

Your North Carolina Family History Research Starts Here: An Introduction to Government & Heritage Collections and Resources

Presented by the SLNC Government & Heritage Library

Topics:

- Framing your research: historical context
- A landscape of diverse collections and resources
- Government records and publications
- Important print resources
- Unique and specialized collections
- What is available online

Framing your research: historical context

Settlement and county development: background resources

Background resources can be found at the SLNC Government & Heritage Library website and in NCpedia, North Carolina's online encyclopedia. Visit [NCpedia.org](https://www.ncpedia.org) to find more than 8,400 entries spanning a wide range of topics on North Carolina history, biography, state government, and the state's natural history. NCpedia includes articles on many of the topics and terms covered in this presentation. You can search for topics such as land grants, Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, settlement, cohabitation records, and many others. The site includes access to secondary reading sources and references, along with access to historical images and primary source collections. NCpedia also includes resources for teachers and K-12 students.

[State Library of North Carolina website](#)

Visit the State Library website to learn about the SLNC Government & Heritage Library and its collections and services. The website also has useful information about getting started in family history research and a variety of topics on finding historical records.

[NCpedia, North Carolina's online encyclopedia](#)

[Chronology of North Carolina's counties](#)

[North Carolina's 100 counties](#) – links to encyclopedia articles with links to historical resources

[Interactive timeline of North Carolina's county development](#)

[Land Grants](#)

[North Carolina settlement history](#)

Geography and settlement: a few important dates

- Royal charters, 1663 and 1665
- Early settlement by Europeans, 1650
- Earliest land grants, 1663
- First permanent incorporated town, Bath 1705
- Split with South Carolina, 1712
- North Carolina becomes a royal colony, 1729

Maps

[Map, "A Map of North Carolina"](#)

By John Brickell. Published by John Brickell and C. Corbett, 1743, London. From the collection of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Available at North Carolina Maps, <https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ncmaps/id/1101/rec/26>

[Map, "How North Carolina Was Settled"](#)

From *The influence of geography upon early North Carolina*, by Cordelia Camp and the Carolina Charter Tercentenary Commission, 1963. From the collection of the State Library of North Carolina. Also available at HathiTrust, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012189172>

To find more historical maps for North Carolina from the 1500's to the 20th century, visit [North Carolina Maps](#) at the University of North Carolina. The resource includes digitized maps from collections across the state.

County development

One critical resource for researching records and history of North Carolina's counties is a listing of county formation, with dates and parent counties. These chronologies are available from the SLNC Government & Heritage Library and in NCpedia.org. Additionally, [NCpedia has an encyclopedia page for all 100 North Carolina's counties](#). These pages include: historical county formation information, including founders and parent counties; links to encyclopedia entries related to those counties; links to county government websites; and other useful information.

You can find the county formation chronologies here:

- [North Carolina County Formation, chronology, from the State Library of North Carolina](#)
- [North Carolina County Development, printable PDF handout, available at NCpedia.org](#)

In addition, we have another invaluable resource for understanding the legal and legislative history of county formation. This is *The formation of the North Carolina counties, 1663-1943*, by David Leroy Corbitt (1996). Corbitt's book, an annotated legal and legislative history of the counties, is a state government publication.

And it is also available digitized in the [North Carolina Digital Collections](#). Each digitized county page is also linked to each NCpedia article about the individual county, as another access point to this information.

Finally, another valuable resource is the *North Carolina Gazetteer*, an annotated index of more than 20,000 North Carolina place names, some historical that no longer exist. This resource, by William S. Powell and Michael Hill, was originally published by the University of North Carolina Press, 2010. This is a key resource for historical research in North Carolina. And it is available in [a searchable database at NCpedia.org](#).

Courts

You can find historical information about North Carolina's courts at NCpedia.org. In addition, the North Carolina Judicial Branch has created [a number of extensive resources](#) on the state's historical courts and contemporary judicial system.

A landscape of diverse collections and resources

North Carolina has a wide collecting landscape. Collections with valuable historical information, artifacts, and records include state government records and publications, university special collections, historical and genealogical collections of local and county libraries, museums, and other special collections and resources from institutions such as historic sites.

Government records and publications

The State Archives of North Carolina is the collector of county and state government agency records, and the State Library is the repository for state government publications. Together, they complement researchers looking for government records and information. Please visit the websites to learn more about collections and services, both in person and remote.

Many researchers will begin their work with the SLNC Government & Heritage Library, as the library has specialized resources – like abstracts and indexes of original records held by the State Archives – to help researchers more easily and effectively locate the presence of original documents. The library is also able to help researchers with research methods and search strategies, provide tools such as research guides, and help in uncovering resources that may be held by other institutions across the state.

[State Archives of North Carolina](#)

- County records
- State agency records
- Private collections
- Military collections

An important resource for understanding the records available at the State Archives for each North Carolina county is the *Guide to County Records in the North Carolina State Archives*. This book is available in print as well as [online at the State Archives website](#).

State Library of North Carolina

- State of North Carolina government publications
- North Carolina newspapers
- Abstracts and indexes of county and other records
- Historical city and county directors
- Local history and family heritage publications

Vital Records

For North Carolina, vital records will be held by the [Office of Vital Records](#) (part of the Department of Health and Human Services), the State Archives, or the local county register of deeds or clerk of court, depending upon the time period and the document type. In broad brushstrokes, this list shows what is available by date and where to go.

