

FAMILY BROWSE

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Introduction

FamilySearch.org has millions of images on its website, many of which are unindexed and not searchable. But if you know how to get into the catalog and browse around, you can find images of birth and death certificates, naturalization papers, deeds, wills, estate inventories and more. FamilySearch adds more such images every month. To take advantage of this ever-increasing bounty, it's important to know how to find these types of records.

Getting into the Records

There are two main ways into the records – catalog and map search. I recommend you try both. Sometimes the records are organized in a different order, or have an additional link in either the catalog or map search that is not available in the other one.

For catalog - <https://www.familysearch.org/catalog/search>

- 1) Options include Place, Surnames, Titles, Author, Subjects, Keywords. Most vital, land, naturalization and probate records are kept at the county level, so start with a “Place” search at the county level, i.e. “United States, Texas, Travis”. But you should also search at other jurisdictional levels including city or town (“United States, Texas, Travis, Austin”) and at the state level (“United States, Texas”).
 - a. Read the notes at the top! – helpful info about county formation dates, etc
- 2) A list of categories will appear (ie “land and property,” “naturalization and citizenship,” “vital records.”) Click on one to see what records FamilySearch has available. Look for governmental entities (“Author: Texas. County Court (Burnet County)”), not an author’s name.
- 3) Click on the item name. Scroll down. You’ll either see a link that says something like **“California, County Birth and Death Records are available online, click here”** or a list of items with icons under the “Format” column. A camera icon means images are available, a film reel means records are only available on microfilm, and a magnifying glass means records are searchable by name.
 - a. As of 7 September 2017, microfilms will only be available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Some local Family History Centers that had microfilms in their on-site collections may continue to make those microfilms available to patrons at that center.

- b. The camera icon means there are digital images available, but due to agreements with the agency holding the original records, those images might be available for anyone to look at or they might be restricted to viewing at a Family History Center. When you click on the camera icon, you might get a message like:

Images Available

To view these images you must do one of the following:

- Access the site at a [family history center](#).
- Access the site at a [FamilySearch affiliate library](#).

OK

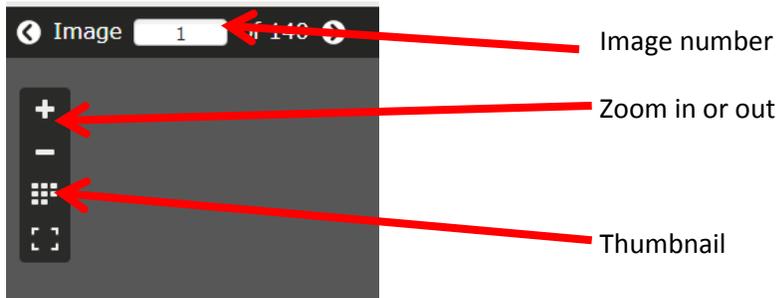
- c. Tip – I’m seeing this icon more and more. Make a list when you get this message – what you’re looking for, film number, any other pertinent details and when you get “enough” (or that one that you just have to have TODAY!!!) make a trip to your local Family History Center and bring your USB stick.

For map search - <https://www.familysearch.org/search>

- 1) Click on the map, to select your continent or country, and drill down through the pop-ups to select a more specific location, i.e. state.
- 2) Top section will show indexed (searchable) records, such as “Texas Indexed Historical Records.” Scroll down for “Image Only Historical Records.”
- 3) Records divided by category (Birth, Marriage and Death; Migration and Naturalization; Miscellaneous; etc.) and will indicate how many images are available and when the collection was last updated.

Navigating in the Records

When you’re in a digitized set of records, you’ll see some icons on the left.



- 1) Use the Thumbnail button to “fly over” the images and see where to “land.”
 - a. Instructions for using records
 - b. Indexes
 - c. Tabs on sides of page
 - d. Breaks between items
 - e. Pages full of words, half-full, etc.

Image ≠ Page ≠ Number

Sometimes records will be filmed on a 2-page spread, so one “image” equals two “pages.” Sometimes a record, for instance for a naturalization or a probate file, will be identified by a number, but the record includes multiple images. The “fly over” will help to show how records were filmed.

Indexes

County records are rarely in exact alphabetical order. Many county records have either a separate set of index books, or indexes in the front of the book, or both, to show how records are organized.

Types of indexes include:

- 1) Russell I-m-n-r-t Key index
- 2) Graves Tabular Initial Index
- 3) Campbell’s
- 4) Burr
- 5) Split Column
- 6) Cott

Indexing strategies include:

- 1) First 3 letters of surname
- 2) First consonant and first vowel of surname
- 3) First letter of surname and a key letter
- 4) First letter of surname and first letter of given name

Some indexes use separate pages for each first letter of given name, so if you are searching for all the records for a given surname, you’ll have to look at all the different given name pages to get every person by that surname.

Books *should* have instructions to the indexes in the front of the volume, but sometimes they aren't there or weren't filmed. Try another "related" volume. If you can't find the instructions or the key letter table in the front of the "Index to Grantors 1864-1873" try to look at the Index to Grantees for the same period, or look at the Index to Grantors for the next earlier or later period.

Resources:

Rose, Christine, *Courthouse Indexes Illustrated*, San Jose: CR Publications, 2006

Sittner, Kathi, "Documents in Detail : Land Deed Indexes," *Ancestry Magazine*, Nov/Dec 1994, page 25-27

https://books.google.com/books?id=MISoFbYaChAC&pg=PT25&lpg=PT25&dq=russell+indexing+system&source=bl&ots=4PU53UZq_r&sig=4U5-TTX6cDt2VS1zbwrS4RO-FsU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj_8OHyybjTAhUB_2MKHViJDTIQ6AEIfzAR#v=onepage&q=russell%20indexing%20system&f=false

FamilySearch Wiki - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Index_Systems

"Identifying and Using Indexes," *Maryland State Archives Guide to Government Records*, <http://guide.mdsa.net/pages/viewer.aspx?page=using%20indexes>

Mary Kircher Roddy – Searching for Stories Blog <http://mkrgenealogy.com/searching-for-stories-blog>

- "Grantor Indexes, Grantee Indexes or a Combo? – Belmont, Ohio" – 1 Aug 2017
- "Understanding Indexes - West Virginia Will Index" – 29 Mar 2016
- "Understanding Indexes in County Records – Graves Tabular Initial Index" – 1 Mar 2016

I continue to post research tips on my blog, typically on Tuesdays, so check back to see if there are other posts with the tag, "Indexes" or "FamilySearch".