FamilySearch User Guide

What is FamilySearch?

FamilySearch is a leading nonprofit organization that provides access to extensive genealogical records and offers educational resources for genealogy research. As the largest free genealogy website, it hosts collections of records from over 90 countries and is continuously expanding.

Operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), FamilySearch is completely free for everyone, regardless of religious affiliation. Your ancestor's religious background also doesn't affect which collections are available.

Key Features of FamilySearch

FamilySearch is renowned for its historical records collection, which spans across many nations. While some records are searchable by name, others require manual browsing through images to identify ancestors.

Here are some notable features of FamilySearch:

- **Family Tree:** A global family tree built collaboratively by users.
- **User-Submitted Genealogies:** Contributions of family history from users around the world.
- **Digital Library:** A collection of digitized genealogical resources.
- **Research Wiki:** A research guide with articles on genealogy topics and regions.
- **Catalog:** A searchable database of genealogical materials.
- **Memories:** A space to upload and share family photos, stories, documents, and audio recordings.

How to access FamilySearch

The FamilySearch website is accessible from anywhere, offering millions of free historical records. Some collections, however, may have access restrictions based on licensing agreements. These restrictions are displayed within the catalog entry of each collection.

There are four levels of access restrictions:

1. **FamilySearch Center**: Available at locations staffed by volunteers, often found in affiliated churches or local history organizations.
2. **FamilySearch Library**: Access the collection at the FamilySearch library in Salt Lake City.

3. **Partner Sites**: Some records require access through subscription sites like **Ancestry**, **MyHeritage**, or **Fold3**. FamilySearch may offer limited access or indexes, but full access often requires visiting the partner sites.
4. **Affiliate Libraries**: Select libraries worldwide, including Appleton Public Library, provide access to restricted collections.

To locate a nearby FamilySearch Center or Affiliate Library visit locations.familysearch.org/

Creating a FamilySearch Account

To fully utilize FamilySearch's features, you need to create a free account. You can sign up using an existing Google, Facebook, or Apple account, or create a new account directly through FamilySearch.

To create an account:

1. Visit **familysearch.org/**.
2. Click Create Account in the upper right corner.
3. Choose to sign up using your Google, Facebook, or Apple account, or create a new account by filling in the required details.

Once your account is set up, you can sign in using the same method whenever you visit the site.

Create or sign into your FamilySearch account to get the most of the site

Navigating FamilySearch Menu

The FamilySearch menu on the left-hand side

After signing in, you'll notice a menu of options on the left-hand side:

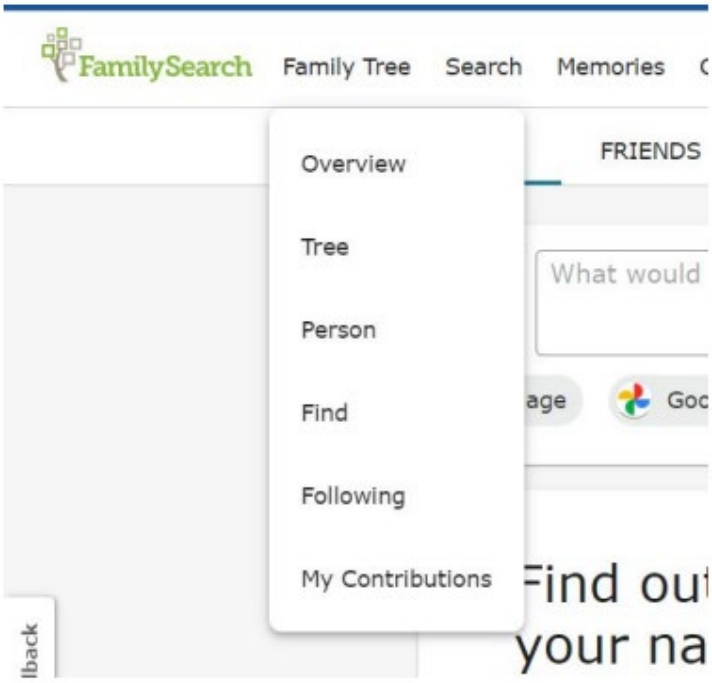
- **FamilySearch Icon**: Returns you to the home screen.
- **Family Tree**: Access your family tree or search for ancestors.
- **Search**: Search the historical records database.
- **Memories**: View or upload family photos, documents, and stories.
- **Get Involved**: Volunteer to help with genealogical projects.
- **Activities**: Family history-related activities, both online and at home.

FamilySearch Family Tree

The FamilySearch Family Tree is a collaborative effort where users around the world can contribute and update records. This means anyone can add, edit, or delete information (except details on living people, which are always kept private).

Each person in the family tree has a Person Page that displays their details, related family members, and attached sources. You can follow individuals to be notified of any updates made by others. Additionally, the system provides hints, such as potential records or photos that might relate to your ancestors.

Navigating in FamilySearch Family Tree



Additional FamilyTree menu options

Clicking on the Family Tree tab will bring up the following options:

- **Overview** - About FamilySearch Family Tree
- **Tree** - Brings you into Family Tree, starting with where you are on the tree (if you have added yourself).
- **Person** - Brings you to a person page on the Family Tree (either yourself or the most recent person you worked on).
- **Find** - Search for a person in Family Tree - either by Name or ID number.

- **Following** - See a list of all the deceased people in Family Tree you are following, allowing you to click on their pages if you wish.

