Genealogy Resources: Maps, Atlases, and Other Cartographic Materials

An Online Guide for the GIS Research and Map Collection, Ball State University Libraries

Ball State University Libraries
A destination for research, learning, and friends
University Libraries offers a wide range of family history research materials. The GIS Research and Map Collection (GRMC) provides cartographic resources for genealogists searching for geographic information for their family tree.
The GIS Research and Map Collection in Bracken Library provides access and assistance for genealogists interested in using maps, atlases, gazetteers, historic plat books, and other cartographic materials in family history research. This guide will feature specific cartographic resources available in the GRMC and Atlas Collection.
**Where to start:**

Family history research may actually start with a map. In genealogy, maps can be used as clues to where public or other records about ancestors may be found. Genealogists may need to locate on a historic map the name of the county or the county seat where ancestors lived in order to determine the best location to begin searching records for birth, marriage, and death certificates, as well as property ownership and other useful data.
Maps might reveal new places for family historians to investigate. Also maps offer a visual element that is unique and adds variety to the many other textual factors of genealogical research.
What can be found on a map?

- Previous names of a place
- Jurisdictional boundaries: city, county, state, township
- Former and current towns
- Private and commercial property: estates, businesses, property lines
- Physical landmarks: mountains, rivers, creeks, forests, and other physical features
- Location of schools, churches, cemeteries
- Transportation features: trails, roads, railroads
Finding the Correct Map:

Genealogists first need to use other cartographic resources to find the correct map. Searches for data about ancestors may be complicated by changes in the names and boundaries of places, so using cartographic resources is important. Gazetteers, geographical dictionaries, and historic maps and atlases can be particularly useful in pinpointing the location where ancestors lived.
Cartographic Resources for Genealogy Research: Gazetteers, Geographical Dictionaries, and Historic Atlases
Gazetteers and geographical dictionaries can be used to determine the names of places over time. Boundaries of a place may have also changed over time. Gazetteers and geographical dictionaries can provide information about the origin of a place name, and latitude and longitude coordinates are given so that exact location can be pinpointed as boundaries change.
The GRMC and Atlas Collection contain numerous world, national, and local gazetteers and geographical dictionaries that can be used to resolve questions about the names of places and boundary changes.
The U.S. Geographic Names Information System includes the names of places that no longer exist as well as other names for existing places. The database provides information about the location of various geographic and cultural features and lists the name of the U.S.G.S. topographic map on which the specific feature appears, with latitude and longitude coordinates provided. Click on “Search GNIS” on the Domestic Names page: http://geonames.usgs.gov/domestic/index.html
Historical atlases are another cartographic resource that genealogists can utilize as a starting point in finding the correct map. Researchers can match the time their ancestors lived in an area with an atlas from that era to acquire more information about their family history.
The GIS Research & Map Collection and Atlas Collection has a large selection of historical atlases. The Collection varies in scope and includes a number of rare historical county and state atlases, with a special emphasis on Indiana and the Midwest.
The Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana, 1876, is an excellent genealogical resource. The atlas includes maps of counties including townships and ranges and plat maps of many cities and small towns throughout the state. The atlas also includes biographies and illustrations of prominent buildings and residences from that time, statistical data, and county histories. Copies of the atlas are available for research in the GRMC and Archives and Special Collections on the second floor of Bracken Library.
This map of Brown County included in the atlas features the locations of churches, schools, and even some significant property owners. (Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana, 1876, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Many of the city plans included in the atlas contain the location of wards, which can be helpful clues for genealogists. *(Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana, 1876, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).*
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Historical atlases of counties and states from the GRMC and Atlas Collection can be extremely useful for researching family history. The atlases provide detailed maps and contain biographies of residents, county histories, illustrations and photographs, and statistical data useful for learning about a particular era.
Historical atlases of counties often contain township maps with property lines and owners included. This map of Greene Township in Parke County, Indiana, is from the *Atlas Map of Parke County* from 1874 available in the GRMC.
This map of Camden in Jay County displays property owners and other significant buildings and businesses. (Atlas of Jay County Indiana, 1887, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
(Plat map of Buckley, Standard Atlas of Iroquois County, Illinois, Including a Plat Book of the Villages, Cities and Townships of the County, 1921, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
(Map of Paw Paw, Atlas of Van Buren County Michigan, 1873, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Many of the historical county and state atlases also include drawings of prominent buildings from different areas, as well as individual residences, farms, and small businesses. (An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Elkhart County, Indiana, 1874, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL,
CRAWFORDSVILLE, INDIANA.

