

---

## Doing a Deep Dive in Ancestry's Collections

---

Annette Burke Lyttle

[annette@heritagedetective.com](mailto:annette@heritagedetective.com)

Ancestry has over 11 billion records in its collections—and is adding more all the time—but putting an ancestor's name into a search form only skims the surface of these collections. Learn how to dig deeper and more efficiently into Ancestry's resources to uncover genealogical gold mines.

### Your Ancestry home page

If you have a subscription and you log in to your Ancestry account, you may find your home page is full of stuff you really don't need. If you click on the "Customize your homepage" button in the upper right corner of the page, you can get rid of things you don't need and add items that are useful. If you use Ancestry at a library or Family History Center, you can't customize.

### Searching on Ancestry

When you enter an ancestor's name, birth date, and location in a search form on Ancestry, you may think you're accessing all the available records, but the fact is that it's simply not possible for Ancestry's search engine to "touch" all of those 11 billion records and return results to you. So you're really only getting results from a percentage of their collections. For instance, you've probably noticed that census records usually come up first with a general search. Once you've done enough research to have found the basic records and you're on to looking for the more advanced ones, the general search form is not going to help.

The most efficient way to find these other records is to search by location or collection and to use the Browse function.

### FIND COLLECTIONS: SEARCH BY LOCATION



1. Click on Search on the Ancestry toolbar. On the drop-down menu that appears, click on All collections.
2. Ignore the search form at the top of the page. Scroll down to Explore by Location.
3. Click on a state either on the map or the list of states.

The collections page for that state will appear. You can also follow this process to search in the UK & Ireland, Europe, Canada, and Australia & NZ.

## Data collections

Data collections on Ancestry's research pages are organized by type. These are typical collections available on a state's research page:

- Census and voter lists
- Birth, marriage and death
- Military
- Immigration and emigration
- Newspapers and periodicals
- Directories and member lists
- Court, land, wills, and financial
- Dictionaries, encyclopedias, and reference
- Maps, atlases, and gazetteers
- Stories, memories, and histories

## Using the research page

The research page provides links to each collection, along with the number of records in each collection. At the bottom of each category, is an option to "View all" collections in the category, since the data collections lists only show up to five of the collections in the category.

On the right side of the page are boxes that allow you to call up a search form to search all the state's collections, to select the research page of another location, to select a region within the state that has unique collections, to view the state's collections in the card catalog, and to access "More Help," which usually includes maps, state-specific message boards, and state specific member directories.

## Searching individual collections

When you click on the link for a particular collection, you'll be taken to a search form that allows you to search for an ancestor in just that collection. The search

page also allows us to browse in individual collections. Both approaches can be useful and both should be used. We also get source information for the collection and an “About” box that tells us what’s in the collection and gives additional information and assistance on using the collection.

**Card Catalog**  
Searchable listing of all record collections

Results 1-25 of 53 Sort By

Title	Category	Records	Activity
<input type="checkbox"/> Canada, Quaker Meeting Records, 1786-1988	Directories & Member Lists	148,443	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Index to Quaker Obituary Notices, 1822-2012	Birth, Marriage & Death	79,198	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, Vol I-VI, 1607-1943	Directories & Member Lists	368,712	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Hinshaw Index to Selected Quaker Records, 1680-1940	Directories & Member Lists	687,018	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. and Canada, Quaker Yearly Meeting Annual Reports, 1808-1930	Directories & Member Lists	116,283	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Quaker Periodicals, 1828-1929	Newspapers & Periodicals	39,804	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. and UK, Quaker Published Memorials, 1818-1919	Birth, Marriage & Death	66,138	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Surname Index to Quaker Records	Directories & Member Lists	444	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Quaker Genealogies, 1893-2003	Stories, Memories & Histories	31,284	
<input type="checkbox"/> Indiana, Selected Quaker Meeting Directories, 1836-1921	Directories & Member Lists	14,838	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. and Canada, Quaker Monthly Meeting Historical Data, 1671-2010	Stories, Memories & Histories	2,087	
<input type="checkbox"/> Manchester, England, Non-Conformist Marriages, 1758-1937	Birth, Marriage & Death	101,837	
<input type="checkbox"/> Manchester, England, Non-Conformist Deaths and Burials, 1758-1967	Birth, Marriage & Death	97,880	
<input type="checkbox"/> Manchester, England, Non-Conformist Births and Baptisms, 1758-1912	Birth, Marriage & Death	187,227	
<input type="checkbox"/> France, Deportations from Internment Camps, 1942 (USHMM)	Immigration & Emigration	3,383	
<input type="checkbox"/> England & Wales, Quaker Birth, Marriage, and Death Registers, 1578-1837	Birth, Marriage & Death	668,018	
<input type="checkbox"/> A Collection of Quaker Testimonies	Stories, Memories & Histories	0	

## FIND COLLECTIONS: USE THE CARD CATALOG

1. Click on Search on the Ancestry toolbar. On the drop-down menu that appears, click on Card Catalog.
2. Enter a title or keyword in the search box.
3. If desired, filter by category, location, and/or dates

If you know the title of a collection, then use the Title search box, but I’ve found it’s more useful to search by Keyword or words. A keyword can be a location, a record type, a religion, just about anything. Experiment with keywords because different versions

will give you different results. For example, at left are the first few results when we enter the keyword Quaker.