Birth records

- Indexes: State Archives of North Carolina
- Certificates: Office of Vital Records, 1913 to present and county register of deeds

Death records

- Death certificates: State Archives of North Carolina, 1913-1975
- Death certificates: Office of Vital Records, 1930 to present
- Death certificates: County register of deeds, 1979 to present

Marriage records

- Registries, bonds, and licenses: State Archives, pre-1868 (primarily bonds)
- Cohabitation records: 1866-1867
- Certificates: Office of Vital Records, 1962-present; county register of deeds, pre-1962

Divorce Records

- Certificates: Office of Vital Records 1958-present; county clerk of court, pre-1958

Additionally, Ancestry.com is a very useful site for finding and accessing vital records information in the form of indexes as well as original documents, depending on the time period.

Important print resources

There are several print resources that are important sources for historical research in North Carolina, including family history research. A broad overview is included below, and these resources are also available in the print collections of the SLNC Government & Heritage Library.

In addition, the print book *North Carolina Research: Genealogy and Local History*, by Helen Leary, Editor (1966), is one of our most important tools for understanding the types of historical records and documents that exist, historical information about their creation and origination, how to read and understand them, as well as other interpretive information.

Important print and microfilm resources to keep in mind and consider for North Carolina history research:

- North Carolina state government publications (available in print and many online)
- North Carolina newspapers on microfilm (some available online)
- Historical publications and scholarly books
- Periodicals and lineage society publications
- Abstracts and indexes of government and other records
- Family histories
- Maps
- Military pension records (available on microfilm and some online)

Abstracts and indexes of county government and other records

Abstracts and indexes are created for a wide range of record types, including: county records (deeds, tax, court, marriage, birth, death, estates administration, and others); census records; church histories and records; lineage society records; abstracts of newspaper information, such as marriage and death notices; indexes and abstracts of road records, cemetery records; architectural surveys and landscape features such as mills and gristmills; places and many others. Many of these publications are self-published works, created by researchers who have painstakingly reviewed historical records, and their existence is dependent on both the existence of records and whether someone has undertaken that work to date. Researchers rely on these heavily to expand their research, locate people and places, and build their heritage stories.

For North Carolina research, abstracts, and indexes, particularly for county records, are an invaluable starting point for researchers looking for these records. They allow researchers to pinpoint the existence of a possible record to take that information to the State Archives to easily locate the original record. Typically, the information given in the abstract or index will refer to a book and page number of the record in the State Archives. Researchers can also use that collection information to visit the State Archives to view the original record or to request copies of documents remotely. Utilizing abstracts and indexes can save hours of research time by eliminating the need to search through entire collections of original records. The SLNC Government & Heritage Library has a large collection of record abstracts and indexes for North Carolina county records. These publications are available in print in the library.

Unique and specialized collections

North Carolina has an extensive collecting landscape for historical manuscript and artifact collections. These are important resources to keep in mind and to investigate for family history research. Many of these

collections are housed across the state's universities, and they can include manuscript collections for individuals, businesses and industry, plantation records, historical collections from towns and cities, organizations and unions, photographs, diaries, scrapbooks, and many other types of records. Often the collections of individual institutions relate to that region of the state. Museums also have historical collections that are useful to investigate. And many local and county libraries also have local history rooms and collections with genealogical materials. Finally, North Carolina historical sites also have collections that may be of value.

Here are several institutions with historical collections:

- [North Carolina Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill Libraries](#)
- [Southern Oral History Program, UNC-Chapel Hill](#)
- [W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University](#)
- [Special Collections, Ramsey Library at UNC Asheville](#)
- [Special and Digital Collections, Western Carolina University](#)
- [Special Collections and University Archives, UNC Greensboro](#)
- [Joyner Library Special Collections, Eastern Carolina University](#)
- [University Archives, Bluford Library, North Carolina A&T University](#)
- [North Carolina Museum of History Collections](#)
- [Historic Stagville](#) (database of genealogical records for enslaved persons and descendants)

Key online go-tos

- [North Carolina Maps, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#)

A comprehensive collection of historical North Carolina maps spanning the 1500s to the 2000s.

- [DigitalNC](#)

A statewide collaborative project digitizing the collections of heritage and cultural institutions across all 100 counties. The collection includes North Carolina college and high school yearbooks, local newspapers (including several of the state's African American newspapers); memorabilia, historical city directories, and AV materials.

- [North Carolina Digital Collections](#)

This is a collaborative project between the State Library and the State Archives, and together there are more than 100,000 records in the collection, freely available online. The collection includes state publications, including publications and reports of state agencies along with publications and laws of the General Assembly, from the 1700s. The collections available are too numerous to name them all, but a few that may be particularly relevant to family history research include: Alien registration and naturalization records, colonial court records, confederate pension applications, more than 200 years of historical court reports, district superior court records for Edenton from 1756 to 1806, historical

governors papers, wills from the secretary of state collection from 1663 to 1789, historical tax lists up to 1809, North Carolina military troop lists for the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 pay vouchers, North Carolina family bible and cemetery records, and finally North Carolina historical newspapers from 1751 to 1898.

- [North Carolina Land Grants](#)

The website *North Carolina Land Grants* is a project that has taken the digitized images for more than 200,000 of the state's land grants from 1663 through 1960 and made them available in a searchable database. The site also includes images of the colonial land grant entry books from 1778 to 1795, along with images of surveys and warrants. If you are looking for a land grant, this is the site to visit.

- [Colonial and State Records of North Carolina](#)

This 26-volume compilation includes transcriptions of the state's earliest government records including those of the General Assembly. The collection also includes items that have come from British and European collections. The collection is available in a full text-searchable database from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.