"DEWDROP INN,"
Residence of William J. W. Lawson,
CHASE, INDIANA.

Genealogists may find the story of their ancestor’s life or see an image of their family member in an atlas. Biographies, portraits, and photographs of prominent residents can be found in many of the historical county and state atlases in the GRMC and Atlas Collection. (Atlas of Putnam County, Indiana, 1879, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
RESIDENCE OF J. E. McMULEN,
NEW ROSS, INDIANA.

Historical county and state atlases in the GRMC and Atlas Collection often include extra features, illustrations, photographs, business directories, and statistical data that may provide clues and information about family histories. For example, the occupation of an ancestor could be learned from this business notice. (Atlas of Blair and Huntingdon Counties, Pennsylvania, 1879, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The Atlas and Plat Book of Carroll County Indiana, 1919, from the GRMC includes this memorial to residents of the county who were killed during World War I. Again this information could be a valuable resource for genealogists, prompting further research.
Historical atlases might reveal interesting information about the past-times and other activities—like 4-H clubs—of ancestors during a particular era. (Atlas of Rockingham County Virginia, 1939, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The GRMC and Atlas Collection include a large collection of historical atlases from various states that may provide useful maps for genealogical research. The Collection includes atlases from Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, New Mexico, Oregon, Oklahoma, and Texas.
The Atlas Collection contains a set of atlases from the series, *Atlas of Historical County Boundaries*. These atlases detail county boundary changes for thousands of counties across the United States from colonial times to the present, which can help genealogists determine the county in which ancestors lived at a specific time. Vital records can then be searched in the proper county seats. The Atlas Collection contains editions for Indiana, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania.
Manhattan in Maps, 1527-1995, in the Atlas Collection explores the history of Manhattan through rare maps and essays. Genealogists may also find the Sanborn Manhattan Land Book of the City of New York in the Atlas Collection helpful in researching families from the city.
Virginia in Maps: Four Centuries of Settlement, Growth, and Development in the Atlas Collection illustrates the history of Virginia using informative maps. The maps date back to pre-colonial Virginia, the inclusion of modern-day West Virginia, and more current times.
Getting Started Using Maps

Once specific locations have been determined from other resources, genealogists can begin researching maps.

