

DIANE L. RICHARD SHOWS WHAT'S AVAILABLE ONLINE FOR THE ARMCHAIR GENEALOGIST

Explore Maps From the Comfort of Home!



MAPS ARE A WONDERFUL resource. Not only do they help you find your way around, they can unlock the history of a place and your family.

Whereas one would have to go to a library or archive, or purchase a map to learn about an area, there are now a plethora of online maps available to help genealogists in their quest to learn more about their ancestors.

The purpose of this article is to encourage you to explore maps... does this mean that you are not already doing so? Of course not! I have always consulted maps. How else did I learn where Deszno and Wola Pietrusza Galicia were located, or how the formation of North Carolina counties affected families I was researching or help locate those federal land patents?

But, it wasn't until recently, when I was asked to locate some land on a modern map when the family last lived on it in the mid

to late 1800s, that I really looked at maps in a different way. This wasn't a case of locating a town — the goal was to use landmarks from deeds and other documents to locate property when the

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"paper trail" was less than perfect. Even when you have all the deeds, as we did for one of these projects, the description was not detailed enough that we could positively identify the modern piece of land. For another project, we were able to utilize enough landmarks from various maps to identify within a few feet where

the target had been located. And, in the course of these projects, all kinds of maps were looked at; let me introduce you to them.

After learning that so many maps were available online and how invaluable they were, I now check out all kinds of online maps for clues that might help me learn more about an elusive ancestor or long-gone landmark.

WHY MAPS?

First, let's step back and look at why you would want to, and need to, use maps for your genealogy/family history research:

- Many survive across a broad spectrum of periods — every country, most periods
- You don't live in the area of research
- Changing landmarks — many disappear
- Changing neighbors — many move
- Property divided

Online Maps

- Gain perspective on neighbors and nearby communities, churches, cemeteries and landmarks

Keep in mind, there are whole courses given on plotting land using metes and bounds and similar surveying measurements. The focus here is more to locate property in its approximate location and context by using clues from deeds, wills, other documents and any maps found. One doesn't just have to focus on "plotting" land as a means to gain perspective or information.

WHY ONLINE MAPS

If you agree that maps are a valuable resource, then the next question is, why online maps? Why not use paper maps?

- You don't live where you are researching.
- You want to include snippets of map images into a family history or similar document.
- Some maps can be hard to read and it would be nice to be able to zoom in on features, text, etc.
- Traditionally, you had to mail in an order form to purchase a map or you had to physically go to the repository to obtain a copy of it. (Assuming that there was a means of getting a copy made.)
- Physical access to maps may be controlled for preservation and some are not available for viewing and copying.

Now, let's look at some map resources and map types.

GLOBAL AND COAST-TO-COAST MAP COLLECTIONS

Below are some map sources that are helpful for any project. I frequently find myself visiting these sources when I want a quick sense of someplace new that I am researching.

NORTH CAROLINA MAPS

Since there are so many maps available and it's impossible to talk about all the online sources in one article, I have chosen to use online maps available for North Carolina research as a focal point.

You will find that many of these maps are available for other counties and states as well. You may also find that your county or state has other types of maps available. There are quite a few

GLOBAL AND US MAP RESOURCES:

CENSUS MAPS:

http://www.familyhistory101.com/map_census.html
For most states, maps showing the existing counties for each of the censuses relevant to that state.

DAVID RUMSEY MAP COLLECTION:

<http://www.davidrumsey.com/>
Focuses on rare 18th- and 19th-century North and South American maps and has historic maps of the world, Europe, Asia and Africa.

FEDERAL LAND PATENT RECORDS AND ASSOCIATED SURVEY PLAT MAPS:

<http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov>
If your family purchased land in a land grant state or Eastern public lands, this website gives you access to federal land conveyance records. Additionally, images of serial patents (land titles issued between 1908 and the mid-1960s) are on this website. Images related to survey plats, dating back to 1810, are being added as each state's documents are completed. You will see summary information for the land grant and be able to access a digital image of the original document and then correlate it to the survey plat.

HISTORICAL MAPS:

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/map_sites/hist_sites.html
Links to all kinds of maps.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS MAP COLLECTION (DIGITIZED):

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/>
Organized into categories: Cities and Towns, Conservation & Environment, Discovery & Exploration, General Maps, Cultural Landscapes, Military Battles & Campaigns, Transportation and Communication.

