

# **Making the Genealogy Center Your Research Assistant with an Emphasis on Jewish Genealogical Research**

Curt B. Witcher, MLS, FUGA, IGSF  
Director of Special Collections and The Genealogy Center Manager  
Allen County Public Library  
900 Library Plaza, P. O. Box 2270, Fort Wayne, IN 46801-2270  
Genealogy@ACPL.info | 260-421-1225 | www.GenealogyCenter.org

## **Why A Genealogy Center in Fort Wayne?**

What was old is new again! In the mid-20th century, genealogists in the public library space were clearly an atypical class of customer. They were active consumers of many resources in every library they visited. They were power-users of collections, they actively and consistently engaged reference staff, and they appeared to “camp-out” in every place they visited, seeming to virtually take over the place. This was a challenge for traditionally trained library professionals. Then Allen County Public Library director Fred Reynolds decided that Fort Wayne would sport a library that offered the best possible service for these library customers. From that service philosophy grew an amazing collection of resources and services.

**Our Goal is to make your search successful!**

## **The Print Collection**

The Genealogy Center of the Allen County Public Library contains more than 558,000 printed volumes & 795,800 items of microtext (microfilm & microfiche). This collection grows daily through purchases & donations. Indeed, more than five hundred physical items are added to the collection each month.

The best way to begin accessing the print collection is to use the library's catalogs. And we are sporting a brand-new catalog system. The challenge to that is this new catalog is still be developed; however, it is useable, and should be used. The book catalog as well as the microtext database can be found as links on the GenealogyCenter.org homepage.

The Catalog: Most library catalogs are not as intuitive as we expect, and most do not deploy AI features we have come in to expect in everyday sites like Amazon and Google. There are several simple things we can do to increase our success.

- Use the Catalog link on the GenealogyCenter.org (Research Catalog) & choose unique terms.
- Use the least number of terms possible—less is more.
- Geographic locations as search terms are more important than surnames, occupations or ethnic groups.
- Take time to play—try different words and options.
- Use the facets along the left to limit further refine your searches.

While most all of the microtext resources have at least a brief listing in the Center's book catalog, the microtext database is still a valuable tool to check just to make sure you have identified all useful materials. As with every institution's online catalog, it is wise to initially take some time to do some sample searching to see what defaults are in place and how searching works.

Compiled Genealogies: Nearly 70,000 volumes of compiled genealogies represent work already done on American and European families, and range from brief typescripts to well documented multi-volume works. Nearly five thousand family histories on microfiche and many family newsletters complement this print collection as well as thousands of family history compilations online. Since the Center's inception, a preservation photocopy program has been offered. We have morphed that into a preservation scanning program in which a customer loans the Center an original work or manuscript; the work is scanned, a copy is placed online and a bound copy is made for the manuscript owner. An increasing number of library patrons are not interested in a complementary paper copy, but rather, prefer having digital copies of their works.

Directories & Yearbooks: The Center has a depository collection of more than 69,000 R. L. Polk directories dating from circa 1964 to the present (among the last remaining Polk repository libraries), with significant earlier runs for a number of cities. The Center also holds many directories for smaller cities and rural areas produced by other publishers. A guide for the format of the holdings of United States city directories is in the following

- 1785-1860—microfiche
- 1861-1901—microfilm
- 1902-1935—microfilm
- 1964-present—books

complement the collection of city directories, the Center also has an enormous collection of school and college yearbooks, numbering over twenty-five thousand volumes. A growing number of these yearbooks are being placed online at one of our partner websites.

Geographically Based History Materials: The Center is aggressive about collecting as many materials as possible that document people in a place during a time period engaging in activities that are documented. Though the collection sports a North American and British Isles focus, materials from other areas of the world are also represented. Of particular note is our collection of South Africa materials.

