FamilySearch Historical Collections Tips and Tricks
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INTRODUCTION

It may seem strange to start with a definition of "collection" but it will be very helpful in this presentation. Collections at FamilySearch take a number of meanings. They can be indexed or image collections in the "Historical Records" section of the FamilySearch website. They can be an imaged collection cited in the Family History Library Catalog, but not in the "Historical Records" collection.

A collection may be in the form of lineage linked data and be listed in the "Genealogies" section of the search feature. FamilySearch has also gathered the "collections" of noted genealogists for a number of years. It may seem like those collections are hidden in the Family History Library Catalog (FHLC), but you'll be able to find them after the session today.

A "collection" may also be in the context of a particular archive or repository – this too becomes a challenge to identify what has been gathered from the available records scattered throughout the world. However, using the search functionality in the Family History Library Catalog, this is an easy task.

FamilySearch also has a "collection" of over 507,000 scanned books that are all relevant to genealogical research. Many are family and county histories.

HISTORICAL RECORDS

FamilySearch has over 3,050 collections in the Historical Records section of the website. They cover a variety of record types and geographic areas. They may be searched as an entire collection, a geographic area, or a specific collection. Depending on what information you know about the subject of your search, you may interchangeably use all of these searches over the course of your research. As a general rule, it is best to either:

- Start with a narrow search and expand, or
- Start with a broad search and refine it depending on the results

The website functions best with all of the web browsers except Internet Explorer (IE). This web browser is outdated and sometimes gets poor performance on the FamilySearch website, although it is still a favorite among many genealogists. Web browsers, Bing, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Edge, and Google Chrome all function very well.

Search Engine

All of the major genealogical websites have different search engines that run beneath the website and return entries in different sort orders. This is why you do not get the same results when you search the 1850 U.S. Census on Ancestry as you do on FamilySearch or Heritage Quest or My Heritage or FindMyPast.

One of the major differences are the name groupings – how they group given names and surnames. One site may include the spelling variant Wrenshall with Renshaw, but another doesn't. Some will include the Latin variants of given names and others do not. Some include a wide variety of abbreviations, others don't have as extensive a name library. This affects the underlying computer algorithm that weights and scores the entries as a close or far match.

The difference in search engines accounts for the difference in the experience that you are getting at each website. It's this difference that allows us to choose the experience that best suits our needs.
The Historical Records section of the FamilySearch website may be searched in one of three ways:

1. Search the entire set of over 3,050 historical collections
2. Search by a specific named record collection
3. Search by a specific locality, region, date, or record type

Historical Record Collections

Showing 1-15 of 15 Collections.   Show All

Title ▲	Records	Last Updated
📷 Oklahoma Applications for Allotment, Five Civilized Tribes, 1899-1907	1,846,931	Oct 17, 2016
📷 Oklahoma Applications for Enrollment to the Five Civilized Tribes, 1898-1914	882,272	Nov 8, 2010
📷 Oklahoma Deaths and Burials, 1864-1941	526	Jan 22, 2020
Oklahoma Marriages, 1870-1930	19,296	May 5, 2021
📷 Oklahoma Probate Records, 1887-2008	Browse Images	Jun 18, 2014
📷 Oklahoma, Church Records, 1897-1984	197	Jan 12, 2021
📷 Oklahoma, Comanche County, Highland Cemetery Records, 1901-1994	26,542	Jul 1, 2020
📷 Oklahoma, Confederate Pension Applications, 1879-1920	23,722	Jun 24, 2020
📷 Oklahoma, County Marriages, 1890-1995	1,469,882	Feb 21, 2019
📷 Oklahoma, Noble County, Parker Funeral Home, Funeral Records, 1908-1982	11,883	Oct 30, 2020
📷 Oklahoma, Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Rose Hill Burial Park, Interment cards, 1917-1982	55,631	Oct 5, 2020
📷 Oklahoma, School Records, 1895-1936	19,912,465	May 5, 2021
📷 Oklahoma, Tulsa County, Rose Hill Memorial Park Interment Records, ca.1915 - ca.1982	26,144	May 16, 2020
📷 Oklahoma, Voter Records, 1906-1956	45,234	Dec 31, 2020
📷 Oklahoma, World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1940-1945	604,280	Mar 2, 2020

Tips and Tricks

Creating straight forward searches is always the place to start. If you are looking for the marriage of George W. Harris to Martha Payne, then start with the standard spelling of both names, search the approximate date and place you believe they would have occurred. However, when that doesn't work, it's time to get creative.

