



**RESEARCHING THE  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

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From [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

## Getting Started:

- Step 1 Determine your Topic of Interest
- Step 2 Gather Information about your Topic
- Step 3 Find Records and Information about Records
- Step 4 Decide if you Should Visit and Plan Your Visit

# Determine your Topic of Interest:

## Topic Ideas:

If you are still deciding about a research topic, here are some places on the NARA website where you can get some ideas. The topics listed represent only a small fraction of possible research topics but will help you to get started.

- Research Topics page
- Archives Library Information Center (ALIC) "Reference at Your Desk"
- Access to Archival Databases (AAD)

[http://www.archives.gov/research/topics/  
Research\\_Topics](http://www.archives.gov/research/topics/Research_Topics)

# Gather Information about your Topic:

## What is your Topic's connection with the Federal Government:

At the National Archives, we hold documents created by or in the course of business with the US Federal Government. The more you know about your chosen topic, and why and how the United States Federal government was involved with that matter, the better the chance that your search for records will be successful. You can use your local library and web sites to learn as much as possible.

- Determine whether your topic can be searched in the National Archives. What is the connection between your topic and Federal Government programs and policies? Do some background reading on your intended subject, noting significant names, dates, events, and any evidence that Federal records may be used for further research.
- What is the connection between your topic and the specific time period during which the Federal Government may have been involved with your topic?
- What is the connection between your topic and the geographic locations that may relate to your topic and how the Federal Government may have been involved with programs and government for that area(s).

## If you know the records you are interested in are at the National Archives, determine where they are located:

The National Archives and Records Administration is truly a national system of records repositories, with many records beyond the Washington, DC area, are in the regional archives and the Presidential libraries.

To find which of our locations may hold what you are looking for:

- Use the Online Catalog
- For microfilm available, search the Microfilm Catalog
- Check the Guide to Federal Records
  1. Search by Record Group number or by agency name or topic
  2. Find the description that covers what you are looking for
  3. See if the description notes where the records are located
- Review the holdings of the Regional Archives

# Find Records and Information about Records:

The NARA web site contains answers to many of the preliminary research-related questions you might have.

- To find copies of Federal records on our web site and/or information about the records and their historical context, you will have to look in several places.
- Some sources listed below are databases while others are online guides, publications, and exhibits.

## Ways to Search Online:

### Online Catalog:

The NARA Online Catalog is the online portal to our records and information about our records. It provides access to data, digitized records, selected series from Access to Archival Databases (AAD), over one million electronic records from the Electronic Records Archives (ERA), all of the web pages from Archives.gov, and all of the web pages from the Presidential Libraries.

### **Microfilm Catalog:**

This is a searchable database of more than 3,400 numbered microfilm. The described microfilm include those created by or purchased by NARA for researcher use.

Determine which rolls of microfilm may be the most relevant for your research at NARA. You can search for microfilm by keyword, microfilm number, Record Group number, and/or location of our nationwide research facilities. Researchers at NARA research facilities may use this material for free.

### **Access to Archival Databases (AAD):**

AAD is a search engine into some of NARA's holdings of electronic records. There are databases and indexes from more than 30 archival series, including over 350 data files totaling well over 50 million unique records; this number will continue to grow. Search by person, geographic areas, organizations, or dates.

### **Archives Library Information Center (ALIC):**

ALIC, part of the National Archives, provides sources for research about American history and government, archival administration, information management, and government documents to archives and records management professionals, the general public, and National Archives staff. Search their online catalog for holdings of the Archives libraries in Washington, DC and College Park, MD.

Additionally, ALIC's Reference at Your Desk feature provides quick access to online resources on many diverse subjects.

## **Guide to Federal Records:**

Search NARA's holdings of federal records at a very high level, to identify which record groups may have material relevant to your research topics. This includes records that originated in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches.

## **Finding Aids:**

### **Filing Manuals:**

Filing manuals outline the filing classification systems used by staff in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and various departments and agencies of the federal government.

### **Regional Archives Holdings Guides and Resources:**

For links to holdings guides, articles, lists, indexes to files, and other finding aids prepared by the Regions to assist researchers, see NARA Regional Archives Online Finding Aids page and visit our National Archives locations section.

### **NARA Publications:**

Published research guides, articles, and papers

These include guides, articles, reference papers, inventories, and more, all designed to help prepare you for your research at NARA.

### **New Accessions and Openings:**



## **Search by Topic:**

### **Research Topics:**

For many topics, we have included related articles, finding aids, and search tips. Links to online information about selected topics in National Archives records.

[Research Topics](#)

## **Search by Federal Government Agency:**

Look for the Federal Government organization that created the records you are interested in.

[Research by Federal Government Organization](#)

## **Search by Media Type or Format:**

Search for records based on media-type or format of the records (such as paper documents, photographs, motion picture film or video, audio recordings, maps and drawings, aerial film, microfilm, databases and electronic records)

If you need to see records that are not available on the NARA web site or other web sites, you may need to contact or visit the National Archives, or hire an independent researcher to continue your research.

[Research in Federal Records and Presidential Materials by Media Format](#)

## Are you here for Genealogy?

- Are you here looking for information about how to look for your family history/genealogy? If so, you should see our Genealogists/Family Historians web pages.
- If you are here to obtain copies of military service and family history records, you can learn about ordering copies of records from the National Archives.

<http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/>