

USING LIBRARY OF CONGRESS MAPS IN GENEALOGY

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I. Library of Congress Maps: Holdings of Geography & Map Division

A. **Holdings:** “>5 million maps, 105,000 atlases, 138,000 microfilm and microfiche, 5,500 globes, 2,000 terrain models, 1.6 million aerial photos and remote sensing images, and thousands of digital files.”

1. **Online** more than 56,000 items available.
2. **In total** more than 432,000 items.
3. MANY are NOT online; but more are being added regularly to both total and online.
4. LOC G&M will answer limited requests; there’s an online form, and a phone number.

B. Collections Overlap; They include:

1. Largest collection, **Sanborn Fire Insurance maps**, exceeds 35,000 online, representing many American cities large and small dated from 1876 to the 1970s.
2. **Foreign Maps:** another large collection with maps for most of the world. Search by country; no separate Foreign Collection.
3. Most used is **U.S. land ownership maps and county landownership atlases**. 1,877 online from 1850s-1920s or so, more on microfilm. Atlases for individual townships in a county from 1860s in northeastern United States; midwest by the 1870s and 1880s. The maps name farm or residence owners.
4. **Military Maps:** Includes Revolutionary, 1812, and Civil wars, WWI, and WWII.
5. **Railroad maps** are part of Transportation & Communication Collection.
6. **Cities and Towns Collection Also Includes Foreign Cities and Towns**
 - a. **Topographic maps** of the United States.
 - b. **Panoramic, Aerial, and City Plan maps** Large holdings for Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco; but other cities as well.
 - c. **Ward maps** for thirty-five cities, large and small.
 - d. **City real estate atlases:** Prepared for tax assessment and sales purposes.

II. Finding a Map on LOC Site—Least Confusing Method

- A. <https://www.loc.gov/> On top Right in box labeled “everything,” select down arrow, then Maps. Still on top right in search box, type the name of place desired—city, county, state or country. For example, Germany or St. Louis, Missouri. Old “American Memory” search has been ended.
- B. Tabs Default to “Search Maps” (as shown on slide)
- C. Alternate search method is 2nd tab: “Collections with Maps.” Click, then scroll down to named collection. It may contain marginally more results than Search Maps.
- D. Note: Map filters, described below, DO NOT appear on a tablet app.
- E. In default “Search Maps,” use Index filters list on left to narrow results. Use sub-headings such as “Part of” to yield a list of collections or “Subjects” for specific topics.
- F. “More” under each sub-heading gives additional choices. Results may be several pages.
- G. Choices are arranged in descending order of size by default. A button at top of “more” page rearranges list in alphabetical order to facilitate search for a particular collection.

- H. Many maps are chosen by date. But if the publisher and date are unknown pay attention, the Geography and Map Division may estimate a date based on information in the map.
- I. Each map has several download size choices below the map. Maps can be downloaded whole, but files are very large, print too tiny to read, and may not enlarge well on your computer. Enlarging online, then snipping parts of a map works better for genealogy use, but include the source!
- J. Sources are given on the site below the map. Use the format: author, title (publication place : company, date); digital image Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C. (online URL link : date accessed) or if not online add call number or other identification.

III. Using LOC Maps in Genealogy

- A. Find your correct Country or State in various time periods using foreign maps.
- B. Locate an ancestor's U.S. place of residence in cities using panorama maps, especially if the current map has changed so much that the streets currently no longer exist.
- C. Landowner maps provide the exact location of a farm or in cities a house property. But they also can be used to answer non-map-related questions such as:
 - 1. Were two people of the same name mixed up in the records? May need extensive work in deed records to answer the question and separate same name people.
 - 2. How did A & B come to know each other and marry; might they have lived, worked, been educated, shopped, or attended church together? Within walking distance?
- D. On topographical maps determine if ancestors chose to live in one area rather than another perhaps because of floods or mountainous terrain. Or explain why they chose to use a neighboring county seat for recording events rather than their own county seat.
- E. Chart an ancestor's Revolutionary, Civil, WWI, or WWII experience with war maps.
- F. Follow an ancestor across the U.S. using railroad maps.
- G. Use city ward maps to locate the ancestor's area in the city.

IV. A Few Printed Sources Now Online at Family Search=B-F; at Hathi Trust=A, D-F

- A. Ehrenberg, Ralph E., et al, *Library of Congress geography and maps: An Illustrated Guide* (Washington, D.C., 1996)
- B. Stephenson, Richard W., *Land Ownership Maps: A Checklist of Nineteenth-Century United States County Maps in the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1967).
- C. Le Gear, Clara E., *United States Atlases, Volume 1: A List of national State, County, City, and Regional Atlases in the Library of Congress*, (Washington D.C., 1950) [Also Vol 2].
- D. *Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress: Plans of North American Cities and Towns Produced by the Sanborn Map Company* (Washington, D.C., 1981).
- E. *Railroad Maps of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1975).
- F. *Ward Maps of United States Cities* (Washington, D.C., 1975).

V. Summary

- A. Some LOC maps are online; many more are on site.
- B. Sanborn maps describe properties in towns.
- C. Foreign maps are useful for determining ancestor's origins at differing time periods.
- D. Landowner maps can be used to enhance your ancestor's story.
- E. Panoramic or city plan maps locate the exact block in town and nearby establishments.
- F. Railroad maps help with migrations and travel.
- G. Topographic maps help understand why an ancestor concluded his business at a different county seat or moved to higher ground.