

USING ANOTHER LIBRARY SOURCE: THE GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT SECTION



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INTRODUCTION:

Across the United States, various universities, law libraries, state archives, libraries, and now websites hold an assortment of government documents. However, many genealogists often ignore them. They believe that these docs have no useful family or historic information.

From 1774 beginning with the Continental Congress, there were legislative records documenting the proceedings.

Each House shall keep a Journal of its Proceedings, and from time to time publish the same, excepting such Parts as may in their Judgment require Secrecy; and the Yeas and Nays of the Members of either House on any question shall, at the Desire of one fifth of those Present, be entered on the Journal.
Article I, section 5, clause 3 of the Constitution.

“Government publication” are publications that the government writes, sponsors, authorizes, or publishes at Government expense. 44 USC § 1901

Initially, private printers published government documents (gov docs). Since 1861, the United States Government Printing Office (GPO) [now known as [Government Publishing Office](#)] published and distributed these gov docs from the various Federal branches (executive, legislative, and judicial). These branches produced a number of records and documents that offered a glimpse into the inner workings.

Below are some of the record types available from the different government branches.

| Executive branch | Legislative branch | Judicial branch |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reports• research reports• statistical publications• fact sheets• handbooks, manuals, posters, & photos• maps & atlases• pamphlets• presidential papers• budgets | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• hearings• congressional reports• committee prints• record of proceedings & debates (Congressional Record)• statutes• bills• laws• codes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• opinions• journals• decisions• orders of the court• oral argument transcripts |

GPO produced [Ben’s Guide to the US Government](#) to help everyone learn about the government.

WHERE ARE THE DOCUMENTS?

Over the years, the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) distributed various government documents (books, publications, reports, graphics, maps, microfiche, videos, and CDs) free of charge to designated repositories (currently numbering 1,200) throughout the U.S. and its territories. Each repository had their own individual collection development policy and ordered documents based on that.



There are two types of depository libraries. You can locate a library at [“Federal Depository Libraries.”](#)

- ♦ Regional depository libraries
 - ◇ Usually one per state
 - ◇ Receive the majority of distributed documents
- ♦ Selective depository libraries
 - ◇ Numerous throughout the state
 - ◇ Receive selected documents

| FDLP PROFILE SEARCH | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------|------------|----------|
| SEARCH RESULTS: 6 profiles for State=Delaware | | | | | | |
| | Depository Library Number | Depository Type | Parent Institution of Library | Library Name | City | State |
| VIEW | 0086B | Selective depository library | Delaware Division of Libraries | State Library | Dover | Delaware |
| VIEW | 0087 | Selective depository library | University of Delaware | Hugh M. Morris Library | Newark | Delaware |
| VIEW | 0088 | Selective depository library | Delaware State University | William C. Jason Library | Dover | Delaware |
| VIEW | 0088A | Selective depository library | Widener University, Delaware Law School | Legal Information Center | Wilmington | Delaware |
| VIEW | 0089A | Selective depository library | Delaware Technical & Community College | Stephen J. Betze Library | Georgetown | Delaware |

A service of the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office.

Notes:

- ♦ Some states may share a Regional depository library with another state.
- ♦ The FDLP program has a specific disposal policy. Because of space limitation, libraries may store materials in offsite locations.

HOW ARE GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS CATALOGED?

Depending on the repository, they may use one of the following systems:

- ♦ Dewey Decimal [developed in 1876]
- ♦ Library of Congress (LOC) [developed in 1897]
- ♦ Superintendent of Documents Numbers (SuDoc)

The Superintendent of Documents of the GPO developed the system of SuDoc Numbers in the late 1800s. Unlike Dewey Decimal or LOC catalog system, SuDoc Numbers are based on the current organizational status of the government departments or agencies.

Here is an example: *The GLMRIS report : Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study* with the SuDoc number of D103.2:G 79/6.

| Department | Sub agency | Series | Doc title | Year |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------|------|
| Defense | Army Corps of Engineers | General Publications | | |
| D | 103 | .2 | :G 79/6 | none |

There are a number of webpages that contain information on reading SuDoc numbers. There is a short list.

- FDLP List of Classes <https://www.fdlp.gov/requirements-guidance/instructions/281-list-of-classes>
- University of Washington State <https://libguides.libraries.wsu.edu/callnumbers/sudoc>
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign [U.S. SuDoc & Agency List](#)
- Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QR4Kaykh0>

FINDING AIDS:

There are a number of guides or catalogues to help you to locate government documents. As you become familiar with the various indexes, use a combination of terms or different word order to enhance your results.

The GPO began publishing the *Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* in 1895. They organized it by agency, author, and title. However, some items never made it into the catalog. Then in 1941, the GPO started issuing a cumulative index (see reference # 8) which cover periods of five or ten years each. Now the GPO has "[Catalog of U.S. Government Publications](#)" online, covering back to 1976.

For congressional information starting with the 15th Congress, 1st Session in 1817, there is the [Serial Set](#). This set includes Committee Hearings and Prints, House and Senate Reports and Documents, Senate Executive Documents and Reports, Private and Public Laws, and special publications. There is an index. The *Congressional Information Services* (CIS) *U.S. Serial Set Index* is a multi-volume index set consisting of 8 parts which covering the years 1833 to 1999. Each part has three volumes. The first two volumes are an alphabetical subject index. The third volume has finding lists.

Prior to the *Serial Set*, the *American State Papers*' collection recorded the documents from the 1st to the 14th Congresses. There was some cross over between the two sets.

Besides the Library of Congress' "[Century of Law Making For A New Nation](#)" which covers the American State Papers, there are some other subscription sites like [Genealogy Bank](#) and *Heritage Quest Online* or *ProQuest Congressional* that has various Congressional documents.

TIPS: Besides the various catalogs, here are some tips.

- ♦ Become familiar with the class list. (web link provided above)
- ♦ If possible, when visiting a FDL browse the shelves. This helps you become acquainted with the different types of materials.
- ♦ Remember gov docs are usually not categorized by our family surnames
- ♦ Use localities (States, counties, or cities)
- ♦ Use subjects (below are some suggestions)
 - ✧ Claims (Land, Bounty land, Pension, or Property loss)
 - ✧ Government Departments (War Dept., Dept. of Defense, or IRS)
 - ✧ Immigration (Emigration or Naturalization)
 - ✧ Indians (Tribes, Missions, or Indian Agents)
 - ✧ Transportation (Canals, Railroads, Rivers, or Waterway)



REFERENCES AND RESOURCES: Brackets { } indicate the publication's SuDoc number.

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