- **My Contributions** - People you have added to Family Tree and changes you have made to people in Family Tree

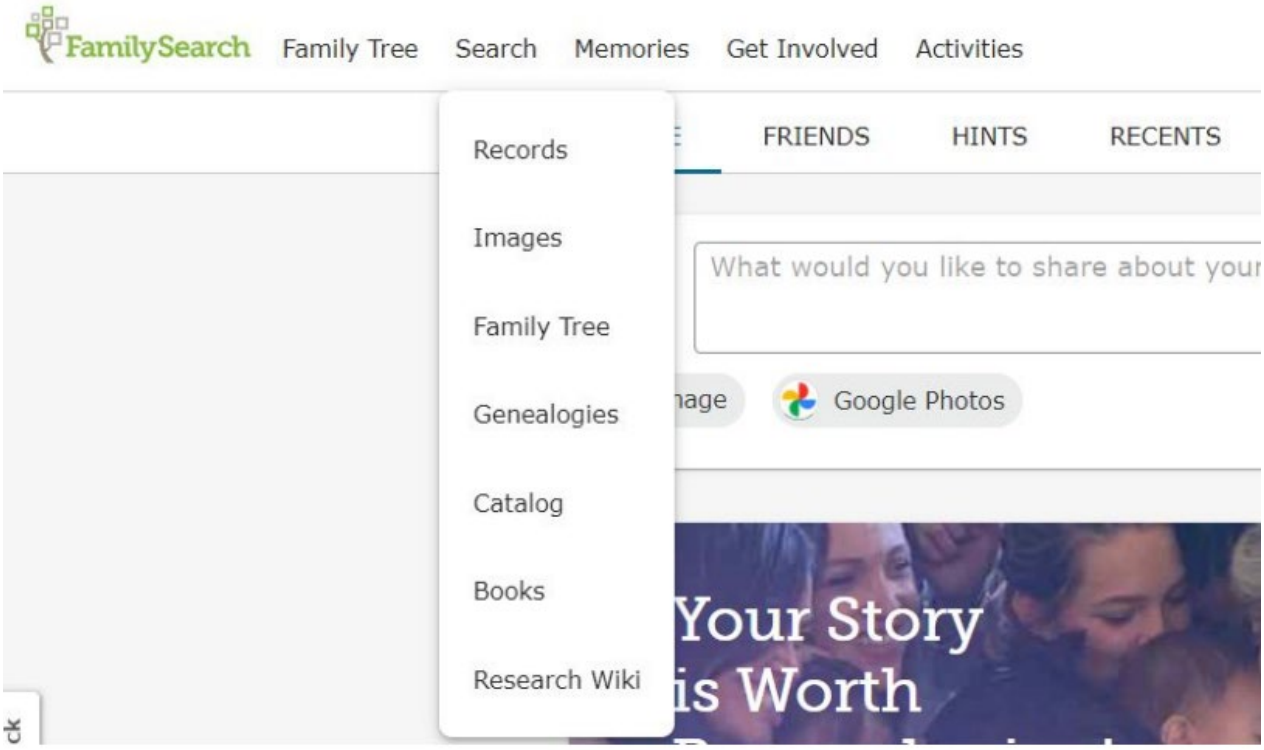
Note that you need to be logged into your FREE FamilySearch account to view all these features.

Searching in FamilySearch

FamilySearch offers various ways to search for genealogical records:

- **Historical Records**: Search indexed records through the Search > Records tab or browse unindexed records in the Search > Images tab.
- **Family Tree**: Search for individuals within the global family tree by name or ID.
- **Genealogies**: Search user-submitted family trees and genealogies.
- **Catalog**: Browse FamilySearch's vast holdings, including books, microfilms, and more.
- **Books**: Access digitized materials from the FamilySearch Digital Library.

For a more refined search, use the "More Options" feature to filter by specific life events or locations.



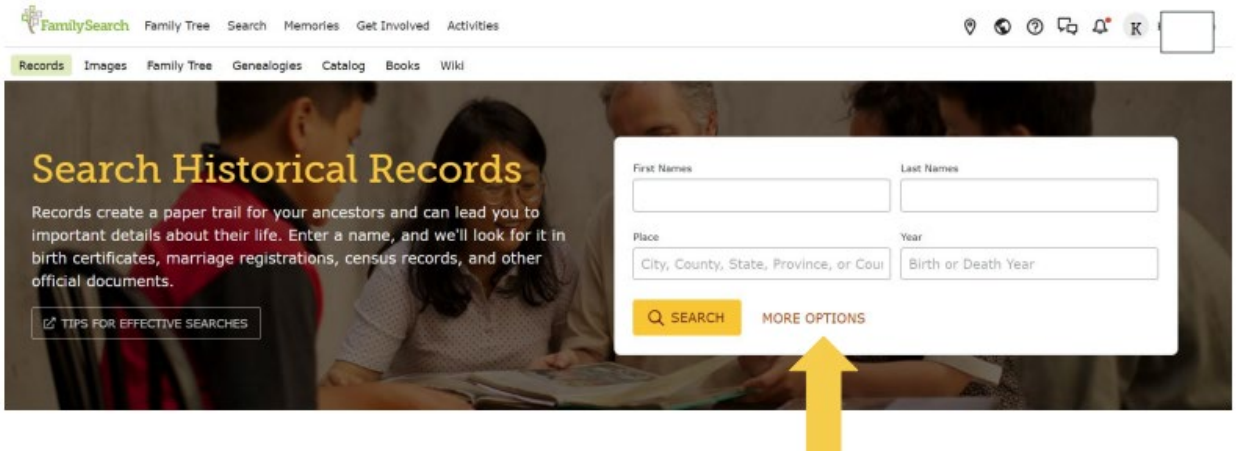
Search menu options

Searching in FamilySearch Records

Click Search then select Records. From here there are three different ways to search.