FamilySearch indexers are instructed to "index what they see." This means that if the given name is written Geo., then that is what is typed into the index. If the record is "G. W. Harris" then only the initials are in the record. What you may not have thought to include are titles. You should also search for entries that are "Mr. George W. Harris" or "Mr. G. W. Harris." Females also often went by their husband's names after they were married. It is not uncommon to see a death record as "Mrs. G. W. Harris."

Exact Search

On names, FamilySearch exact mode returns exactly what you enter, with four allowances: case is ignored, spaces are ignored, diacritical marks are ignored, and punctuation is ignored.

- "Mark John" no longer matches just Mark or just John.
- "Mark John" no longer matches "Mark Jack."
- "Mark John" no longer matches "John Mark."

For names and places, if a name or place is marked "exact," it must be present in the record. This is not the case for dates. Even though FamilySearch always handles dates as exact (the year on the record must fall within the specified range), the date field in the record can be blank and the record still matches.

Parent Search

Parent search is a very useful tool that will bring together potential family groups. The temptation is always to fill in too much data. In this instance, you may enter information into the search fields for the names of the parents and include the surname of the mother, or leave it blank. For example:

Search Historical Records
Search for a deceased ancestor in historical records to uncover vital information from their life.

Deceased Ancestor's Name

First Names   Last Names

☐   ☐

Leave   **Blank**

Search with a life event:

Birth | Marriage | Residence | Death | Any

Birthplace   Birth Year (Range)

☐   From   To

Search with a relationship:

Spouse | Parents | Other Person

Father's First Names   Father's Last Names

Peter   ☐   Keesler   ☐

Mother's First Names   Mother's Last Names

Ann   ☐ | ☐

FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY CATALOG

When FamilySearch has imaged the "collection" of a noted genealogist, then the collection will be cataloged under the name of the compiler and placed in the Family History Library Catalog under the subject heading "Genealogy," then alphabetically by the name of the person who created the collection. For example:

- Florida Genealogy
- Ireland Genealogy
- Germany Genealogy
- Alabama Genealogy

Under "Florida Genealogy," the following collection is found:

The Edith Starling Wall collection, 1800-1990

Statement of Responsibility:	Edith Starling Wall
Authors:	Wall, Edith Starling (Main Author)
Format:	Manuscript/Manuscript on Film
Language:	English
Publication:	Salt Lake City, Utah : Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1993
Physical:	on 10 microfilm reels ; 16 mm.

At the end of the catalog record, you will see the other areas where the record is cataloged:

Subjects
Locality Subjects
United States, Florida - Genealogy

United States, Georgia - Genealogy

GENEALOGIES

Under the Search tab in FamilySearch, you will also find a collection of previous lineage-linked genealogies that have been researched by individuals and organizations. These collections are locked to further changes, but may be compared to the Family Tree. Searches in the Family Tree do not include searches in the "Genealogies" section, so both must be searched to see the full range of lineage-linked data on FamilySearch.

BOOK COLLECTION

The FamilySearch book collection allows you to search millions of entries in a qualified collection of genealogically relevant materials. The collection is primarily made from compiled genealogies and county histories. This allows you to search across millions of pages of compiled research of accumulated genealogies. FamilySearch works with other partners in the library community to scan and index these volumes for free research and download.

CONCLUSION

There are numerous collections in the holdings of FamilySearch. Many are still to be digitized and indexed. Watch for additions to the Historical Records collection and be sure to click on the date to see the most recent updated collections. Also search the "Genealogy" subject heading in your research area of interest to see what major genealogical collections may be available.

Use the search strategies to identify variants in spelling and to pull potential family groups together with the parent search. Compare the search results in FamilySearch with the same search in the other major online companies to see the differences in the way the search engines are returning the same query.