

The Art of Genealogical Research Trips

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Travel for family history research is a great pleasure of life. It will happen again and safely for us. Whether you travel to the ancestral home in another country or to a nearby library or courthouse, one of the joys of genealogy can be a successful research trip. Is it possible to make your "on the road" research yield both results and an enjoyable travel experience? Can your trip preparation lead to information even if you never make the journey? What needs to be done when the journey is over? This session details steps to help you answer those questions. You don't have to be a genius to combine these sensible steps with a spirit of adventure to help make your genealogical research forays memorable and rewarding.

1. **Review what you know and list what you don't know.** Update your genealogy software and review notes and files on previous research. Start a trip file including the questions and people for whom you are seeking records, maps, family narratives, and a family/place chronology. The time to do all this is long BEFORE the trip. Are there social media pages related to specific record repositories you wish to visit or for that state, province, or county? Ask questions that will help in your planning. Read what others have asked and what answers were provided.
2. **Where do you want to go; is that where you really need to go?** Analyze what you need to learn on this trip. Where are the family detail gaps? Determining your specific goals to pinpoint where you need to research. Think about factors that will govern your research time on the trip to include whether you are traveling alone, with another genealogist, or with someone who will need other diversions while you research. Will you be attending a genealogy conference, a family wedding, or a reunion? How about rest time?
3. **Write, call, read ahead for information.** You *can* obtain helpful information from many sources *without* burying them with unreasonable requests. This can bring you details for trip planning and preventing problems on the road. Investigate online for travel, historic site, and lodging information. Many archives, historical societies, libraries, courthouses, and other places have an online presence that includes hours, access guidelines, catalogs, finding aids, and other vital trip planning details. Budget and staff considerations may have last minute impacts on their hours and a quick call makes sense before you leave.

4. **Get a jump on your research.** What can you accomplish *before* your trip? Access records and resources nearby. I did Arkansas research at the Minnesota Historical Society and the Wisconsin Historical Society before ever going to Arkansas. What is online via free and subscription databases and digitized images? Consult with researchers who know the area you will visit. Don't use expensive trip time on sources you can find closer to home or via your computer.

5. **Outline and detail your trip plan.** Decide how much time you have and when you will go. Map out your final route, make arrangements, prepare a detailed itinerary, and your packing list. How can you plan the best use of your time and still be flexible? Various organizations and tour companies offer heritage/research tour packages. While good for an introduction to ancestral places and research repositories, you need to decide if such a package will allow you enough research times in the needed places.

6. **Tips for finding success and enjoying your time on the road.** Research when you're traveling is just like researching when you're at home, *except for a few things . . .* Use the tips you'll learn to plan so that even things that go wrong can be an adventure, not a disaster. That's why we have alternative places or relatives in mind.

7. **There's no place like home.** How do you deal with the after-the-trip letdown? When you get home what do you do with all this *stuff* that you gathered? Four things need to be done after each trip, and then, *update your charts . . . and start thinking about the next research trip!*

8. **Some items for your packing list and more can be found in online lists. These will vary depending on whether you travel by car or air.**

Trash bags	Light bulbs	Laundry soap	Envelopes	Zipper bags
Clothespins	Reading light	Grocery list	Sticky notes	Scissors
Timer	Food/snacks	Cooler	Paper towels	Silverware
Utensils/cup	Stationery bag	Power strip	Ace bandage	Water
Clothing	Toiletries	Meds/Rx copies	Sharp knife	Batteries
Own pillow	Itinerary	Room thermometer	Address labels	Dollar bills
Cell phone	PENCILS/paper	File folders	Copies to share	Maps
Small flashlight	First-aid kit	Ear plugs	Cords & cords	Computer/tablet
Passport/DL	Backpack or rolling bag	Face mask	Lip balm	Hand sanitizer

GENERAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Check for travel or directory books and websites about Bed and Breakfasts, hotels, historical societies, museums, golf courses, major cities, and various states and countries. Not all list historic sites and buildings or libraries and archives but may supply other information for your trip and ideas on alternate activities for those who accompany you.

8. *American Automobile Association*. AAA members can obtain Tour Books, Triptiks, and maps at no extra charge online at <https://www.aaa.com/>
9. Groene, Gordon and Janet. *Living Aboard Your RV*. 4th ed. Camden, Maine: International Marine/Ragged Mountain Press, 2012. A growing number of genealogists are spending their retirement and research years this way. Search in bookstores, on Amazon, and online for such guides and lists of campgrounds.
10. Harrington, Candy. *Barrier-Free Travel: A Nuts & Bolts Guide for Wheelers & Slow Walker*. Demos Health; 3d ed. New York: Demos Health, 2009. Research travel does change for many of us as we age. A wealth of books and websites exist with tips and places for barrier-free and accessible travel.
11. Ingram, Tracey. *Accessibility Disabled World Travels - Tips for Travelers with Disabilities: Handicapped, Special Needs, Seniors, & Baby Boomers - How to Travel Barrier Free*. Chicago: Sovereign Education Media, 2018.
12. Lawliss, Chuck. *The Civil War Sourcebook: A Traveler's Guide*. New York: Harmony Books, 1991. This lists Civil War battlefields, reenactment units and addresses; reference books; libraries and archives with Civil War research collections. Other books by the author include *Ghost Towns*, *Gold & Gamblers*, *Old West Sourcebooks*, and *The Early American Sourcebook*. Great for travel ideas for yourself and non-genealogist companions. Don't stop with just this author!