Jewish-specific materials in the Genealogy Center collection:

- Holocaust related materials. These include Yizkor books of communities destroyed in the Holocaust (some of which are new translations and some are in the original Hebrew and Yiddish).
- Temple/synagogue histories. These are widely varied, and represent temples and synagogues scattered throughout the United States.
- Jewish genealogy research guidebooks. The collection has all the major guides, including "Finding Our Fathers," which is the classic, but there are also important books by Miriam Weiner, Gary Mokotoff, David Zubatsky, and others. Also, in this category are Jewish surname dictionaries.
- Currently 109 serial publications in the Genealogy Center are devoted to Jewish topics. The Periodical Source Index/PERSI has 25,175 article citations for these serials. Additionally, there are 2,042 citations for Jewish-themed articles appearing in other publications.
- Histories of Jews and Jewish culture located in various communities throughout the world. Rabbi Malcolm Stern's "Americans of Jewish Descent" and "First American Jewish Families" are considered the classic works, but there are many others.
- Jewish diaries and personal memoirs that are historical in content.
- Access as a full affiliate partner library to FamilySearch, which contains digital files of a number of Jewish records throughout the world.

### **The Virtual Collections**

The Genealogy Center provides a very significant number of databases for on-site researchers and a notable number of free data files for any interested individual accessing the GenealogyCenter.org site from anywhere in the world.

**Databases that are available onsite are listed in the following.**

#### **Large Family History Databases**

- AmericanAncestors.org—online resource of the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) containing millions of records for researching New England and early American families as well as other data sets for states along westward migration trails.
- Ancestry.com—the largest family history site in the world. There are more than twenty-five billion searchable records on this site.
- FindMyPast—one of the best online sources for British research, and increasingly a major resource for North American records and images, featuring census schedules; vital records; church registers; military records; British, as well as Irish and American newspapers.
- MyHeritage—The "MyHeritage Library Edition" contains more than 10 billion historical records and

family frees. Records range from census and vital records to military and immigration records, covering North America, Europe and beyond.

### **Newspaper Databases**

- African American Historical Newspapers—a collection of nine African-American newspapers, featuring the *Atlanta Daily World* (1931-2003), *The Baltimore Afro-American* (1893-1988), *Chicago Defender* (1910-1975), *Cleveland Call and Post* (1934-1991), *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), *New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1993), *The Norfolk Journal and Guide* (1921-2003), *The Philadelphia Tribune* (1912-2001), and *Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-2002).
- America's GenealogyBank—This database contains collections of historical newspapers (1690-1922) and America's obituaries from 1977 to present. In addition, this database also contains collection of historical books (1749-1900) and historical documents (1789-1994).
- Accessible Archives African American Newspapers—unique collection of 19th century African American newspapers, including *The Christian Recorder* (1861-1891, 1893-1902), *The Colored American/Weekly Advocate* (1837-1841), *Douglass' Monthly* (1859-1863), *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851-1855), *The Freedmen's Record* (1865-1874), *Freedom's Journal* (1827-1829), *The National Era* (1847-1860), *The Negro Business League Herald* (1909), *The North Star* (1847-1851), and *Provincial Freeman* (1854-1857).
- Canada's Heritage from 1844—The Globe and Mail—published in Toronto and covering the years 1844- 2009, this historical newspaper archive contains stories, photographs, birth and marriage announcements, death notices, and more.
- Indigenous Newspapers in North America—nearly 200 years of Indigenous print journalism from the United States and Canada. This resource has been developed with, and has only been made possible by, the permission and contribution of the newspaper publishers and Tribal Councils concerned.
- NewspaperArchive.com—a database of tens of millions of newspaper pages dating back to the 1700s. Our subscription includes international newspapers as well.
- Newspapers.com—online database of more than 4,100 historical newspapers, covering the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, and Panama from the 1700s-2000s, and includes nearly 187M newspaper pages.

