

Finding Family Treasures on the Resale Market

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The resale market can be a rich resource for your family history research, and if you plan your approach, you may be surprised to find some family treasures. **What is the resale market?** Another name might be the secondhand market—basically, any place where you can purchase something previously sold to someone else. Places like:

- Thrift shops and charity shops (ex: Goodwill, Savers, St. Vincent de Paul, etc.)
- Antiques malls/shops or consignment shops
- Flea markets and live auctions
- Estate sales and yard sales
- Online auctions (ex: eBay, Atomic Mall, GoToAuction, etc.)
- Online resellers (ex: Etsy, JustaJoy, Mercari, etc.)

What can you find? Use your imagination!

- Items that belonged to your ancestors
- Items from or about events in your ancestors' lives
- Items from or about places your ancestors lived and worked
- Items that give you historical context about your ancestors' lives

Examples:

- Photos & photo albums
- Court records, deeds
- Letters, journals, scrapbooks
- Certificates (marriage, religious, school, stock, etc.)
- Maps, plat maps, atlases
- Local history books, city directories
- Business items (ledgers, advertising)
- Family Bibles
- Personal items
- Artwork
- Yearbooks, club rosters, church cookbooks
- . . . almost anything!

Universal Family History Shopping Tips

- If you can, visit shops and markets in towns and cities where your ancestors lived. They are more likely to have things related to the local area.
- Ask about items you're seeking—the sellers or staff may be able to save you search time
- Unless you're buying online, bring cash for payment, or at least find out what forms of payment sellers will accept—some sellers likely can't or won't accept credit cards or checks.
- Look for things like, but not limited to:
 - Books on local history, families, or topics
 - Photographs and photo albums (dig into those boxes of photos!)
 - School yearbooks, local church or club recipe books or other publications
 - Framed certificates, stitchery

- Bibles, diaries, letters, scrapbooks, baby books
- If you really want something, buy it, because it may not be there when you come back
- Most items will not be returnable

Antiques Shops or Malls

You may be able to get a small discount if you ask. At malls, the staff may need to phone a seller to ask what their best price would be on an item. If the seller can't be immediately reached, be prepared to leave the item and return later. In the meantime, however, someone else may purchase it. Items marked "NFS" are not for sale, "ND" and "Firm" mean no discount, and "NFD" means no further discount.

Flea Markets

At flea markets, you can usually haggle prices. Bring cash for payment—some sellers likely can't or won't accept credit cards or checks. At large flea markets, especially those outdoors, bring a tote bag or cart and a plastic bag to waterproof purchases in case of rain. You may be walking a lot, so wear comfy shoes and dress for the weather.

Live Auctions

At live auctions, be on time because sales move quickly and items are often offered at random. You don't want to miss the sale of an item in which you're interested. If the auction allows an open review time when you can inspect the auction items in person, take advantage of it. Check on acceptable forms of payment before you start to bid. It's good to know in advance how much you're willing to pay for something so you don't overspend.

Estate Sales and Yard Sales

Try to be there when the sale opens. At yard sales, try haggling the price. At estate sales, if you're early, you may be able to get a line number for entrance when the sale opens. You can try haggling prices at estate sales, but I've found it's usually not accepted. If you can't haggle a price, ask to leave a bid on an item you want; if they allow bids, the highest bids are usually accepted on the sale's last day.

Searching Online Auction Sites

Please read all terms of service information before signing up for free accounts on any website. All three of the following websites allow buyers to set up a free account. Be sure to read everything—description, shipping and return policies, shipping location—and review all photos of the item before you bid. Ask the seller questions before you bid, as bids, once made, often can't be retracted.

Tip: I've developed a sheet of search terms I use for online searches, whether on an auction site, family history site, or search engine. It includes surnames, towns, counties, countries, occupations, religions, etc., that relate to my family history. I keep it near my desktop PC.

Ebay (www.ebay.com) started in 1995 and has grown to have 1.5 billion live, world-wide listings in their online marketplace. As their search field says, you can "search for anything" here. Ebay's basic search will only find listings that contain all the keywords you enter. So, the more keywords you include, the narrower your search and more relevant your results will be. Their advanced search, accessible at the top right corner of the home page, offers additional filters to help you find what you're looking for. These include: "all words, any order," "any words, any order," "exact words, any order," and "exact words, exact order." You can also exclude words, limit categories, and search "title and description," set

price ranges, search completed and sold listings, and more. **Searching** eBay can be similar to searching on genealogy sites like Ancestry.com or FamilySearch.org. You may need to try different words, phrases, and spellings to find what you want.

Vary your search terms and use abbreviations: Mt. Morris/Mount Morris
Ogle County/Ogle Co./Ogle Cnty
Photo/photograph/picture/snapshot/CDV

Try misspellings of words and surnames: Genealogy/genealogy/genology/genaology, etc.
Cranmer/Cramer/Crammer/Craner/Craner/Kramer, etc.

