

The N.C. State Archives

A Beginner's Guide from the Heritage Research Center

C O U R T E S Y O F T H E H I G H P O I N T P U B L I C L I B R A R Y

WHAT YOU'LL FIND WITHIN:

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- Preparing for your day
- Finding your way in
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- Record arrangement
- How to fill out a call slip

HERITAGE RESEARCH CENTER

High Point Public Library

901 N. Main Street

P. O. Box 2530

High Point, N.C. 27261

(336) 883-3637

ncroom@highpointnc.gov

HOURS:

MON: 9:00–6:00

TUE-THU: 9:00–8:00

FRI: 9:00–6:00

SAT: 9:00–1:00, 2:00–6:00

SUN: CLOSED

WHYS AND WHEREFORES.

So, what is so great about an archive? I remember when I made my first trip almost twenty years ago and how excited I was about what I might find. No one had to convince me that it was a worthwhile trip. But I had no Internet access back then, and there were no big subscription databases online devoted to genealogy. People couldn't share information across the miles with a touch screen or the click of a few buttons. Are archives still relevant today?

You better believe it! The Archives is the repository of our collective memory in North Carolina.

Eventually, all the records generated by all the governmental agencies in North Carolina—past and present, statewide and local—go through the hands of the archivists there, and many are preserved and stored for permanent access. Some are microfilmed so that the originals can be protected from too much handling or so that they can be shared with libraries across the state. Plus, it is all collected in one place so that you can research many counties before about the middle of the twentieth century without traveling from courthouse to courthouse. The vast majority of what is



housed there has never been published and is not available online. And it's not likely to be any time soon. The volume of records is perfectly staggering and would take armies of volunteers decades to index. In fact, ours is the largest state archive in the nation by virtue of the sheer number of records it holds.

PREPARE FOR DISCOVERY!

One of the beautiful things about visiting the Archives is that you never know what you are going to find. Often, something turns up that you didn't anticipate while you were looking for something else.

There is too much to describe in a brief synopsis like this, but the highlights of the collection include:

- Wills, estates, deeds, vital records, court minutes and papers, divorce records, tax lists, apprentice and bastardy bonds for all the counties of North Carolina if the records still exist.
- Land entries, land warrants and surveys for all the land grants issued in North Carolina (Secretary of State Papers).
- Confederate pension applications for N.C. soldiers.
- Papers of the legislature including petitions from private citizens.
- North Carolina Supreme Court case files.
- The official papers of all the governors of N.C.
- Donated Bible records, letters, journals, and other papers of citizens.

GETTING READY FOR THE TRIP



It is always good to be prepared for your day at the Archives. Here are some things to remember.

(1) Establish priorities

and a strategy. It will take you many, many sessions at the facility (maybe a lifetime) to complete your research, so don't bite off more than you can chew in one day. Choose only a handful of limited goals to achieve at any one time.

What records do you want to look at? What problem do you want to solve?

(2) **Keep a record** of everything you survey, what you were looking for, and whether or not you found it. This will keep you from re-

peating yourself years down the road.

(3) Bring a **pencil and paper** or your **computer** or mobile device with you. If you are working with paper, write down a few key facts that you will need to perform your research. Don't imagine that you can bring big notebooks or bags of material into the Archives. There are security issues.

(4) **Research** the type of records you will be looking at on a given day if you don't know a lot about

them. Helen Leary's *North Carolina Research* is a great source. Although archivists can answer some of your questions, they will be able to help you only a minute or two at any one time. You will mostly be on your own unless you have a research buddy. (Hey, not a bad idea!)

(5) **Bring a picture ID.** You'll be required to show it at a couple of different points on your way into the building. The records of our state are precious, and some visitors have been known to steal them.

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FINDING YOUR WAY IN...

The Archives is located at 109 East Jones Street in Raleigh. That is between the Legislative Building and the Governor's Mansion and diagonally across from the North Carolina Museum of History and the Natural Science Museum. There is a parking lot directly across the street from the front entrance in which you can pay to park at a modest rate. If you don't mind walking a couple of blocks, you can also park on the left side of North Person Street behind the Governor's Mansion for free from 9 am to 4 pm.

The Department of Cultural Resources building houses a number of different offices. The State Library of North Carolina is on the first floor on the left hand side of the building. The Genealogical Section of the State Li-

brary is on the Mezzanine, a half-floor wedged between the first and second floors. The State Archives Search Room is located on the second floor on the left hand side of the building just above the Genealogy Section of the State Library. The Genealogy Section probably has the best collection of books about North Carolina records and families in the state, but original records are on the 2nd floor in the Archives Search Room.