### **Ethnic Databases**

- African American Heritage—an important collection of resources for African American research. It includes original records, links to the AfriGeneas Community social networking site, and *Black Genesis*, a state-by-state methodological resource guide.
- Archives Unbound: Evangelism in Africa—Correspondence of the Board of Foreign Mission, 1835-1910— a unique collection of records of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, an agency that created orphanages, schools, hospitals, and churches in Africa from 1835-1910.
- Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive—a rare historical archive of millions of pages of court records, maps, books, newspapers, and periodicals from the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe specific to the topics of slavery, abolition, and emancipation.
- Indigenous Histories and Cultures in North America—collection of manuscripts, rare and original documents from treaties, speeches and diaries, as well as historic maps and travel journals dates from the earliest contact with European settlers right up to photographs and newspapers from the mid-twentieth century.
- Jewish Life in America—explores the history of Jewish communities in America from the arrival of the first Jews in the 17th century through to the mid-20th century. This treasure trove of material provides digital images of collections from the American Jewish Historical Society in New York. In addition, Jewish Life in America contains interactive maps, essays by leading scholars, a selection of American Jewish Year Book articles, and links to other useful websites
- ArkivDigital—the largest private provider of Swedish church records and other historical records online. This site includes various kinds of historical documents such as church records, court records and inventory of estates.

### **Military Databases**

- [Archives Unbound: The Civil War in Words and Deeds](#)—a collection of regimental histories and personal narratives documenting all facets of military life during the Civil War.
- [Archives Unbound: The War of 1812—Diplomacy on the High Seas](#)—a collection of records including applications from privateers, documents regarding enemy aliens and prisoners of war, and passenger lists from the United States covering the time period of 1812-1814.
- [Fold3.com](#)—database concentrating on military records, but it also contains numerous city directories and very consequential Native American resources.

### **Our Free Online Resources**

Categories of [freely](#) accessible online databases are listed in following. Records in all of these categories total nearly six million records and images. Those numbers grow with new additions and updates every month.

### **Periodical Source Index (PERSI)**

PERSI is the largest subject index to genealogical, historical and ethnic periodicals in the family history space with more than 3.1 million index entries. The index grows by many thousands of entries each month, and it was made freely available for the first time in 2022. There is an amazing number of abstracts, transcriptions, indices, researched family histories, organizational and geographic histories, photographic images, and so much more published in periodicals. PERSI is well worth the exploration. The Genealogy Center has all the periodicals indexed in PERSI. One can search PERSI by the following categories.

- **Surnames**
- **Geographic Areas**
  - United States
  - Canada
  - British Isles
  - Other Countries
- **Research Techniques**
- **Article Title Keyword**

### **Gateways to Large Ethnic Collections**

- [African American Gateway](#)—a growing resource for African American research, it includes information from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean, and well as a few other countries. The links to websites in this gateway are paired with bibliographies of resources for African American research found in The Genealogy Center collection.
- [Indigenous Peoples of North America Gateway](#)—a resource for those exploring First Nations family history. Information on how to begin such a research endeavor, links to materials from the National Archives and links to popular data are complemented by a continually updated listing of resources held by The Genealogy Center.

### **Geographic Collections**

- [Allen County, Indiana Resources](#)—a collection of databases that includes indices of local obituaries, cemeteries, marriage, death and other courthouse records, as well as African-American material. More than thirty-five thousand photographic images are also available.
- [Indiana Resources](#)—a widely varied collection of databases created by researchers who have donated their work to The Genealogy Center, as well as Genealogy Center staff.
- [Other States Resources](#)—a widely varied collection of databases created by researchers who have donated their work to The Genealogy Center, as well as Genealogy Center staff.

### **Surname Specific Data Files**

- [Family Bible Records](#)—a collection featuring transcriptions and images from family bibles donated to The Genealogy Center. Details include births, marriages, and deaths as well as information from items inserted in the Bibles, such as newspaper clippings, photographs, and funeral cards.

- Family Resources—a section featuring unique family histories and family files submitted by researchers who have granted permission for their material to be hosted on The Genealogy Center site.

### **Extras**

- Genealogy Center Surname File—a resource that can be searched to identify others researching a surname of interest. Contact information is provided to encourage collaboration. Contributors to this file are Genealogy Center customers.
- Our Military Heritage—a growing collection of images of books, pamphlets, government documents, original letters, diaries, biographies, photographs, videos, unit histories, and rosters as well as service and pension records. A project of The Genealogy Center, this collection of data files offers materials from the Colonial era through the Afghanistan and Iraqi Wars.

