

# Accessing Records From a Distance

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There are vast quantities of materials housed in repositories all across the United States and Canada that are useful to genealogists. Compiled genealogies, manuscripts, local histories, abstracted or transcribed vital records, church records--the list goes on and on. While our local libraries and other research facilities can offer a broad range of materials to use, they will not be able to hold copies of every book for every area. No library can. Not even the Library of Congress.

The Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) holds millions (over 2.5M at last count) of records on microfilm. They do not have copies of all records either -- at least not yet. So how can a researcher access materials that are not available to them in their own backyard? There are several ways.

The first is to visit your local LDS Family History Center or the NEHGS Research Library. Recognizing that not everyone can travel to Salt Lake City, LDS has set up Family History Centers all across the country and all over the world, and has also allowed NEHGS to be a location where researchers can access LDS microfilm. Researchers can search for records on the FamilySearch website and request to have copies of microfilms sent to their local center or NEHGS. See [familysearch.org/films/](http://familysearch.org/films/) for more information on this service.

Another valuable resource is the interlibrary loan system. In 1902 the Library of Congress established itself as the "library of last resort" and agreed to start lending some of its materials to other libraries when the materials were not available elsewhere. This year the Library of Congress alone will handle over 50,000 requests for book loans and photocopies.

The American Library Association has established standards for service through the interlibrary loan system. This system allows materials from one library to be sent to another library for use by its patrons. In many instances the materials may not be allowed to leave the library once they have arrived and you will need to use them only in the building. Contact your local library to see if they are part of the interlibrary loan system. Most public libraries do belong, but some smaller ones may not.

Many libraries now have their catalogs available for search on their websites. When searching these catalogs it may not always be possible to determine whether or not the book is a circulating copy. Once you have found a book in a catalog that you would like to borrow, print out the bibliographic listing and bring it to your local library. If you cannot print out a bibliographic listing, copy all of the information on the book, including the title, author/editor, name and location of publisher, year of publication, and Library of Congress or other call number. Any other pertinent information given about the book should also be listed. Your librarian will then work with you to find and order a copy of the book. The reference librarian can check databases such as OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), to determine which, if any, libraries might have a copy of the desired book.

Not every book in every library is available for circulation. In cases where the books do not circulate, photocopies of portions of a book can be ordered. In addition, many articles from periodicals can be photocopied and sent to you through the interlibrary loan system. The Periodical Source Index (PERSI), available in most libraries and at [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), will provide not only citations for the periodicals in which articles were originally published but also the names of libraries holding copies of that periodical.

Books and periodicals are not the only materials available on interlibrary loan. Many repositories loan microforms as well. There may be restrictions on which records are available for loan. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), for example, will loan copies of all U.S. census and Soundex microfilms. Unfortunately, it does not offer interlibrary loan of all materials. Passenger lists, for example, are not available for loan. NARA lends materials to both individuals and institutions. For details contact your local NARA branch, which is online at <http://www.nara.gov/>.

The National Archives of Canada (NAC) is an invaluable resource for interlibrary loan. Any part of their collection that is available on microfilm is available for loan. Their catalog is available online as [ArchiviaNet](http://ArchiviaNet) at

[www.archives.ca](http://www.archives.ca). NAC offers loans only to institutions, so you must use the interlibrary loan system.

Private research libraries may or may not offer parts of their collection on interlibrary loan.

Circulating library collections, the LDS Family History Center system and interlibrary loan are invaluable aids to performing research on your Canadian ancestors. Talk to your local librarian or Family History Center staff member to learn even more about them and discover how they can help you do research without having to make costly trips to distant repositories.