LOCATING LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES, AND SOCIETIES

It's easy to find them online today. Use your ancestral place names plus words like library, university special collections, and historical society. Utilize these publications to find more. You don't want to miss some hidden library or museum that has 2 cabinets of files on local families. Check libraries and used bookstores for books about specific repositories and for guides that are no longer published in book form.

13. *American Library Directory*. 2 vols. Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2021. Includes Canada. The newer editions are not in all libraries due to the existence of an online edition for libraries. The descriptions in older editions on library shelves may describe a collection or index that doesn't jump out at you on a specific library's website.
14. *British Archives: A Guide to Archive Resources in the United Kingdom*. 3d ed. London:Macmillan Press, 1995.

15. *Directory of Irish Archives*. 2d ed. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993.
16. National Historical Publications and Records Commission. *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States*. 2d ed. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1988.
17. *The Official Museum Directory*. Older volumes found in libraries still offer great information and today's online access via in-house databases at major repositories adds more.
18. *Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada*. 15th ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2001. In partnership with the American Association for State and Local History <https://aaslh.org/>

EXAMPLES OF MATERIALS FOR SPECIFIC LOCALITIES AND REPOSITORIES

19. Andriot, John L. *Township Atlas of the United States*. McLean, VA: Andriot Associates, 1979. Other editions utilize different formats for the maps; all are useful in different ways to researchers. I have some pages digitized so that I can quickly view ancestral locations in my states and which townships are nearby. Check the Newberry Library's Atlas of Historical County Boundaries Project at <https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/>
20. Bloser, Susan Sokol and Clyde Norman Wilson, Jr. *The Southern Historical Collection: A Guide to Manuscripts*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1970.
21. Cyndi's List: <https://www.cyndislist.com/travel/> This link takes you to her Travel and Research category. Check under each state and country for more specifics on records and repositories.
22. Culbertson, Judy and Tom Randall. *Permanent New Yorkers: An Illustrated Guide to the Cemeteries of New York*. Chelsea, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 1990. Pair publications like this with images found online to help you recognize the area, cemetery, and the family stones when you get to a place.
23. *FamilySearch Catalog*. You might find that some of the records you planned to check on the trip are already digitized! <https://www.familysearch.org>
24. Leary, Helen F.M., ed. *North Carolina Research: Genealogy and Local History*. 2d ed. Raleigh, NC: NC Genealogical Society, 1996. Not a new guide but a great resource for NC information. It also provides examples of records that exist in other states.
25. Merriman, Brenda Dougall. *Genealogy in Ontario: Searching the Records*. 4th ed. Toronto: Ontario Genealogical Society, 2008.

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE & CONSULTATIONS

These are resources for professional researchers for hire. Use them before your trip for guidance, index checking, and to obtain needed documents before the trip. Find someone for on-site guidance once you are in the area for some side-by-side assistance to save time. In the long run, the fee you pay will save you time and money before, during, and after the planning and actual research.

26. Association of Professional Genealogists. Click on Find a Professional for a Directory of members. <https://www.apgen.org/>
27. Board for Certification of Genealogists, Inc., The *Directory of Certified Genealogists* is available online under the BCG Associates tab: <https://bcgcertification.org/>
28. ICAPGen. International Commission for Accreditation of Professional Genealogists. Click on find a professional. <https://www.icapgen.org/>

ONLINE TRAVEL PLANNING RESOURCES

29. **Rand-McNally Mileage Calculator:** <https://maps.randmcnally.com/mileage-calculator.do> The easiest way to locate this is to just type "mileage calculator" into your search engine. I enter a city and state or an address where I am and the same for the place where I want to go. I get the number of miles, driving time, and a map with the route highlighted. Yes, GPS is a boon, but sometimes I need to see the route on paper.
30. Special needs travelers: Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality <https://sath.org/>.
31. <http://www.revolutionaryday.com/> Self-guided driving tours of routes and sites related to the Revolutionary War.

32. Itinerary Categories: for your reference and the family/friend/neighbor at home

- Your name
- Cell phone
- Email
- Doctor/health insurance info
- Rental car info
- Personal car make, model, year, license plate
- Copies of tickets, DL, a birth certificate for you
- Rx list
- Airline reservation details
- Contact info persons at home
- Contact persons you are visiting
- Contact info hotels
- Contact info airline
- Contact details repositories
- Day-by-day schedule

Final tip: The travel and research take more time than you think they will!