

# Finding Your Ancestors at the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center

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The Missouri Historical Society was founded in 1866 and since that time has been collecting books, documents, photographs, artifacts, etc. to document the history of St. Louis, the state of Missouri, and the 19th-century American West. Among these collections are many unique items of great genealogical value. These materials are stored and available for research at the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center (<https://mohistory.org/library>), which is free and open to the public. The Library and Research Center is currently closed to the public due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are three primary collections at the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center that are of interest to genealogists: library, archives, and photographs and prints.

## Library

The library holds books, journals, pamphlets, trade catalogs, maps and atlases, newspapers, and other published material. Here is a sampling of valuable genealogical sources in the library:

- St. Louis City directories (1821–1980) and St. Louis County directories (1893–1979).
- Necrology Scrapbooks (circa 1880s–1970s) comprise photocopies of death notices, obituaries, and probate announcements clipped primarily from St. Louis newspapers and compiled into scrapbooks by the staff of the Missouri Historical Society library. Indexed in the Genealogy and Local History Index: <http://genealogy.mohistory.org/genealogy/source/301>.
- Hundreds of yearbooks for numerous St. Louis–area high schools, trade schools, and universities.
- Twentieth-century employee magazines for many St. Louis–area companies. These magazines are often jam-packed with information on employees and their families. Types of articles that frequently appear in these magazines include articles on employees' hobbies, military service, and family vacations; birth, death, and marriage announcements of employees and their family members; photographs of employees' children; articles and photos of employee sports teams; and announcements of promotions and retirements.
- World War I Biography and Service Records: Persons Who Enlisted in St. Louis City and County (approximately 10,000 questionnaires). Questionnaires usually include such information as the serviceman's current address, dates of enlistment and discharge, details about his service, date and place of birth, occupation, parents' names, wife's name, and school or college attended. Indexed in the Genealogy and Local History Index: <http://genealogy.mohistory.org/genealogy/source/39> and <http://genealogy.mohistory.org/genealogy/source/56>.
- Historical journals published by the Missouri Historical Society dating back to 1880 and long runs of historical journals from many other states.
- Maps and atlases, including St. Louis maps dating back to the 18th century, St. Louis fire insurance maps (circa 1870s–1940s), and 19th- and early 20th-century plat books for the city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and numerous other Missouri counties.
- Numerous newspapers, primarily for the St. Louis area, 1808–present.

- The *Police Journal* (1914–1932), a weekly newsletter of the St. Louis Police Department, includes accounts of criminal activity in St. Louis, accounts of police work, and obituaries of policemen.

## Archives

The archives collections primarily fall in three categories: (1) personal papers (including items such as letters, diaries, receipts, scrapbooks, certificates, diplomas, military papers); (2) records of businesses, organizations, and institutions (including items such as minute books, letters, rosters); and (3) records of various government agencies, mostly from the city of St. Louis and St. Louis County (including items such as licenses, tax records, voter registrations, court records, land records). Here is a sampling of collections that are of particular value to genealogists:

- A1634. Dexter P. Tiffany Collection, 1808–1902 (78 boxes). Collection consists of various records of the St. Louis County Court, 1808–1902; the city of Carondelet, 1825–1870; and the Washington County Court, 1813–1830. Includes tax records, licenses, Civil War–era loyalty oaths, free Negro bonds, petitions to the county court, and applications for county government positions.
- A1185. Charles Parsons Papers, 1808–1940 (bulk 1862–1864) (48 boxes, 33 volumes). Charles Parsons was the assistant quartermaster at St. Louis during the Civil War. Collection includes accounts, abstracts, correspondence, bills of lading, orders, transportation passes, steamboat crew lists, charters, and contracts.
- A0286. Civil War Collection, 1860–1977 (bulk 1861–1865) (23 boxes, 20 volumes). The manuscripts in this collection relate primarily to affairs in Missouri and to the affairs and operations of Missouri troops, both Confederate and Union, primarily in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. The collection includes personal papers, such as correspondence, diaries, and reminiscences; official military papers, such as muster rolls, loyalty oaths, paroles, and special and general orders; and newspapers. The Civil War Manuscripts Guide describes documents in the Civil War Collection and other collections in the Missouri Historical Society archives:  
[https://mohistory.org/files/indexed/Civil\\_War\\_Manuscripts\\_Guide.pdf](https://mohistory.org/files/indexed/Civil_War_Manuscripts_Guide.pdf).
- A1376. St. Louis Archives, 1766–1804 (38 boxes). Also known as the St. Louis Recorded Archives and the French and Spanish Archives, this collection comprises official documents of the French and Spanish colonial government in St. Louis. Documents include slave sales, land sales, marriage records, wills, estate inventories, and witnesses to legal proceedings.
- A1401. St. Louis County Board of Election Commissioners Voter Registration Books, 1924–1936 (608 volumes).
- A2932. St. Louis Gruetli Verein Records, 1850–1962 (18 volumes, 1 box, 4 folders). The St. Louis Gruetli Verein was formed in St. Louis circa 1849 as a benevolent society for natives of Switzerland. The organization offered its members the opportunity to socialize with one another, kept alive the traditions and cultural heritage of Switzerland, and paid out benefits to its sick and deceased members. The collection consists primarily of record books of the St. Louis Gruetli Verein (and later the St. Louis Schweizer Bund) that contain meeting minutes, expenditures, earnings, and financial reports. The collection also includes 72 issues of *Der Schweizer* (1931–1940), a sick list, a membership diary, and a record book of membership applications.
- A1602. Taxes and Tax Lists Collection, 1805–1898 (3 boxes, 9 oversize folders, 38 volumes). Includes tax lists for numerous Missouri counties, mostly pre-1843.

