

# Tracking Down Your Ancestors Without Leaving Town

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Researchers in Austin have numerous opportunities available to track down ancestors, whether or not they ever set foot in Austin. This talk focuses on the results I accomplished using Austin-available resources to track, identify, and uncover the lives of several of my ancestors, none of which ever lived in Travis County. The list below includes the places I did the research and the types of sources I used (well I did include some Austin-related resources that I didn't use for the case studies, but that you should know about in case you do Travis County research).

## **Austin History Center (<http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/about-us>)**

Manuscript collections of papers and records of City and County departments, local families, civic organizations, businesses, and institutions.

- City directories (1870s-1920s), available online at Portal to Texas History
- Travis County records: Commissioners Court minutes (1839-1892), Superintendent of Schools (teachers' daily registers from the 1930s and 40s), Poor Farm Ledger (1890-1900)
- Maps, including bird's-eye view, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (1885-1970s), plats and neighborhood plats, cemetery maps
- Newspapers, including Austin American-Statesman (various iterations since 1871) (accessible digitally through ProQuest and NewsBank (both accessible through most libraries with TexShare accessibility, such as the Family History Centers)

## **Travis County Archives (<http://archives.traviscountyhistory.org/>)**

- Tax Office, including tax rolls (1861-1933), occupation tax receipts (1910), delinquent tax rolls (1885-1928, 1939-1977)
- Courts, including criminal court records (1890-1921), criminal case papers (1885-1911), jury summons and lists (1860-1868), case papers (1840-1845), civil case papers (1914-1969)

## **Travis County Clerk**

Deeds, probate, vital records. Some deeds, probate, and commissioners court volumes have been digitized and may be found in "Travis County Clerk Records" at the Portal to Texas History.

### **Texas State Library and Archives Commission (<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/arc/>)**

Most people know about the state records TSLAC has. Several collections from the Republic era and the military are digitized and available online. Finding aids to the largest and most commonly used collections may be found through TARO (Texas Archival Resources Online-see below). TSLAC has made it easy on their website to find the collections they've identified that are useful to genealogical researchers: "Genealogy" — <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/arc/genfirst.html>. But there are many other archival and manuscript collections that might include useful information that are not digitized and/or have no online finding aid. For example, who would think that the collections related to governors might include reams of correspondence from everyday, ordinary Texans? To discover those collections you can go to the "Archives & Manuscripts" section — <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/arc/index.html>. There you'll find "Descriptive Guides" with links to "Processed State and Local Records" and "Processed Manuscript and Photograph Collections." Collections are listed under each tab.

The Genealogy Reading Room is open every day and every 2nd Saturday. The library includes their extensive collection of books related to Texas and counties throughout the country, especially the southern states.

Some of the genealogical-related resources to be found at TSLAC:

- County records on microfilm (23 counties are available permanently in Austin; the remainder are housed in regional repositories across the state but can be ordered into Austin through Inter-Library Loan). Records vary by county but often include deeds, probate, naturalizations, marriages, courts, and school records. An index is available online for each county.
- Adjutant General Service Records, 1836-1935 (index and records online)
- Republic Claims, 1835-1846 and some beyond (index and records online)
- Confederate Indigent Families List, 1863-1865 (index online)
- 1867 Voters' Registration (available online through Ancestry.com)
- Texas Convict Record Ledgers and Indexes (available online through Ancestry.com)
- Confederate Pension Applications (available online through Ancestry.com)
- Memorials and Petitions (available online through Ancestry.com)
- Nacogdoches Archives (available online through Ancestry.com)
- City Directories, numerous cities (available onsite)
- Fire Insurance Maps (from the Texas Fire Marshall) (1920s-1970s)
- Supreme Court and Appellate Court records
- Photographic collections
- Map collections
- County records (numerous Galveston County records and others)
- County histories
- Books abstracting county records throughout Texas and the US (available onsite)
- Genealogical society quarterlies and journals

### **Perry-Castañeda Library (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/pcl/>)**

- Map Collection (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/>)
- Texas Sanborn maps (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/texas.html>)

### **Texas General Land Office (<http://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/forms/index.html>)**

- Land grant records, including homestead grant records
- Emigration company records
- Court of claims records

### **Dolph Briscoe Center for American History (<https://www.cah.utexas.edu/index.php>)**

Manuscript collections relating to counties, people, and events. Website includes a link to “Genealogical Resources.” The collections include private papers and documents, business records, diaries, journals, oral histories, and records kept for reasons you’d never think of. Worth searching because you don’t know what you might find.

### **Texas Archival Resources Online (<https://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/>)**

An online search engine accessing the finding aids for manuscript and archival collections throughout the state, including the Texas State Archives, General Land Office, university collections, libraries with manuscript collections, and other entities with collections accessible to the public. Search by name, place, subject, and any other term you think might show up in a finding aid.

### **Portal to Texas History (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/>)**

Digital source of records, newspapers, documents, photographs, and all things Texas. Many governmental entities in Texas have started uploading their records to the Portal (e.g. Travis County Clerk). Several genealogical societies have digitized their quarterlies and made them available on the portal. Extensive newspaper collection with a good search capability.

### **Library of Congress-Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>)**

- Digitized newspapers from 1789-1924

### **County Clerk’s Offices throughout Texas**

Digitized records available through county’s website – mainly deed records but sometimes can find others. For example, Williamson County has digitized all of their deeds records and can be searched by grantor or grantee or both.

### **Family History Centers**

With the availability of FamilySearch, we forget the benefits of visiting our local family history centers (three in the Austin area—North Austin on Rutherford Lane, Oak Hill, and Round Rock). While I would love to think that all microfilm the Family History Library has been digitized, of course, it hasn’t been. I’ve rented numerous reels of undigitized film out of the FHL catalog in the last year and used the FHC scanners to scan digital copies from the microfilm. Cheaper than a trip to Salt Lake City or the various counties around the country.

Don’t forget that the FHCs have free access to Ancestry.com world version, FindMyPast, MyHeritage, ArkivDigital, newspaper.com. And, if you have TexShare card, you can access the ProQuest and HeritageQuest databases. You can access digitized versions of family histories and local histories that you can’t access on your home computer (ever gotten the annoying “you don’t have access message”?). The Family History Library joined with genealogical libraries around the country (Clayton, for one) to digitize their collections of histories, but because of copyright issues, many are only available through the FHL in Salt Lake or the FHCs.