1. Use the search box to input your ancestor's names and information on place and year for a life event.

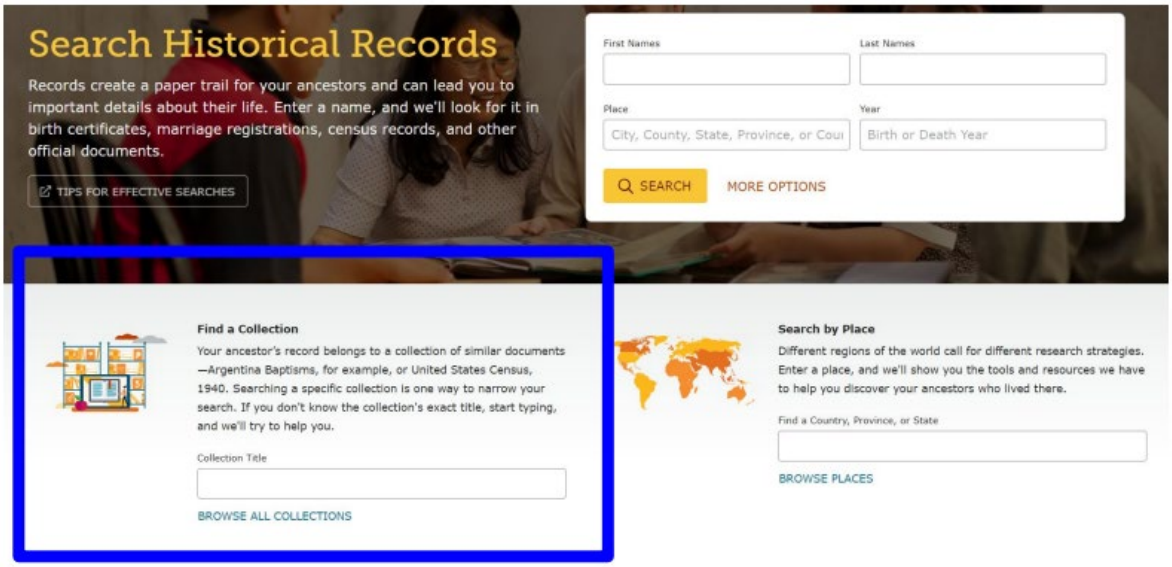
    - Click "more options" to put in certain details, tailored to your search.
        - Ex: If you are searching for a birth record for your ancestor, you don't want to put in their marriage and death information.
    - Once you have added whatever information you want, click "Search" to complete the search.



Use the "more options" button to add additional details on a person you want to search for

2. Search through Find a Collection (over 3,200 collections)

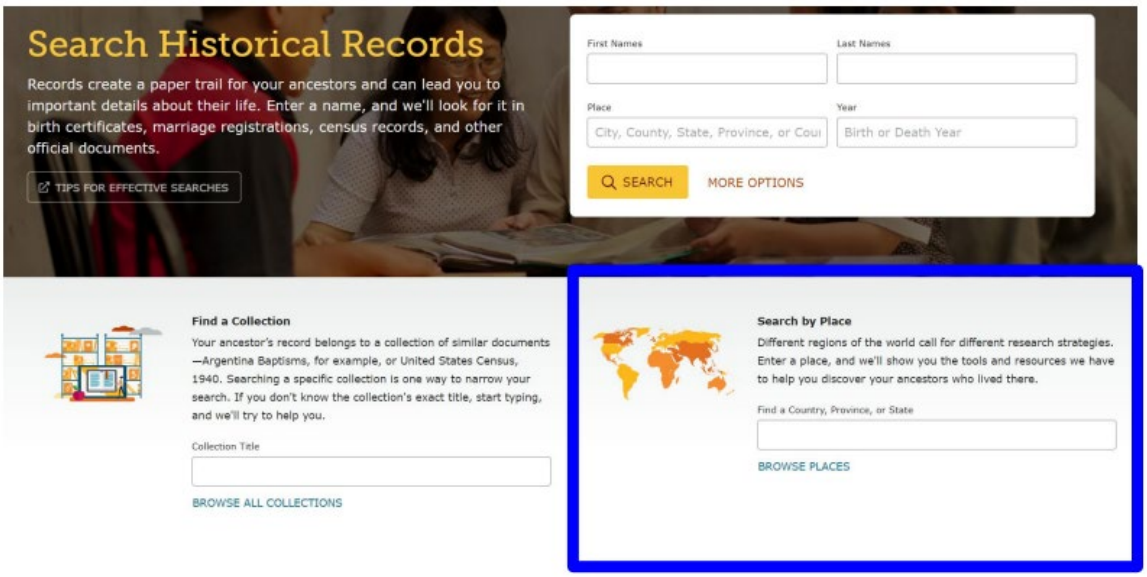
    - Start typing a place and/or a genealogy record type.
        - Ex: Wisconsin birth
    - You can put a county or country here as well but it depends on collection names.
        - Ex: Typing Outagamie brings up "Wisconsin, Outagamie County Records, 1825-1980" collection.
        - BUT this isn't everything on Outagamie County - things could be under state collections or national collections (ex: Census).



Search by the name of a collection or browse all collections

3. Search by Place - type in a Country, Province or State. Don't put in county/city level location.

    - This will bring you to a location page for this area.
    - See the Learning Center in upper left, which will give you access to additional trainings on researching in this locale.
    - Near the top of the location page is where you can search in indexed collections just for this location.
    - Scroll down further for genealogies, image-only (unindexed) records, and catalog materials for this location.



Search by Place – typing in a country, province or state

Searching Unindexed Collections

There are over 5 BILLION records that are unindexed - meaning you won't find them from doing a name search for your ancestor.

The unindexed collections are located by clicking "Search" then selecting "Images". You can also find them in the location pages if you go through the option of Search By Place under Records tab.

- Remember scroll down to see "Image Only Historical Records" to find unindexed collections for that location.

You'll want to start your search in unindexed collections by LOCATION where your ancestor lived.