**Card Catalog**  
Searchable listing of all record collections

Results 1-25 of 76 Sort By

Title	Category	Records	Activity
<input type="checkbox"/> Canada, Quaker Meeting Records, 1786-1988	Directories & Member Lists	148,443	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Published Quaker Family Histories, 1845-1920	Stories, Memories & Histories	17,880	
<input type="checkbox"/> Great Britain, Holocaust Records From The Religious Society of Friends, 1933-1942 (USHMM)	Stories, Memories & Histories	8,281	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wayne County, Indiana, Quaker Funeral Home Records, 1939-1974	Birth, Marriage & Death	8,100	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Index to Quaker Obituary Notices, 1822-2012	Birth, Marriage & Death	79,198	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Selected Quaker College Yearbooks and Alumni Directories, 1896-2003	Directories & Member Lists	821,847	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, Vol I-VI, 1607-1943	Directories & Member Lists	368,712	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Hinshaw Index to Selected Quaker Records, 1680-1940	Directories & Member Lists	687,018	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. and Canada, Quaker Yearly Meeting Annual Reports, 1808-1930	Directories & Member Lists	116,283	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Quaker Periodicals, 1828-1929	Newspapers & Periodicals	39,804	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. and UK, Quaker Published Memorials, 1818-1919	Birth, Marriage & Death	66,138	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Surname Index to Quaker Records	Directories & Member Lists	444	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Quaker Genealogies, 1893-2003	Stories, Memories & Histories	31,284	
<input type="checkbox"/> Indiana, Selected Quaker Meeting Directories, 1836-1921	Directories & Member Lists	14,838	

But if we enter the keyword Quakers, the search turns up some of the same collections, but many collections that are different from the first search.

## BROWSING COLLECTIONS

**Ohio and Florida, City Directories, 1902-1960**

**Search**  Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s)  Last Name

Year  Location

Lived in

Any Event

Publication Info

Keyword

Business Name

Year Range

**Search** Clear search

**Browse this collection**

To browse this image set, select from the options below.

State

City

Year Range

- 1903
- 1905
- 1915
- 1924
- 1926 - 1927
- 1929
- 1952
- 1954
- 1955
- 1955 - 1956

Browsing records is an excellent way to find information not only about your ancestors but about the sources themselves that you're looking at in each collection. When you select a collection to look at, the "Browse this collection" box on the right side of the collection's home page allows you to drill down to particular sources in the collection and look at any part of

their content. For instance, when you're looking at a collections of city directories, you can choose a particular directory to look at and inspect its front and back matter for information, as well as looking at the entry for the person of interest.

Some collections on Ancestry are browse-only. They are not indexed, so they have no search form. In that case, we have to look through individual images of the collection's contents to see if our person of interest is mentioned.

Searching by location and using the card catalog to locate individual collections on Ancestry will open up a goldmine of records that can't be accessed in a general search using a search form. The ability to browse in a collection will further expand your ability to access and understand records relating to your ancestors. You'll find many of your "brick walls" falling when you know how to find records beyond just the basic ones delivered by Ancestry's search engine.

### Resources

"How to Search Ancestry," <https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/How-to-Search-Ancestry>

"Free Research Guides," <https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/Free-Research-Guides>

"Searching by Location," <https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/Searching-by-Location>

"Browsing Records on Ancestry.com [video]," <https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2013/07/25/browsing-records-on-ancestry-com-video/>

"How to Find and Browse Unindexed Records at Ancestry—The Better Browsing Checklist," <https://lisalouisecooke.com/2019/11/17/browse-only-records-at-ancestry/>

“How to Find the Collections for Your Area,”

<https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2016/07/06/how-to-find-the-collections-for-your-area/>

“Using the Card Catalog to find a specific record,”

<https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/US-Getting-Started-Lesson-5-Search-Tips>

“How to Browse the Census by Location on Ancestry and FamilySearch [video],”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwIaGho1vy8>

“Ancestry has Thousands of ‘Invisible’ Records You Can’t Find with a Search,”

*Family History Daily*, <https://familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-help-and-how-to/ancestry-records-browse-only/>