- A0541. Fur Trade Ledgers, 1804–1871 (72 volumes). Ledgers, journals, and minute books relating to the fur trade operating out of St. Louis. Includes two-volume name index.
- A1624. Theater Programs Collection, 1828–2019 (207 boxes). Collection of programs, playbills, handbills, and scrapbooks relating primarily to St. Louis theaters. Also includes programs for performances of churches, schools, and other organizations.
- A3059. Cullinane Funeral Home Records (<https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A3059>).
- A0723. Howard Funeral Home Records (<https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A0723>). Indexed in part at <http://genealogy.mohistory.org/genealogy/source/73>.
- A1728. Weick Brothers Undertaking Company Records (<https://mohistory.org/collections/item/A1728>). Indexed at <http://genealogy.mohistory.org/genealogy/source/423>.

### Photographs and Prints

Here's a sampling of photographs and prints collections of genealogical interest:

- The Portraits Collection consists of portrait photographs, engravings, and lithographs arranged alphabetically by the subject's last name (66 boxes) (<https://mohistory.org/collections/item/P0004>).
- Swecosky Notre Dame College Collection, circa 1880–circa 1940 (25 boxes) (<https://mohistory.org/collections/item/P0245>). Dr. William Swecosky (1894–1963) was a St. Louis dentist and amateur photographer who developed a love of old buildings in his youth. He took his own photographs and collected photographs of old St. Louis buildings. Collection includes photographs of St. Louis residential and commercial buildings.
- St. Louis Public Schools Photograph Collection, circa 1870–2003 (165 boxes) ([https://mohistory.org/collections/derivatives/P0900/P0900\\_PDF.pdf](https://mohistory.org/collections/derivatives/P0900/P0900_PDF.pdf)). Includes many class photos.
- Grand Army of the Republic, Ransom Post No. 131, Portrait Collection, circa 1865–1898 (5 boxes) (<https://mohistory.org/collections/item/P0083>). Includes portrait photographs of members of Ransom Post No. 131.

### Research on the Missouri Historical Society Website

The Missouri Historical Society website includes several catalogs, databases, and indexes. An eight-minute video research tutorial at the following link offers advice on navigating the website for historical research: <https://mohistory.org/research/online-research>. The following are the primary online resources for historical and genealogical research:

- The Genealogy and Local History Index (<http://genealogy.mohistory.org/>) is an ever-growing index to selected library, archives, and photograph collections at the Library and Research Center. This index focuses primarily on names in the St. Louis metropolitan area; however, it does include thousands of entries for ancestors who resided in other parts of Missouri.
- The Online Collections Search (<https://mohistory.org/collections>) catalogs the photos and prints collections, the archival collections (i.e., letters, diaries, minute books, etc.), the objects or artifacts collections (i.e., clothing, paintings, toys), and the moving images and sound collections (i.e., audio, video, and film recordings). Please make sure to read the important search tips (<https://mohistory.org/collections/search-guide>). In some cases, your search results will show digital images of items; however, in many cases, results will only show a catalog record. (Most of the collections are not digitized.)

- The Library Catalog (<https://explore.searchmobi.us/search~S2>) lists books and other published material. In the Library Catalog you may want to try keyword searches for your family surnames (the library holds hundreds of published genealogies, many of which date back to the 19th century); names of clubs, societies, or organizations that your ancestor belonged to (perhaps you'll find a roster of members or an annual report of the organization); names of churches your ancestor attended (the library holds many local church histories and church newsletters); localities where your ancestor lived; names of companies your ancestor worked for (the library holds many St. Louis–area company employee magazines for the 20th century).
- On the Archives Guides page (<https://mohistory.org/research/documents-archives/archives-guides>), you can view the “Guide to the Archival Collections,” which contains brief descriptions of the more than 3,000 catalogued archival collections; the “Civil War Manuscript Guide”; and finding aids to selected archival collections.
- The Genealogy Resources page (<https://mohistory.org/research/genealogy-family-history/genealogy-resources/>) provides links to valuable indexes and databases at other repositories for researching your St. Louis ancestors.

In addition to these online resources, there are three important old-style card indexes that are not accessible online: (1) The Library Information File (<https://mohistory.org/research/genealogy-family-history/information-file>), which indexes a variety of published sources by personal names, corporate names, place names, and subject headings. (2) The Archives Card Catalog (<https://mohistory.org/research/genealogy-family-history/archives-card-catalog>), which provides extensive indexing of the archival collections by personal names, corporate names, place names, and subject headings. (3) The St. Louis Archives card index (also known as the St. Louis Recorded Archives card index and the French and Spanish Archives card index) (<https://mohistory.org/research/genealogy-family-history/archives-card-catalog>), which indexes personal names in official documents of the French and Spanish colonial government in St. Louis, dated circa 1760s–1804.

### **E-Newsletter**

The monthly “Genealogy and House History News” e-newsletter provides announcements of new indexes posted to the Genealogy and Local History Index and shares information about sources for researching St. Louis–area ancestors. To sign up to receive this e-newsletter, visit <https://custapp.marketvolt.com/Form/6P2bXgqfYq/Signup>, enter your email address, then select “genealogy.”