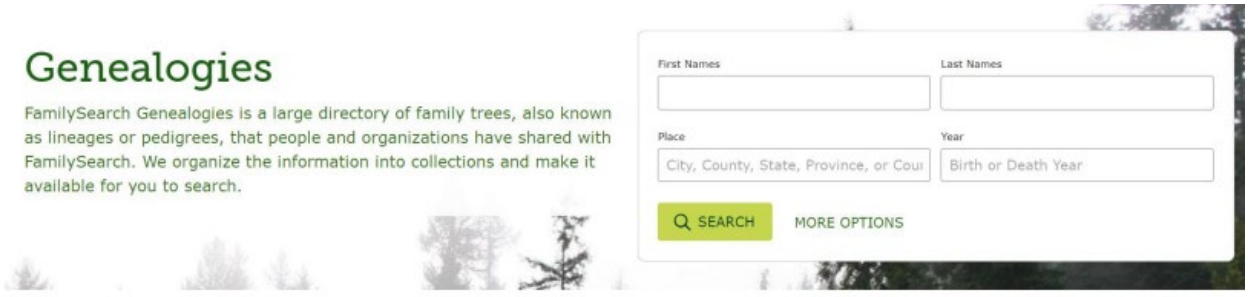
- Ex: Outagamie County, Wisconsin.
    - You sometimes can narrow down to a more specific city/town on the right side.

Because these collections are not indexed, you will have to go through these collections image by image. Be sure to check at the beginning of the collection or the end of the collection for a handwritten index or table of contents. They are continually adding more records in this area of the site so be sure to check back frequently.

Exploring Genealogies in FamilySearch

FamilySearch's Genealogies section contains a wealth of user-submitted family histories. Collections like the Ancestral File, International Genealogical Index, and Pedigree Resource File can be explored for detailed ancestral information. To view existing genealogies, select "Search" then click on "Genealogies."

To search the genealogies, simply add information on a given ancestor to search all the genealogies or scroll down to select one genealogy record set (ex: Ancestral File) to search within that collection.

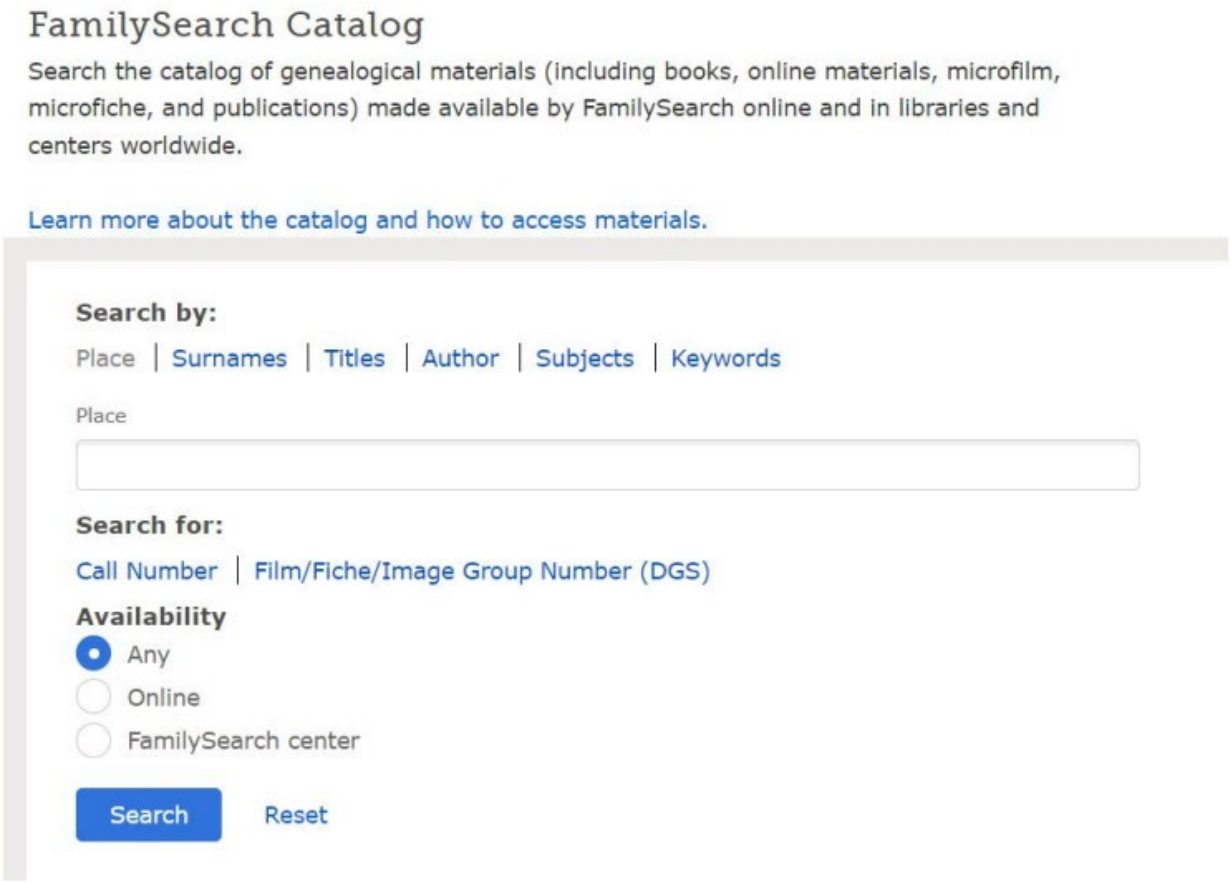


Genealogies area of FamilySearch

Searching Catalog in FamilySearch

The Catalog is an invaluable tool for locating genealogical materials. If you select “Search” then click on “Catalog” this will bring you into the Catalog. You’ll want to use this tab to search for genealogical materials, such as books, online materials, microfilm, microfiche, and publications. The catalog includes materials that are available online, in libraries and FamilySearch Centers worldwide.