There are a couple of levels of security you have to pass through to get to the Archives. In the lobby, you must stop at the security guard's desk located just in front of the entrance doors. There you must show your ID, state the reason for your visit (say you are going to perform research in the Ar-

chives), and pick up a visitor's tag, which you should affix to your clothing for the entire day.

When you get to the second-floor Search Room, you'll step into a vestibule. A security person sits behind the glass to check in visitors. Since this is your first time, you'll show your ID and give current contact information. You'll be formally acquainted with the rules by the security officer. Any bags you've brought or coats should be stored in a locker, issued to you by the guard. You'll also be issued a researcher's card with a personal ID # on it. You sign the card (agreeing to the terms of use) and take it with you into the search room. Use only your pencil, a digital camera or a computer inside.

THE RULES OF ACCESS

It is a privilege to use the materials contained in the Archives and so you must behave accordingly. Make sure that you know the facility will be open the day you are planning your trip. Generally, the Search Room is closed Sundays and Mondays. It is also closed on many holidays and the Saturdays preceding or succeeding them. There are also a few days each January when the Archives is closed for inventory. The hours Tuesday through Friday are 8:00 am to 5:30 pm. On Saturdays, the hours are from 9 to 2. For exact hours, consult the website: www.archives.ncdcr.gov

There are some rules you must observe when using records in the Search Room. Usually, at the beginning of the day, you submit call slips for each group of records you want to examine.

At this time, you also turn in your researcher card to the reference archivist at the service desk. It is held there until you depart for the day. It is important to write down or memorize your researcher ID number written on the card. The call slips require that you include this number. If you place requests later in the day, you'll need the number.

Most of the records you'll be looking at are either in files within boxes or in bound books. Fibredex boxes are given to you one at a time. You must take them to the table along with a place marker that the archivist will give you. Put in the place marker and remove one file at a time. Place all materials flat on the table and do not change the order of the records in the files. There are flags and paperclips you can use to request

copies of individual documents. Fill out the flag and clip it to the upper edge of a record, so that when it is back in the box, the flag will be visible to the archivist. Copies are currently ten cents each. Return the box with the lid open if you are requesting copies from it. Then ask for your next box or volume. Bound books can be viewed three at a time, and you can either lay them flat or prop them on the bookstands.

Remember to be patient. The Archives is understaffed and often quite busy. There is a small book collection that you can use for reference in the Search Room. Do not reshelve the books. You can also use the microfilm room which includes many key county records, land grant records, and newspapers from across the state. Leave any microfilm you use on the carts for refilling. Copies are 25 cents each and you must use quarters.

At the end of the day, turn in your records, pay for your copies, and retrieve your researcher card. You will return the latter to the security guard and allow him to search your papers on the way out. Empty your locker and return the key before you leave.

HOW TO FIND STUFF

Archives and libraries are very different in the way they organize their materials. Whereas in a library you can often find indexes to search for your family's name, in the Archives, the main way to search is by location, record type and time period. There are few surname indexes, unless the original records were indexed by the clerks or registers in this way (as, for instance, wills or deeds).

All the records are summarized in a card catalog and in an on-line system that you can use in the Search Room or at home called MARS. They are organized by the location in which they were created (in the case of the counties) or by the branch of state government that created them—Governor's office, Secretary of State, Legislature, State Treasurer and Comptroller, Supreme Court. So, you simply must know which government branch likely created the record you need. That is one reason to consult Leary's published guide to *North Carolina Research*

beforehand. Copies of this book are available at the Archives, in the Heritage Research Center and can also be purchased from the North Carolina Genealogical Society.

So, let's suppose that you suspect your ancestor got a divorce in Orange County in the 1830's. You are not sure exactly when. Using Leary, you know that very early divorces were granted by the Legislature and would be among Legislative papers, but by the 1820s and 1830s the Superior Courts in each county handled them. Since the divorce you are looking for occurred in the 1830s, you know to look for them among Orange County's records. You look in the card catalog for County Records, then under Orange and see that there is a category called Marriage, Divorce and Vital Statistics. One subcategory is called Divorce Records and you see that they run from 1824 to 1908 and are kept in files in three fibredex boxes. Each box has its own call

number. Within the boxes the records are arranged alphabetically by the husband's last name and the date. You will fill out a call slip with as much of the call number as you can determine from the card file and also supply the other information the slip requests. Usually you won't know exactly which box you want, so you may leave the last part of the call number blank or place a question mark there. You won't know for sure whether the record is there until you look at the contents of the box. If it isn't there, you can look through civil action papers for Orange during the 1830's and see if the Archivist missed them when he separated divorces from other Superior Court records. You might also check the bound volume of minutes of the Court (also at the Archives). Perhaps the loose papers are missing. There is usually more than



one place to look for any given record, but the first step is to know what you are looking for.