Use wildcards:

- An asterisk (*) to replace a letter or string of letters (Il* gets Il, IL, Ill, and Illinois)
- Quotation marks around multiple words or a phrase = exact words in exact order
- A minus sign will eliminate unwanted words (ex: Freeport, -Bahamas)
- Words within parentheses indicates one word OR another, and searches either of those words in a listing: (journal, diary) = "journal OR diary"
- You can include strings of these phrases in a search: (journal, diary) (old, vintage, antique) = "journal OR diary" AND "old OR vintage OR antique."

Watch an eBay Auction & My eBay

Another nice feature: if you find an auction item you like, but you're not ready to bid, you can click "add to watchlist" and it'll be saved to My eBay page. This page, accessible from "My eBay" at the top right of the home page, is your account dashboard, showing all the auctions you're watching, the searches you've saved, favorite sellers you follow, and more. When you decide to "watch" an auction, eBay will automatically send you an email (and text if you allow it) when the auction is close to ending, in case you want to bid. Watched auctions will stay on your Watch list until you delete them. If an item doesn't sell and the seller re-lists it (perhaps at a lower price), you'll see that on your Watch list, too.

Automated searches on eBay

Once you have an account on eBay, you can save your detailed searches for future one-click searching ease. To do this, type in your keywords, set any search filters (price range, type of auction, etc.) and click Search. On the results page, near the top you'll see "save this search." Click that and your search will save to "My eBay," where you can then "subscribe" to the search, and eBay will run that search every 24 hours (usually overnight) and email you with new listings. You can edit and unsubscribe from these automated searches at any time via the My eBay page.

Atomic Mall (www.atomicmall.com) began in 2008, and "is a worldwide online marketplace, where Buyers and Sellers from around the globe can converge and trade with each other." The search engine is a simple search field in which you can type keywords. For better results, use the Advanced Search (top right corner of home page). One nice feature is the automatic Extended Search, which kicks in and searches "offsite marketplaces" (such as eBay) when "your search doesn't locate any Complete Matches on Atomic Mall."

GoToAuction (www.gotoauction.com) is a site "by auctioneers, for auctioneers" and buyers can find out about upcoming local live and online auctions and preview photos of items for sale. When you create an account, you can also sign up to receive emails about upcoming auctions in your area and save listings of

interest, so you won't need to search for them again. GoToAuction's search engine is straightforward: input your zip code, range of miles around you (25, 50, and more), and any keywords you want. On the results page, you can click "more info" to get details about an auction and photos of auction items. **Tip:** search zip codes where your ancestors' homes and farms were.

Searching Online Resellers

Again, please read all terms of service information before signing up for free accounts on any website. All three of the following websites allow buyers to set up a free account. Be sure to ask questions and review everything—description, shipping and return policies, shipping location, all photos, etc., before you purchase. **Note:** The previous search advice for the most part holds true for the following sites (see "Searching eBay" above), including the wildcards.

Etsy (www.etsy.com) is "the global marketplace for unique and creative goods. It's home to a universe of special, extraordinary items, from unique handcrafted pieces to vintage treasures." For family history shoppers, Etsy offers a trove of vintage ephemera. It's worthwhile to search here for paper items, especially old letters, journals, maps, deeds, postcards, funeral cards, etc. The search engine lets you search for items or shops, and you can save your favorite items and shops to your profile. To save an item, click the heart icon at the top right of the photo. To save a shop, click the name of the shop at the top right of any listing, then click "Favorite Shop" on the shop's home page. To search locally, on any results page, scroll to "Shop Location" (on the left side of the page), select "custom" and enter a town, city, state, or country.

JustAJoy (www.justajoy.com) is a self-titled "family heirloom exchange" and boasts having "the world's largest source of discovered family artifacts." It is a marketplace for family heirlooms, with sellers emphasizing the surnames, dates, and locations of items for sale. You can search the site for free, but only members can see, purchase, or sell items on the site. Membership currently costs \$59.95 per year. The search field at the top of the home page only searches for surnames. However, you can click the "General Search" link to access a search field that will search for any word or phrase.

Mercari (www.mercari.com) is a reseller marketplace. Many buyers and sellers use the company's app to complete transactions. More than 150,000 new items are listed here every day. The search field simply asks "what are you looking for?" and you can enter your search terms there. For family history searches, I suggest selecting the "Vintage" category before searching, which provides you a list of search filters down the left-hand side of the window. You can filter by category, price, brand, condition, and status (available or sold).

Free Sites for Family History Photos

Be sure to check the websites of state archives, national archives, and local libraries for photos.

- AncientFaces www.ancientfaces.com
- Cyndi's List Lost & Found www.cyndislist.com/photos/lost-and-found/
- DeadFred www.deadfred.com
- Digital Public Library of America <https://dp.la>
- Flickr www.flickr.com
- Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>
- Missouri Digital Heritage www.sos.mo.gov/mdh