

Historical Maps: 10 Tips & Tricks for Genealogy

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It is likely that as a genealogist you not only have a love of history and historical records, but also maps. So, what is it about this two-dimensional depiction of geography that fascinates us? Perhaps because that very map could be the treasure map to helping us unlock information about our family history and our ancestors.



- Check county and other borders.** When attempting to locate census and vital records, check to make sure you have the right locality especially county. County borders changed over time which impacts access to records.
- Review a variety of maps over time.** Compare various maps of the same area over the timespan of an ancestor's life – this is useful if maps designate landmarks, businesses, and roads. What was added or removed during that time period? Were locations “renamed” or changed?
- Trace migration patterns.** Americans loved to move (and still do). Track migration of a family from one point to another. View the map to see what they encountered on their journey, what hardships they had to overcome and why they settled there.
- Google Maps.** Create customized personal maps containing pinned information related to where your ancestors lived, worked, and played. Create a Google account, then go to Google My Maps (<https://google.com/mymaps>), and start pinning to your customized map.
- What Was There.** What Was There (<https://whatwasthere.com>) allows you to pin a historic image then use a “slider” to fade the image to its current day location. Better understand the geographical and historical context for your ancestors and get other family members to add information and tell the stories behind the images.
- Plot location data for an ancestor.** Track where your ancestor lived, worshipped, worked and more using maps. You will gain a better understanding as to the “why” of certain things such as “Why did she attend that church?”
- Use maps for cluster research.** Cluster research looks for groupings of people with the same surname, or those who are from a specific country or have a common ethnicity. Once identified, research those people for clues related to your own ancestor.
- Topographical maps.** Show how the land looks via terrain, landmarks, features such as mountains, passes and more. These maps can often explain why your ancestor's family didn't attend church the closest church due to difficult terrain, etc.
- Rootsmapper.** If you have a family tree on FamilySearch, use Rootsmapper (<https://rootsmapper.com/>) to track migration routes and easily visualize data. Login with your FamilySearch credentials to get Rootsmapper to work.
- History Pin.** Utilize History Pin (<https://historypin.com>) to help you “pin” a variety of items. Upload your own images, add date and location, then pin it on the map. Also pin audio clips and videos or add comments and stories about the image.

Check out the **Historical Maps Resource List** on the back page!

Historical Maps Resource List

- **Cyndi's List: Maps, Gazetteers & Geographical Information**
<https://www.cyndislist.com/maps>
- **David Rumsey Map Collection**
<https://www.davidrumsey.com/>
- **Google My Maps**
<https://google.com/mymaps>
- **History Pin**
<https://historypin.com>
- **Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection**
<https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/>
- **Pinmaps**
<https://www.pinmaps.net/>
- **Rootsmapper**
<https://rootsmapper.com/>
- **uencounter.me**
<https://uencounter.me/>
- **What Was There**
<http://www.whatwasthere.com/>

Canada

- **Geographical Names in Canada**
<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/maps-tools-publications/maps/geographical-names-canada/10786>
- **Library and Archive Canada: Map Archives**
<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/atlas-canada/explore-our-maps/map-archives/16868>
- **The Atlas of Canada**
<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/maps-tools-and-publications/maps/atlas-canada/10784>

United States

- **American Memory Project – Library of Congress Maps**
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/?fa=partof:geography+and+map+division>
- **Ancestry.com: Maps, Atlases & Gazetteers**
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/44/>
- **Atlas of Historical County Boundaries**
<https://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/>
- **Bureau of Land Management – GLO Records**
<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/>
- **Digital Sanborn Maps**
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/sanborn/>
- **Historic Map Works**
<http://www.historicmapworks.com/>
- **Mapping History**
<https://mappinghistory.uoregon.edu/>
- **United States Digital Map Archive - USGenWeb**
<http://usgwarchives.net/maps/>