- If you only want to search for things available online, you have the option to click this under “Availability.”
- **Note:** This catalog is no longer being updated with new materials, as FamilySearch works to convert to a new catalog

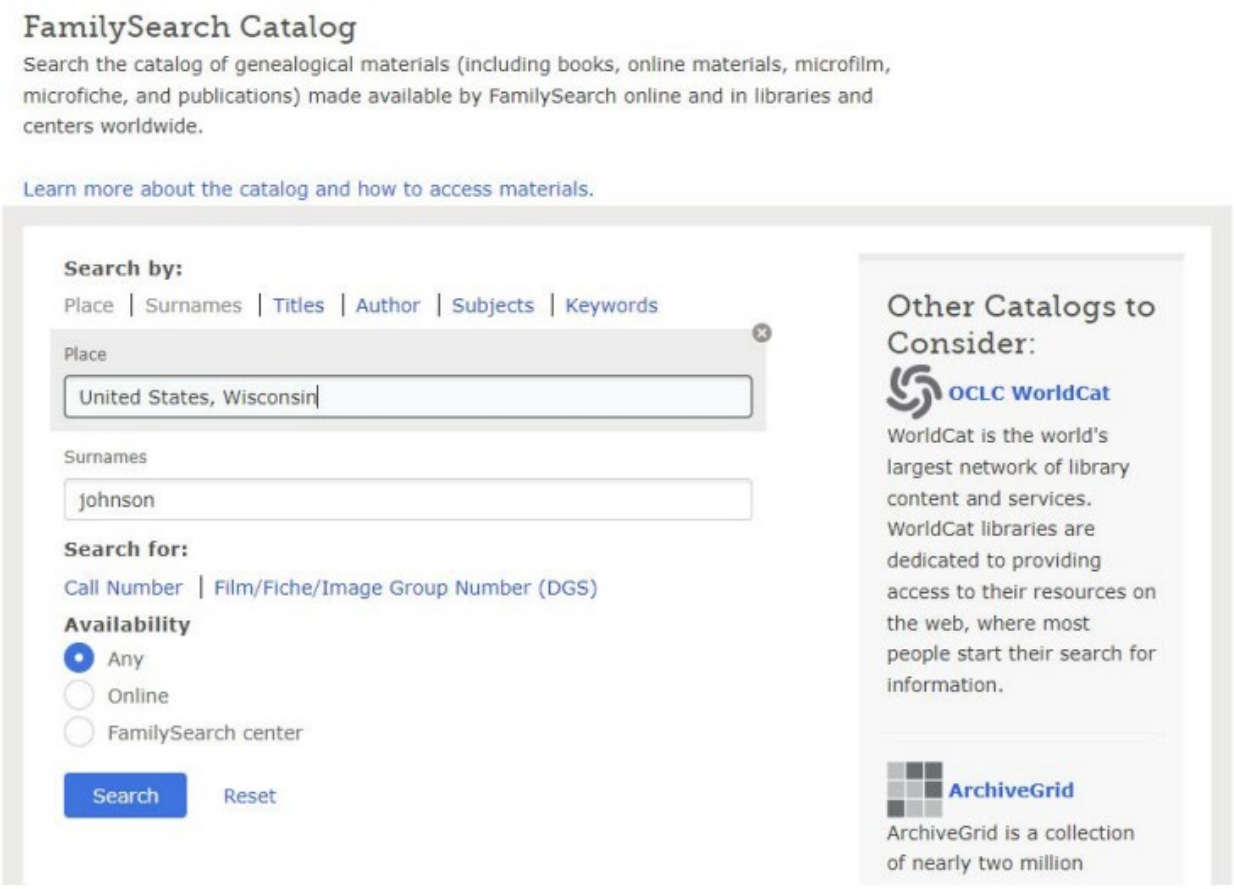


The FamilySearch Catalog

Searching Catalog in FamilySearch

You can search by place name (location), surname, title, author, subject, keyword, call number, and/or film/fiche number. You can search by more than one of these. However, the more information you put in here, the more it will narrow your search (and potentially not give you any results).

Example search for Johnson family in Wisconsin:



Sample catalog search

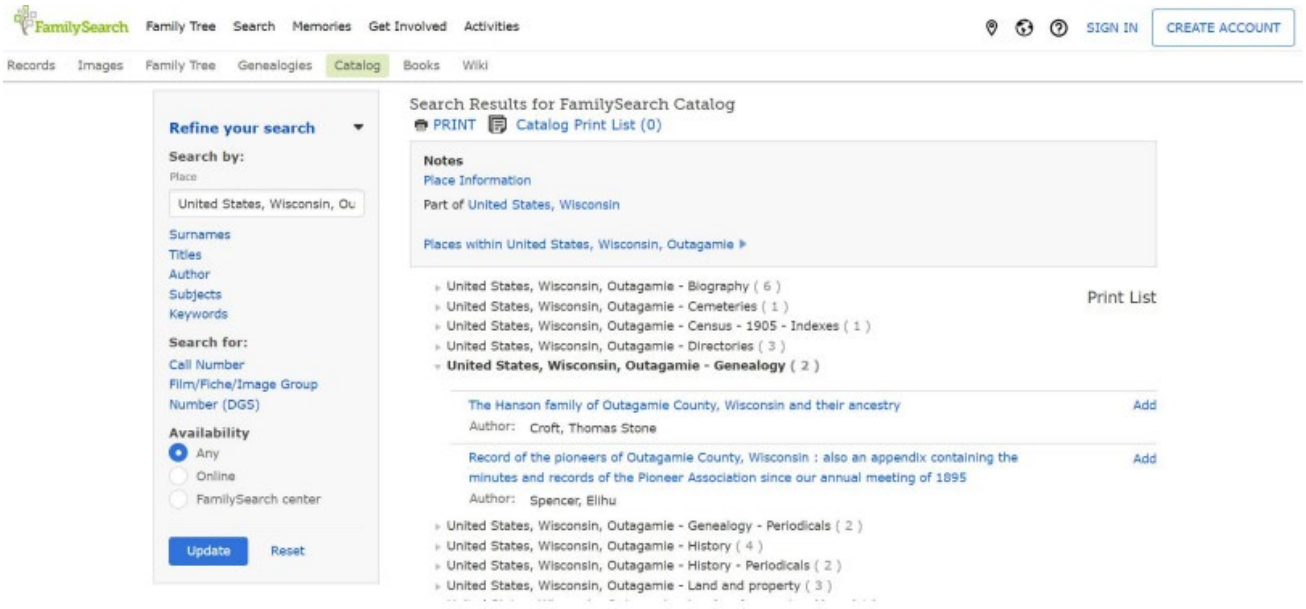
Catalog Results

After completing your search, you will see a results page, broken down into various categories.

Click the small arrow next to the category name to expand the listing to display the items under that category.

To learn more about a particular item and how to access that item, click on the title (in blue) to be brought to the catalog page for that item.

Sample catalog result page for Outagamie County, Wisconsin, with the Genealogy category expanded:



Note that each catalog page will display varying amounts of information. Here is a sample result of what you can expect to see in each catalog page. Note in the example below there are multiple formats of this item.

Commemorative biographical record of the Fox River Valley, counties of Brown, Outagamie and Winnebago : containing biographical sketches of prominent and representative citizens, and of many of the early settled families

ADD TO PRINT LIST

Format	Book, Microfilm 35mm
Language	English
Publication Date	1895
Publisher	J.H. Beers
Place of Publication	Chicago, Illinois
Physical	1239 p. : ports.

Notes

Also available on microfilm and digital images.

Includes name index.

To view a digital version of this item click here.

Subjects

Locality Subjects

United States, Wisconsin, Brown - Biography

United States, Wisconsin, Outagamie - Biography

United States, Wisconsin, Winnebago - Biography

Copies

Location

FamilySearch Library

Call Number	Location	Collection/Shelf	Availability
977.56 B392	FamilySearch Library	Off-site Storage	In Transit

Results per page: 10

Page 1 of 1

Film/Digital Notes

Note	Location	Collection/Shelf	Film	Image Group Number (DGS)	Format
Also on microfilm. Salt Lake City, Utah : Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1974. on 1 microfilm reel ; 35 mm.	FamilySearch Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	924752	7941822	

Sample catalog record

How to Access Affiliate Library Collections

Appleton Public Library is a FamilySearch Affiliate Library. This means we have access to some of the restricted collections.

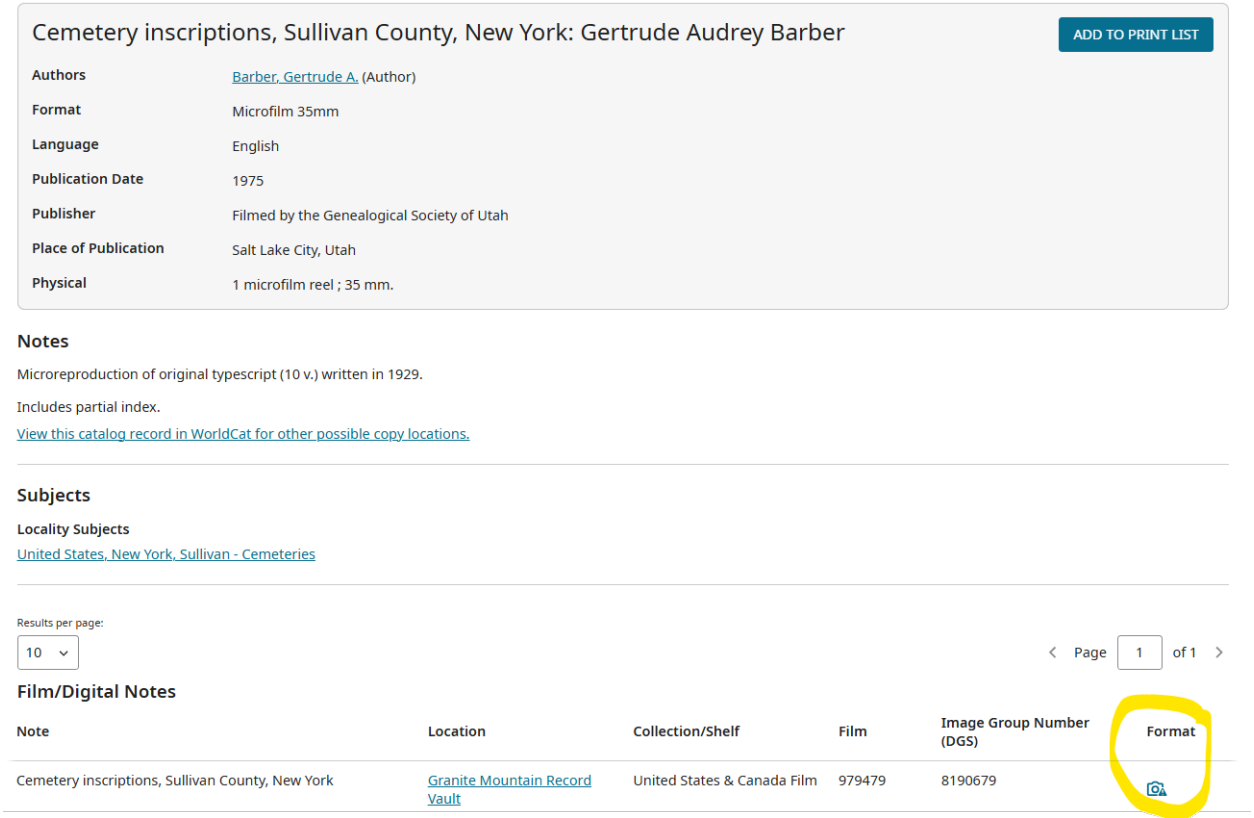
The catalog section of the FamilySearch website is an easy place to pull up restricted collections you found at home. If you find restricted collections that are restricted to an Affiliate Library, you will then be able to come to Appleton Public Library to view those restricted collections. Be sure to write down the film number or collection name so you can locate the collection easily again through the Catalog search.

