

Overview of American Ancestors Collections

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American Ancestors serves patrons online and at our Boston headquarters. It's a common misconception that we only have New England records. On the contrary, we have a strong Atlantic Canada collection, extensive New York resources, mid-Atlantic and Midwest collections, as well as international books.

Collections at the Library

1. Eighth Floor – rare books – request at the 5th floor desk (for members)
2. Seventh Floor – compiled genealogies, 17th century reference materials, such as the Mayflower Silver Books, the *Great Migration* series and Torrey's *New England Marriages*, vault requests, some microfilm
3. Fifth Floor – Local histories and records, ethnic group specific holdings, Canadian references, International Collection, how-to-books, manuscript and rare book requests, Jewish Heritage Center
4. Vault (Basement) –Microfilm of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec Notarial Records, newspapers and some American family genealogies, heraldry and some rare books, local histories, Harvard Annuals, and state genealogy journals.

Digital Databases

We have two ways to search the databases at American Ancestors. First, you could use the search screen to search for names, locations, or time periods. In general, “Less is More,” that is, searching in just a few fields tends to be more successful than completely filling out the form. The search form accepts wildcards, such as an “*” to replace one or more letters in your search string. You also have the options of filtering results by record type – e.g. birth, marriage, death OR by category – e.g. vital records.

The second search option is to browse databases. Click the left-hand word “Search” at the top of the page and select “A to Z list of all databases” from the drop-down box. On the browse search page, type a term into the search box or filter by location, year, or category. The results are listed alphabetically. If a camera icon appears next to the database, images are available. A page icon means you will see an index entry.

Digital Subscriptions

When in the building on Newbury Street, a number of subscription databases are available without charge. So, for example, Fold3.com, FindmyPast.com, Early American Newspapers, HistoryGeo.com, and The Jewish Advocate.

Digital Library and Archives

The Digital Library and Archives at American Ancestors contains materials from three repositories at American Ancestors:

- R. Stanton Avery Special Collections
- Brim-DeForest Library
- Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center

The materials are browsable and mostly unindexed, although some have searchable transcriptions.

The material from the **R. Stanton Avery Special Collections** is also known as our manuscript collection.

The collections have been arranged into 12 groups:

- Business Records & Accounts
- Church Records
- Civil War Manuscripts
- Commonplace Books
- Family and Personal Papers
- Family History Manuscripts
- Family Registers & Bible Records
- Finding Aids for Manuscript Collections
- French and Indian Wars Manuscripts
- Local History Manuscripts
- Revolutionary War Manuscripts
- William Bollen Papers

The collections from the **Brim-DeForest Library** include:

- City Directories
- Family History books
- Local History books

The seventeen collections from the **Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center** include:

- Abraham Captain Ratschesky Papers
- Bureau of Jewish Education Records
- Combined Jewish Philanthropies Records
- Community and Social Service Organization Records
- Dr. Robert Sperber Papers
- Family and Individual Papers
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Boston Port Records
- Jewish Communities of the North Shore
- Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston Records
- Jewish Heritage Center Photographs
- The Jewish Times Collection
- Leo Shapiro Newspaper Collection
- Rabbinical, Synagogue and Jewish Education Papers
- Spiro Family Papers
- Winer, Kane, Snider Family Papers & Elm Farm Foods Records
- Wyner Family Papers
- YMHA & Hecht House Records

American Ancestors Research Getaway – June 2026
Accessing the Digital Library and Archives (DLA)

The DLA may be accessed either by:

1. Typing the URL digital.americanancestors.org
2. Click “Search” at the top of the home page and select “Digital Library & Archive” from the drop-down list.
3. Clicking a link from the Library Catalog, e.g. “Online version of collection in JHC Digital Collections”

Searching the DLA may be accessed from the home page search box at the top left-hand corner or by clicking on one of the repository images, e.g. “Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center,” or “R. Stanton Avery Special Collections,” or “Brim-DeForest Library.” Clicking on a repository image prior to searching filters your results to that repository.

Some of the collections are open access:

- Abraham Captain Ratschesky Papers (Jewish Heritage Center)
- Business Records and Account Books (Special Collections)
- Civil War Manuscripts (Special Collections)
- Commonplace Books (Special Collections)
- Family and Personal Papers (Special Collections)
- Finding Aids for Manuscript Collections (Special Collections)
- French and Indian Wars Manuscripts (Special Collections)
- The Jewish Times (Jewish Heritage Center)
- Local History Manuscripts (Special Collections)
- Mary Antin Correspondence to Alfred Seelye Roe (Jewish Heritage Center)
- Revolutionary War Manuscripts (Special Collections)
- William Bolland Papers (Special Collections)

Others are available to members of American Ancestors:

- Church Records (Special Collections)
- City Directories (Brim-DeForest Library)
- Family History Books (Brim-DeForest Library)
- Family History Manuscripts (Special Collections)
- Family Registers and Bible Records (Special Collections)
- Local History Books (Brim-DeForest Library)
- Riobard O'Dwyer Papers (Special Collections)
- All JHC Collections

JHC Collections: Non-members may access JHC Collections by creating a free guest account and then emailing your username to jhcreference@jewishheritagecenter.org.