MAP HISTORY/HISTORY OF CARTOGRAPHY:

<http://www.maphistory.info/imageus.html>
Gateway to a large number of links to individual maps or sites with lots of maps.

PERRY-CASTAÑEDA LIBRARY MAP COLLECTION:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/>
Has more modern maps and also a fair collection of historical maps.

UNITED STATES DIGITAL MAP LIBRARY (US GENWEB):

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/maps/>
State and county maps, US maps, and Indian land cessions to the US treaty maps.



Census Maps.

Online Maps

NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY MAP RESOURCES:

SOIL SURVEY MAPS: These typically dated from the early 1900s and show many features. These surveys, if they have the maps, show older names for features that may have disappeared or been re-named. The ECU, Eastern North Carolina Digital Library has soil survey maps for that region of the state, <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/historyfiction/maps.aspx?sort=A>

This page, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/soilsurvey/north%20carolina.html>, provides links to extant soil survey maps across North Carolina

CIVIL WAR MAPS: There are Gilmer maps which often exist in great detail for counties. The Library of Congress has some, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/civil_war_maps/cwmabout.html and the UNC-CH website also has an extensive collection, at <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/gilmer/index.php>

TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS (now part of Trails.com): This link, <http://www.topozone.com/>, is the one site I find easy to use. Identify a named feature in the area of interest and then see if at the map level, this feature is named. For example, cemeteries in Halifax County, <http://www.topozone.com/states/NorthCarolina.asp?county=Halifax&feature=Cemetery>

AERIAL VIEWS: <http://terraserver.microsoft.com/default.aspx> or <http://www.terraserver.com/>. You can overlay an aerial view on the topographic or street maps. Remember to get the UTM or latitude/longitude information from your reference map. For UTM, the information looks like this: UTM 18 281252E 3994893N (18 = zone, 281252 = easting, 3994893 = northing)

For latitude/longitude, the information looks like this: 36° 04' 27"N 77° 25' 45"W though, you sometimes need it in this format:

36.0741 -77.4291

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

(DOT) MAPS: Once you locate a property, these dot maps, <http://www.ncdot.org/it/img/DataDistribution/CountyMapTIFs/default.html>, can help you place them in the context of modern roads. Besides current maps, there are also historic maps online covering 1930-68.

NORTH CAROLINA GEODETIC SURVEY: There are also these maps, http://www.ncgs.state.nc.us/status_map_alt.ht, that are a mix of road map and features map; they do list a lot!

GIS MAP: Many localities now have these available. For example, Wake County, <http://imaps.co.wake.nc.us/imaps/> and Wayne County, <http://gis.co.wayne.in.us/>.

And, this NCSU website keeps a list of GIS and other online maps, organized by county, <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/gis/counties.html>.

FLOOD PLAIN MAPS: As the name states, these focus on showing the flood plains for all waterways within the state. They help identify "hidden" creeks, branches and small waterways and give a sense of the surrounding terrain. See http://www.ncfloodmaps.com/default_swf.asp.

HISTORIC NORTH CAROLINA TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: If you find a modern map too difficult to correlate to a historic map, this website, <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/gis/historictopos.html>, may help solve this problem as there are fewer modern features present.

SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAPS:

Highly detailed city plans originally produced between 1867 and 1970 for the purpose of assessing risk and cost of insurance. These highly detailed plans were printed in color, drawn at a scale of 50 feet/inch (1:600) and record detailed information about streets, businesses, residences, building materials and utilities. Usually available for North Carolina residents via North Carolina Live (typically accessed via your local library)

LOCAL SPECIALIZED MAPS:

These may include land grants, cemeteries, divisions of land and other documents that often include a map of the property in question. More of these are available online, but most aren't, yet.

Wake County Register of Deeds, <http://web.co.wake.nc.us/RDeeds/maps/maps.htm>, includes index to Markham maps and many other historic wake county maps.

Township Maps,

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~ncglgs/currenttownships.htm>

A collection of township maps for select counties.

Carolina Places in Time, <http://gisarcims.co.mecklenburg.nc.us/historicasp/searchmaps.htm>. Many maps for the Mecklenburg area with other North Carolina and South Carolina maps included.