- Study the legend or key of the map to determine the meaning of the symbols and colors on the map.
- Review the scale of the map to measure distances shown on the map.
- Search for the date of the map in order to use as a reference to when ancestors lived in the area.
- The GIS Research and Map Collection Web page includes an online tutorial that can be useful for familiarization with the important parts of a map, Maps and Cartography: The Elements of a Map: [http://www.bsu.edu/library/article/o,54747--,00.html](http://www.bsu.edu/library/article/o,54747--,00.html)
Cartographic Resources for Genealogy Research: Maps
The GIS Research & Map Collection in Bracken Library includes over 145,000 maps available for family history research and learning. There are maps of cities and countries from around the world, as well as maps of local areas—both modern and historic.
As a Depository Library, the GRMC receives maps from the U.S. Geological Survey, National Imagery and Mapping Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and many other governmental organizations. The Collection is also constantly being updated from commercial vendors.
Historic maps of states can show the location of the original counties and Native American lands during different eras. *(Indiana in 1824 map and Indiana 1826, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).*
Shown is a portion of the map, *New Sectional and Township Map of Indiana*, 1877, from the GRMC. This map details the names of all of the townships in each of the counties in Indiana.
This portion of a map of Indiana shows place names given by the French and Native Americans of the state. The map, *Indiana, the Influence of the Indian upon Its History: with Indian and French Names for Natural and Cultural Locations*, 1933, from the GRMC would be an interesting resource for genealogists.
This map from the GRMC, *Genealogical Map of the Counties*, shows the evolution of the counties in Pennsylvania and provides information about land grants, purchases, and treaties.
Panoramic Maps
The GIS Research & Map Collection maintains a large collection of post-Civil War era panoramic maps of cities. These “bird’s eye views” provide unique details about the architecture of the cities and lifestyles of its residents. The Collection includes various cities from across the United States and the world. (Muncie, Indiana, 1884, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The GRMC acquired a complete set of reproduction panoramic maps of Indiana cities from the Library of Congress American Memory Collection. (View of Tell City, Perry County, Indiana, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
This panoramic view of the city of Chicago provides genealogists with a mental picture of the city during the time of their ancestors.  (Chicago, Illinois, 1892, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
(Cincinnati, Ohio in 1856, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Researchers can learn about the property ownership of ancestors using plat maps. The GRMC includes plat maps of various cities, and plat books of counties are located in the GRMC and the Atlas Collection. (Plat of the Town of Indianapolis, 1821, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Plat maps were maintained by city or county governments and can provide a wealth of information—often giving details about a specific property location, property owners, and neighbors of ancestors. (*Plat of Madison, the Capital of Wisconsin, 1836, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries*).
The GIS Research & Map Collection contains historic and current topographic maps from the U.S. Geological Survey for all fifty states at numerous scales. The historic topographic maps date back to the late 1890’s through the 1950’s.
Topographic maps are an excellent resource for genealogical research because these maps detail changes in the landscape over time and feature schools, cemeteries, churches, and other cultural features like roads and other forms of transportation. The details of the terrain can also provide clues as to how families lived and interacted with others.
The number of symbols shown on this index from a historic U.S.G.S. topographic map reveals the amount of information available to researchers. Topographic maps portray the contours and elevations of the physical landscape, but these maps also contain information about cultural features of the landscape like roads, canals, and other transportation, cemeteries, churches, and industries. Government boundaries are also displayed.
Researchers can learn more about the properties of ancestors using topographic maps, noting the location of residences (black boxes on the map of the plantation) and other outbuildings. Barns typically are shown as black outlines. (Lake Providence, Louisiana, 1911/1939, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Migration patterns can be studied using topographic maps. A main road leads inland from the town on the Mississippi River. *(Bowling Green, Missouri/Illinois, 1937, GRMC, Ball State University)*.
Genealogists can find the locations of cemeteries on topographic maps—identified as a cross in the boundary lines or “Cem.” Historic topographic maps are helpful in locating cemeteries that are overgrown, like the “Old Pottinger” cemetery shown on the map. (New Market, Indiana, 1956/1980, GRMC, Ball State University).
Historic topographic maps mark the locations of churches and schools. Schools feature a flag on top of the building. Churches feature a small cross on top of the building. Names of some buildings are provided. (Greenfield, Indiana, 1952, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Topographic maps provide clues about the lives of ancestors. Railroads cross through Oakland City. The abandoned Wabash and Erie Canal is displayed. Mines are located north and east of town, and mineral springs lie to the south. (Petersburg, Indiana, 1903, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The University Library’s collection of cartographic research materials includes the most notable maps of cities and towns known for giving detailed, accurate information about the history of buildings and other structures—the Sanborn® Fire Insurance Maps.