### **Collaborative Initiatives—Building Free Libraries of Family and Local History Materials**

- FamilySearch (FamilySearch.org)—the Genealogy Center is one of twelve partner organizations that have collectively placed more than 607,645 works online for free searching, reading, & downloading. [https://books.familysearch.org/primo\\_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=FHD\\_PUBLIC](https://books.familysearch.org/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=FHD_PUBLIC)
- Internet Archive (Archive.org)—many tens of thousands of Genealogy Collection materials are available for free use, including free downloading, on the Internet Archive. [https://archive.org/details/allen\\_county](https://archive.org/details/allen_county)

### **Online Guides**

- National Archives Finding Aids—Hundreds of National Archives & Records Administration descriptive pamphlets, preliminary inventories, and special lists are available in searchable form. <http://www.genealogycenter.info/nara/>
- State and Subject Snapshots—Guides to key resources for those researching particular states, geographic areas, and subjects are available for free downloading.

### **Social Media**

- An e-zine, *Genealogy Gems*, is published on the last day of each month that highlights collection resources, delivers some methodology and technology tips, and provides a list of upcoming programs.
- Genealogy Center Facebook—<https://www.facebook.com/genealogycenter>
- Genealogy Center Instagram—<https://www.instagram.com/genealogycenter/>
- Genealogy Center YouTube—<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8AE558B5D8661B31>

### **Technology Extras**

- Very strong, library-wide, free Wi-Fi in addition to a complement of public access computers dedicated to genealogy research. One can log-on to the library's network and get access to the licensed, onsite databases from one's personal computer devices for easy downloading of data and images.
- An array of digital imaging systems for printing or saving print and microtext images to a USB drive.
- Special Vivid-Pix scanning stations for scanning old photographs and fragile documents. It comes with the latest face-up scanners and special state-of-the-art image correcting software.

### **Special Collections & Services**

Military Records: In all of its collections (monographs, serials, microtext, and online data files) the Center has very deep military record holdings. The Revolutionary War, the War Between the States, and twentieth century conflicts are particularly well represented in the collection. Examples of record types include adjutant generals' reports, lineage society publications, and soldiers' diaries and letters as well as thousands of unit, regimental, and divisional histories.

Canadian Collection: The department houses a significant collection of Canadiana, especially for the eastern provinces. Print sources include county and town histories, cemetery records, and almost all available published French-Canadian parish registers and marriage repertoires. Please consult the three pathfinders, or snapshots, that can assist in navigating this substantial collection: Canada-General, Canada-Atlantic, and Canada-British Columbia/Pacific.

British Isles Collection: The Center has a substantial collection of materials from England, Ireland and Scotland, with more than 20,000 printed volumes including county histories, monumental inscriptions, heraldic references, early parish registers and most English county record society publications. We just recently acquired a substantial collection of materials from Cornwall that will be cataloged and available in the collection at the end of 2020. The Irish Collection is especially rich with plentiful local and family history resources. Further details can be found in the department's Irish & Scots-Irish and British, English & Welsh international snapshots.

Snapshots: States, Subjects, and International. These are quick guides to help one get started in our collection, or in any research situation. These snapshots not only indicate a sampling of materials held in the Center, they can provide one with suggestions on types of materials to look for in other research settings, both in our library and other facilities.

Family History Archives: Your free access to hundreds of thousands of resources.

- ++Family History Books
- ++FamilySearch.org→Search→Research Wiki
- ++Internet Archive
- ++WeRelate.org
- ++Linkpendium.com

Consultation Services: The Genealogy Center provides complementary consultation services for those who request via email at [Genealogy@ACPL.info](mailto:Genealogy@ACPL.info). Articulating in advance with what one has researched and what one wants to accomplish helps make the consultations more meaningful.

Virtual Programming: The Genealogy Center is committed to at least four, free virtual programs per month. Right now, we are doing two each week—Tuesday afternoons at 2:30P ET and Thursday evenings at 6:30P ET. These are great opportunities to learn and network.

Hours of Operation All Year:

- Monday-Thursday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Friday-Saturday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Sunday: 12 noon to 5 p.m.



45TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
**JEWISH GENEALOGY**  
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA | AUGUST 10-14, 2025

*And We Settled Here...The Jewish Journey*



**45th International Association of Jewish  
Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) Annual Conference**

**Fort Wayne, Indiana | August 10-14, 2025**