New Bern Library — digital collection — extensive map collection, <http://newbern.cpclub.org/digital/maps.htm>.

Western North Carolina Heritage, <http://www.heritagewnc.org/>, includes more than 800 images of land grants for the western part of North Carolina and many include plat maps!



Above: A soil survey map.
Below: Civil War battle plan map.



different types of maps available online that can help with genealogy research. They each give you different information. Sometimes the new information reinforces what you already know and sometimes it supplements what you know (e.g., seeing a Civil War map with neighbors identified versus reading a census enumeration).

In this article are examples of some North Carolina statewide resources that I consult for most projects.

Additionally, the use of maps often benefits from the use of other tools, such as gazetteers and other geography-related references, (more of these are going online, but the best one for North Carolina is still only available in printed form) as well as specific local resources such as this "Secondary roads lookup — North Carolina", <https://apps.dot.state.nc.us/srlookup/Default.aspx>.

Note that not all maps have the same usefulness for all projects. For instance, soil survey maps are helpful for more rural settings, whereas Sanborn Fire Insurance maps are only suitable for urban settings.

Let's talk now about some of the maps that I have used for North Carolina projects, recognizing that not all counties for North Carolina have all of these types of maps available online, but it is always worth looking to see if they do. See the full page box earlier in this article for a list of where to look.

In addition to all the maps

mentioned, you will find wonderful maps that are particular to a locale — someone may have identified original land grants along a river, or plotted out land owners for a select period of time, or created a simplified map

MIGRATION MAP RESOURCES:

These are maps that include North Carolina and are focused on the migration of individuals into or through North Carolina.

BROWN HISTORY.ORG

<http://www.brownhistory.org/maps.htm>

Has a great assortment of colonial, migration and other North Carolina maps

GREAT COLLECTION OF MIGRATION ROUTE OVERVIEWS WITH MAPS BY BEVERLY WHITAKER

<http://home.kc.rr.com/gentutor/#Migration>

VARIOUS MIGRATION ROUTES

<http://sciway3.net/proctor/marion/maps/MigrationRoutes.html>

of an area highlighting landmarks and now long gone features. There are many map gems to be found online!

MORE NORTH CAROLINA MAP RESOURCES:

NORTH CAROLINA COLONY AND STATE MAPS:

<http://ncrec.dcr.state.nc.us/Cat/CatServer.ASP?WCI=Maps&WCE=Short>

TENNESSEE COUNTY FORMATION MAPS:

<http://www.tngenweb.org/maps/county-ani/tn-maps/tn-cf.html>

An excellent collection of maps that reflect the history of Tennessee, including its time as part of North Carolina!

MAPS AND OTHER CARTOGRAPHIC RECORDS IN THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE ARCHIVES: (Information circular)

<http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/Archives/FindingAids/Circulars/AIC12.pdf>

Includes list of extent county "land ownership" maps

WILLIAM P CUMMING MAP SOCIETY:

(North Carolina-based cartographic society)

http://www.cummingmapsociety.org/J_1780_North_Carolina_and_Part_of_South_Carolina_with_the_Field_of_Battle_Bew_Lodge.jpg

Features numerous historical maps of North Carolina and other locales, including this 1780 map

MIGRATION MAPS

In addition to examining maps focused on a particular locale, for many 17th- to 19th-century families it's important to know how and where people migrated. If you are stumped as to how an ancestor got from point A to point B, you might find that it

Online Maps

was because a lot of other people were traveling that same route.

CONCLUSION

Are all maps online? No, as with other documents, only a small fraction is. I have heard that

there are about 10,000 maps on the Library of Congress website, of more than the 4.5 million maps in their collection! And, that's just one example.

Like any resource, understand that maps are not perfect, nor complete.

Some issues that

arise with maps include:

- Differing scales
- Differing perspectives
- Differing time periods — natural changes in landscape and man-made changes in landscape

- Differing levels of details
- Created by individuals who can and have introduced errors

However, as with most of our genealogy resources, despite their flaws, maps are a wonderful visual tool to use as you do your research. Now, go out and see what maps exist online for your community or ancestral home, and have some fun stepping back in time!

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