15 U.S. states and more than 40 countries.

FamilySearch Indexing uses a web app, making indexing convenient on any computer, laptop, or portable device with web access and a screen large enough to display documents and controls. A simple guided tour is the perfect way to become familiar with the way indexing works. After taking the tour, start with a batch of records. If the handwriting or language proves too hard, return it. While a batch of records takes about twenty minutes to complete, indexers can spend as much or as little time as they desire. Incomplete batches can be saved for later or returned for others to complete.

To become an indexer, visit https://www.familysearch.org/indexing.