In the Search Room, there are separate card files for records of the cases before the State Supreme Court indexed by defendant and plaintiff, and also for the land grants issued by the state. There are also some card file finding aides for other state agencies as well as notebooks which describe some record sets in detail.

In the next segment, I'll illustrate how to fill out a call slip.

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF CALL SLIPS

One of the biggest obstacles newbies at the Archives face is filling out their call slips properly. There are different call slip forms for county records, state agency records and private collections. These are color coded but if you can master one type, you can figure out the others. Most of the time you'll be looking at county records, so you'll use white call slips like the one illustrated to the right.

The call slip is a small piece of paper that you fill out to ask for a particular record you are interested in. Its content is based on the record you see in the card catalog (left hand illustration) or on-line MARS entry about that particular record type. It tells the person searching through the closed stacks where to locate your item of interest. Archivist also use them to track the level of use for various records, and in case of loss or damage, they could potentially identify the culprit.

Let's take the example illustrated below. You are interested in finding out who the children of Philip Adams of Forsyth County were. You suspect one of them was your ancestor. You know that Philip didn't have a will, so you are hoping that maybe he left an estate file behind when he died. You are at the Archives, so here is your chance to check. You look in the County Records card catalog under Forsyth County. You locate the subdivision called "Estates Records" and find the card illustrated below. It tells you that there are 419 fibrebox boxes of estates for Forsyth, gives you the range of call numbers for those boxes, indicates that they are alphabetically arranged by the deceased person's surname and also specifies the dates on which the records were received from the County. So you grab a county records call slip and fill it out.

The first slot is the call number. It is composed of "C.R." for County Records, then a three part decimal number.

1845- 1956	Estates Records 419 fibrebox boxes	Forsyth Co.
C.R. 038.508.1- 038.508.419	Arranged alphabetically, Aaron - Zink.	
3-28-78	Rec'd 5-25-61, 6-29-62 10-29-64, 3-20-69	

The first part is the county number. Forsyth's County number is 38 because if you alphabetize all of the counties (defunct and current), it is thirty-eighth in the list, A to Z. The next portion of the number after the first decimal is a code for the type of record. Loose estates are always "508" no matter what county you're looking at, just as wills are "801" and criminal

court papers "326." The last part of the call number after the second decimal point is the box number. In this case, they are numbered 1 through 419. In the example, the person has assumed that Philip Adams estate is in box 1 and has written it so. In most situations, you are not going to know the box number, so simply leave it blank or write a question mark there as "C.R. 038.501. ?". The archivist will find which box contains the Adamses and bring it to you. The name of the county is next—"Forsyth." Under specific record you can write "Adam or Adams Estates" (include surname variants) or you could write "Philip Adams estate" if that is the only one you want. (You'd be better off to look at all of them, not just Philip's.) Next comes your name, then your ID number taken from your researcher card. Last is today's date. Once you've filled out the slip, you can hand it in to the reference archivist and he or she will retrieve the box for you along with others you may request. Remember, it will take you a while to look through all the Adams estates, so don't ask for more than you can handle at one time.

Sometimes, it pays to fill out your call slips before you come. You can take a few slips with you and get all the call numbers you need from the MARS catalog through the Archives website on-line, at home, then fill out the slips before you return. You can also consult the summary of county or state agency records either in printed form at your local library or at the Archives website before your trip to make sure that what you want is there. In some cases, original records are still in the county and the archives only has microfilm (for instance, deed books). Also, be aware that mid to late 20th century records are often still in the county. In other cases, records for particular counties for particular time periods have been destroyed or lost. So verify that what you want is at the Archives before you make a long and pointless trip.

CALL NO. C.R. 038.508.1 -	North Carolina State Archives Raleigh North Carolina
Name of COUNTY or Private Collection Forsyth. Estates Records	
Specific RECORD ADAM, ADAMS	
Name of USER John Adams	
I. D. No. 00053	
Date	For staff use