

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

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Genealogical research can at the same time be an exciting and frustrating experience. Starting with family history, a layman can become so enthralled by the past that he may become interested in a wider outlook on history and thus develop into a good historian. Beginning with the limited techniques of the amateur genealogist, he may grow into a mature historical researcher.

Between the starting and maturing, however, is a wide area that defies definition, but which for the sake of classification might be referred to as genealogy in its generic sense. Some genealogists, of course, become trained historians with not only a knowledge of history but ability to use scientific methods of research. Those who attain this rank are indeed wise and contributory historians. On the other hand, the majority of genealogists are concerned with specific data on individuals and families with emphases on statistics and blood. Even these amateurs, if they exercise caution and accuracy, make a contribution to history in its broadest sense by doing spade-work which the professional researcher may find useful in picturing history in general.

Beginners all too often exhibit the very characteristics that prevent them from becoming good genealogists. These attitudes and characteristics immediately form a barrier between the researcher and his sources which can be surmounted only by wisdom born of experience in delving into the multiplicity of source materials available but which must be sought out and studied with patience and good judgment.

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Patience and accuracy are the watchwords of the good genealogist. Without both, genealogy degenerates into ancestor worship based on mythology. Myths have no place in history — or in genealogy.

The genealogist must from the first accept several basic facts. First, our ancestors had many virtues, but one of their strongest was not that of keeping and preserving their records. For instance, except for a few church records and an occasional county record, births and deaths were not officially recorded in North Carolina until 1913. Consequently, a person seeking the date of birth or death of an individual prior to 1913 need not expect to find this date recorded officially.

Second, research is a serious and time-consuming activity which the individual himself must be prepared to undertake by examining records in person; genealogy is not a mail-order course.

Third, many of the records that have been kept are not indexed and individual items can be located only by time-consuming, page-by-page review. No library or archives has the staff to make these searches for the genealogist.

Fourth, the mistaken idea that one can "write-off" and get a ready-prepared family history and coat-of-arms ought to be discarded. Even if a history of the Richard Jones family has been published, the fact is that there have been thousands of Richard Joneses living all over the country.

Fifth, the genealogist must be financially and otherwise prepared to travel extensively to locate source materials in libraries, archives, manuscript depositories, county courthouses, and the like. If he is not so prepared, the only alternative will be to hire a professional genealogist to do his research for him. There are some good genealogists around; there are also some who are out for a fast dollar.

Finally, the beginner must learn quickly what source materials are available for the particular area in which the ancestors lived.

Anyone beginning genealogical research should be familiar with the elementary principles of research, particularly as applied to genealogy. Good tools for introductory study are Derek Harland, *An Introduction to Record Keeping and Research*, and the same author's *Research Procedure and Evaluation of Evidence*, both of which are available from the author, 24 West 4th North, Salt Lake City 16, Utah.

A useful study for the North Carolina genealogist is Wallace R. Draughton, *North Carolina Genealogical Reference*, available from the author, 709 East Trinity Avenue, Durham, N. C.

Finally, anyone interested in research in the North Carolina Archives should write the Department for a copy of a free 8-page genealogical leaflet, *The Archives of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History: Services to the Public*. This leaflet should be especially helpful to beginners in that it gives suggestions as to procedure and sources of information.

The Department of Archives and History, as the official archival agency of North Carolina, is the richest single mine of genealogical source material in the State. In its Archives are original records of state officials from the governors to the departments and agencies; a variety of records from most of the 100 counties; microfilm copies of the federal censuses through 1880; personal collections of outstanding North Carolinians; and records compiled by various patriotic groups.

This mine of source materials is exploited by perhaps 4,000 researchers a year. Thousands of photostatic copies of these materials are furnished to researchers for a nominal fee.

Most genealogical materials in the Archives fall in one of the following categories:

County Records. By law no county official may destroy public records without the prior approval of the Department of Archives and History. The Department of course will refuse such approval in the case of records that it believes have historical value; such records must be preserved and made available in the county courthouse, or they may be transferred to the Archives. The Department has some records of varying quality and quantity from 91 of the State's 100 counties. For many counties these consist of county court minutes, wills, deeds, marriage bonds (to 1868), tax lists, and estates records.

Most genealogical records are by nature county records. Consequently the genealogist must be thoroughly familiar with the various types of county records extant as well as the origin of the counties. The location of the records of each county may be found in Charles Christopher Crittenden and Dan Lacy, *The Historical Records of North Carolina — The County Records* (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1938-1939, 3 volumes), which is out of print but which is available for study in most libraries and courthouses. The basic work on the counties is D. L. Corbitt, *Formation of North Carolina Counties, 1663-1943* (Raleigh: The State Department of Archives and History, 1950), which is available for \$3.00 from the Division of Publications, Box 1881, Raleigh, N. C. A valuable little chart showing the origin of the counties is available from the same address for ten cents.

It should be noted that the researcher must know the county in which the ancestor lived in order to locate specific information inasmuch as there is no state-wide index for county records. Indeed, many county records themselves have no index, and they must be checked page for page.

The will books are kept in the office of Clerk of Superior Court in the county courthouse, and marriage records after 1868 and the deed books are kept in the office of Register of Deeds in the county. The Department of Archives and History has microfilm copies of early will and deed books of many counties, but its staff is not authorized to search microfilm records for researchers. They are, however, available for use in the microfilm reading room.

Census Records. The federal census has been taken every ten years since 1790 and these records are available through 1880. The Census of 1790 for North Carolina is printed and indexed; those of 1800 through 1880 are microfilm copies of the originals in the National Archives. These records must be searched by the genealogist in person on microfilm reading machines available in the Archives. Prior to 1850, only the name of the head of the household was listed, along with numbers (not names) of other age groups in the family. Beginning in 1850, the census listed the name, age, sex, and other information on every member of the household. Thus, the census records 1850 through 1880 are indispensable for research in the nineteenth century.

Military Records. For the **Revolutionary War**, the Department of Archives and History has the *Register* of the Continental Line from North Carolina, Revolutionary vouchers and army accounts, and some miscellaneous Revolutionary records. These records do not give personal information and often do not prove military service (for instance, an individual who sold a horse to the army is listed as having been paid for a "public claim" whereas one who served in the militia might have been paid with a similar voucher). Military records such as muster rolls, pension applications, and the like are in the National Archives, Washington 25, D. C.

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For the **Civil War** the Department has the alphabetized index to John W. Moore, *Roster of North Carolina Troops in the War between the States*. In addition, there is the Adjutant General's "Roll of Honor" for certain regiments. In searching the latter, the researcher must know the regiment and company in which the man served. State pension applications of Confederate veterans and widows are housed in the Archives. In seeking information from these records, the full name of the individual and the county of residence must be known.

Very few records for the War of 1812, Mexican War, and the Spanish-American War are available.

Finally, the Department has microfilm copies of the *index* to the carded service records in the National Archives for the various wars, and these copies may be used in the microfilm reading room.

Other Records. As a result of the W. P. A. cemetery inventory in the 1930's, the Department has an alphabetized card file to cemetery markers. While many cemeteries have never been inventoried, these records are a valuable source for vital statistics.

The Department has a small collection of unpublished genealogies filed by family name, as well as miscellaneous genealogical records compiled by patriotic societies and a collection of Bible records.

The Department does not maintain a general printed library. Basic reference books, however, are available in the Search Room.

The Department invites researchers to visit the Search Room where they may study the records under regulations established for their use. An attendant is on duty at all times to be of assistance. Of course, the attendant cannot do a person's research for him, but often suggestions as to possible sources can be given.