Sanborn® Fire Insurance Maps provide interesting details for genealogical research, including the “footprints” and construction materials of buildings, functions of the structures, house numbers, and even the location of windows and doors. Historians can learn the whereabouts of other family buildings, like stables which are marked with an “X.” (Muncie, Indiana 1887, Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries).
The index for the Sanborn® Fire Insurance Maps portrays the amount of information conveyed on the maps. Researchers can study maps published over several years to determine how their family’s property and neighborhood changed over time.
The GRMC also has Sanborn® Fire Insurance Maps of Boston, Massachusetts and St. Louis, Missouri. (Sanborn® Map of Boston, Massachusetts, 1975, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The entire Muncie, Indiana Sanborn® Map Collection is available in the Archives and Special Collections in Bracken Library.
The Muncie Digital Sanborn® Map Collection is available on the University Libraries’ Digital Media Repository located at http://libx.bsu.edu. This Collection includes maps from 1883, 1887, 1889, 1892, 1896, 1902, and 1911.
Sanborn® Fire Insurance Maps of various cities in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee and Chicago, Illinois, are available on microfilm in the Microforms Collection of University Libraries, located in Bracken Library, first floor east.
Historic Aerial Photography
Historic aerial photography can provide information to genealogists about the property of their family. Studying aerial images in progression over time can reveal development and other changes in an area. (White County, Indiana, 1938 aerial photograph, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
Historic aerial photography of some Indiana counties dating back to 1938 is available for use in the GIS Research & Map Collection. Historic aerial photography of some states is also available. Most of these images are photographs layered over a topographic map. (Muncie, Indiana, 1941 aerial photograph, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
International Genealogical Resources in University Libraries
The GIS Research & Map Collection includes topographic maps of countries from around the world at many different scales. These can be helpful in locating the specific location of an ancestor’s hometown. (Mackay, Queensland, Australia 1966, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The GRMC maintains a collection of thousands of city maps from around the world.
Thematic maps from the GRMC can be an interesting resource for genealogists researching family histories around the world. Researchers can view coats of arms featured on this map of Ireland. *(Irish Family Names Map: Arms and Medieval Locations, 1984, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).*
(Clans Map of Scotland, 1997, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
(Wales Cultural Heritage map, 1983, GRMC, Ball State University Libraries).
The Atlas Collection includes many valuable international atlases for genealogy research. World gazetteers are also available in the Atlas Collection and the GRMC. (Atlas of British Surnames and A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland, Atlas Collection, Ball State University Libraries).
Another resource available in the Atlas Collection and the GRMC is *The Map Catalog: Every Kind of Map and Chart on Earth and Even Some Above It*. As its title implies, this book is a thorough reference tool providing information about the many types of maps available and the major sources of map products. Genealogists can use this resource for acquiring specific maps for specific needs.
Researchers can copy maps and atlases from the Collection using the scanner in the GRMC.
Maps from the GRMC can be circulated for two weeks or longer. Atlases from the Atlas Collection circulate for 28 days.
Genealogists will find many resources related to local families, businesses, churches, and organizations in the Archives and Special Collections on the second floor of Bracken Library. The Archives contains a copy of *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses: Indiana, 1800-1920*. Researchers can search through historical atlases and plat maps, cemetery indexes, family files, indexes to birth and death records, and marriage indexes.
The Reference Collection on the first floor of Bracken Library offers valuable resources for family history researchers. The Collection includes numerous encyclopedias and guidebooks on genealogy. The Genealogical and Historical Atlas of the United States, Township Atlas of the United States, and Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788-1980 are all cartographic resources located in the Reference Collection.
Genealogists can locate informative family history resources in the Microforms area on the first floor of Bracken Library. Researchers can review the *County Histories of the Old Northwest, LC G&M Land Ownership* maps for thirteen states, historical county atlases, and the *U.S. Federal Population Census* dating back to 1790. The series of Delaware County, Indiana records includes court books; will, deed, and probate records; and marriage indexes.
Other Genealogical Resources in University Libraries: Digital Media Repository

The Ball State University Libraries Digital Media Repository contains collections of historic maps, atlases, photographs, letters, and other materials for genealogy research available at http://libx.bsu.edu/.
• Information for this tutorial provided by *Using Maps and Aerial Photography in Your Genealogical Research* by Marilyn Lind, General Collection, Ball State University Libraries.

• For more information about any of the maps shown or the tutorial lesson *Genealogy Resources: Maps, Atlases, and Other Cartographic Materials*, please contact the GIS Research & Map Collection, Ball State University Libraries, at (765) 285-1097.
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