How do you determine if a collection is restricted and available at an Affiliate Library?

To see if you can access the collections at Appleton Public Library, you need to look at the icons in the FamilySearch catalog (under Format in each catalog record). If you see a camera with a triangle that has an exclamation point within it this is a restricted collection.

You will want to click on that icon to view the restrictions since restrictions vary for every collection. As long as it says “access at an Affiliate Library” you can come to Appleton Public Library to get full access to that collection that is otherwise locked for at-home access! Be sure that the collection says access is available at an Affiliate Library; if it is only accessible at the FamilySearch Center or FamilySearch Library, you will not be able to access it at Appleton Public Library or any other Affiliate Library. We have no control over what is allowed to be accessed at an Affiliate Library and what is not.

Here is an example of a catalog record and what you see when a collection is restricted. Notice the icon with a key under Format; this means the collection is locked and there are restrictions. Clicking on that icon will bring you to a page that will tell you how to access the restricted collection.



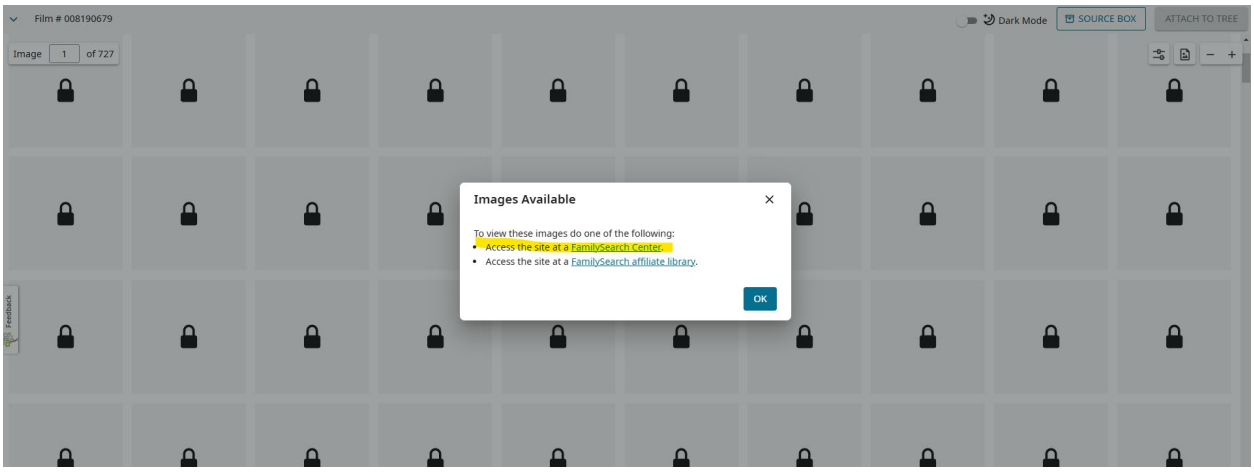
Example of restricted collection catalog page

If you click on the Format icon, it will bring you to this page that will tell you how to access the restricted collection. Note this collection in the example below can be accessed at a FamilySearch Center or a FamilySearch Affiliate Library.

The below notice will be different for each collection, with some materials only accessible at the FamilySearch Library or some only accessible at a FamilySearch Center. Access is dependent upon agreements with the custodians of the records.

If the restriction notice says “access at a FamilySearch affiliate library” that means you will have unrestricted access to this collection if you look it up while at Appleton Public Library or any other of the affiliate libraries near you.

Example of what you see when trying to view a restricted record outside of an Affiliate Library:



What you will see if you try to access a restricted record

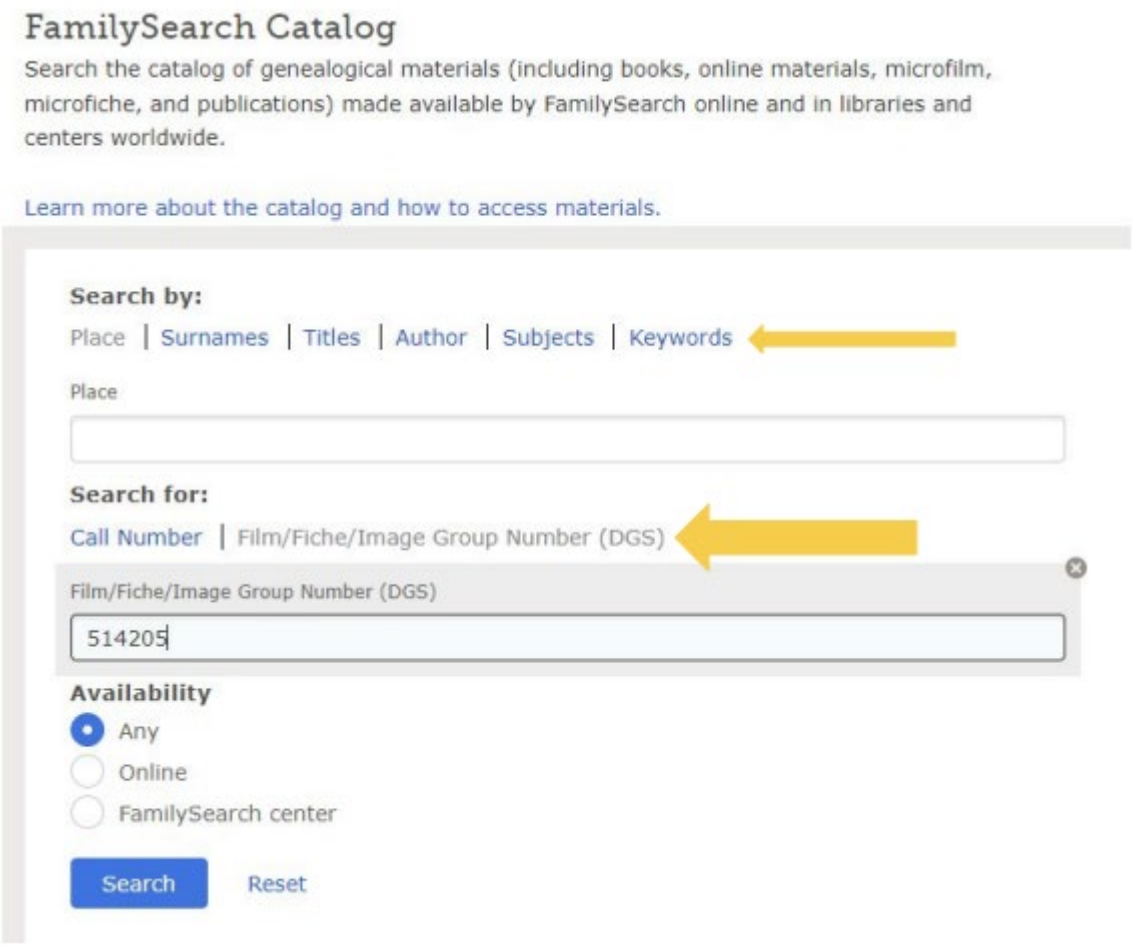
If you come across a restricted collection that you'll want to look up at an Affiliate Library, be sure to write down the film number, collection name and/or keep a link to the collection and bring it to the Affiliate Library. You can find this information in the catalog record.

How to Access Affiliate Library Collections Once At Library

Bring the information on the record collection - such as film number, collection name, and/or a link to the collection - to an Affiliate Library. You can then use the Catalog to look up the exact collection again and have access to the images unrestricted.

To pull up the collection: First make sure you are signed into your FamilySearch account then click on Search and select Catalog.

You can now put in the Collection Name under Keywords field or click on "Film/Fiche/Image Group Number" and type in the microfilm number to be brought to that catalog page again.



Look up a collection in the catalog by film/fiche/image group number

Inside of the Affiliate Library, you'll notice the Format icon will be unlocked, and you can click on the Camera icon to be brought into the collection to view the images.

The images are now unrestricted, and you can view all of them, print them, and/or save them if you would like.

Searching Digital Library in FamilySearch

Another great tool on the FamilySearch website is the FamilySearch Digital Library, which is a large online library of genealogical resources. There are more than 500,000 materials, including digitized genealogies, family histories, county and local histories, genealogy periodicals, gazetteers, and more from major genealogy libraries around the world.

To search the Digital Library - click on Search then select Books.

FamilySearch Digital Library search screen

Searching FamilySearch Wiki in FamilySearch

Another great tool on FamilySearch is the FamilySearch Research Wiki.

On the Wiki you will find more than 100,000 free articles about thousands of research topics, which serves as great introduction to every genealogical record type. There are also Wiki entries for every geographic location, including every County and State in the United States, and Country. Each Wiki will include information to help researchers learn more on researching in that given topic or area, with links to relevant digital collections, which include those hosted on FamilySearch and those on other websites. The level of detail for each Wiki entry varies, with some offering more extensive information than others.

Be aware the Wiki isn't a spot where you would put in your ancestor's name. Instead, you'll want to search for a given place, topic or record type or any mixture of these. For example, you could search for "birth records," or you could search more specifically "Wisconsin birth records" to learn about this specific record set in a given location.

To get to the Wiki - go to https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/ or from the FamilySearch home page click on Search then Wiki.

Memories in FamilySearch

The Memories section allows you to upload family photos, stories, and recordings. By default, any content added here is public, but you can choose to keep memories private if desired. Organize memories into albums, attach them to individuals in your family tree, and browse through memories uploaded by other users.

To navigate in Memories - click on one of the following options:

- **Overview**
  - Discusses various aspects of Memories area.

- **Gallery**
  - Brings you to where you have uploaded any content so you can see all the things you have placed on here.
  - You can organize into certain albums if you'd like (ex: By surname).

- **People**
  - A list of all the people you have uploaded and attached Memories to in your Family Tree. Be aware that you don't have to attach a memory to someone if you don't want to but this makes it easier for relatives to locate.

- **Find**
  - This is where you can search through what has been uploaded by other users and see if you can locate photos, stories, etc. on your ancestors.

Upper Right Hand Corner Options

About FamilySearch Centers/Locations of Centers

Change the language (Default is English)

Help

Your messages - how you communicate with other users. You will see a red dot here if you have unread messages.

Notifications - you will see a red dot here if you have unread notifications

Your Username Managing Your Account/Account Settings

Learn More About FamilySearch

For more information on how to navigate FamilySearch:

- See our in-depth Overview of FamilySearch video on YouTube
- View the FamilySearch Learning Center for step-by-step instructions for using various aspects of the site.
- Check out the book Unofficial Guide to FamilySearch.org, 2nd Edition, by Dana McCullough, which is available to check out at the library.
- See upcoming classes and webinars, as well as past recorded classes, offered for free through FamilySearch.

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