

Before You Visit the Randolph Room

Start with a Plan!

Some of the best advice we can give people before they come to the Randolph Room (or any other research destination) is to have a plan. Answer the question: What is it that I want to know?

Some informative advice from The National Genealogical Society Quarterly (Vol. 107, No. 1; March 2019):

Successful people know where they want to go before setting out. ... Most travelers do not embark on a trip without a plan. Without direction, travelers become aimless wanderers. Experienced travelers plot a course to ensure efficiently reaching their destinations. Successful genealogical research similarly requires a directed plan.

A research plan begins with a focused question based on known information. Like a traveler using a map, experienced genealogists identify records that can provide relevant evidence to answer a question.

Genealogists' questions seek information about persons and examine relationships, identities, or events. A question seeking an individual's parents pivots on relationships. Multiple persons sharing the same name challenges identity. Proving an ancestor did, or did not, participate in an activity converges on an event. All three seek answers about the subject at a certain place and time.

The research question suggests what records to include in the plan. Relationship questions use censuses, probate, deeds, and other records that define family connections. Records that define uniqueness – religious affiliation, occupational records, or directories – help answer identity questions. Answers to activity questions lie in records of specific events, such as a military conflict.

With this advice in mind, we have some more specific information that can help you make a plan before you visit the Randolph Room.

Getting started with your Family History

1. **Organize your information** - write down everything you know about your family history; the [5-Generation Pedigree Chart](#) can help you organize your information.
2. **Census information** - Ancestry.com and/or HeritageQuest.com can help you fill in blanks in your 5-Generation Pedigree Chart (Ancestry.com is temporarily available away from the library; HeritageQuest.com is always available remotely). The 1940 U.S. Federal Census is the most recent one available, so start your search with someone you know was alive and living in the U.S. in 1940. From there, you can start to follow your family back in time. Keep track of everything you find. Make a list of all the different surname spellings. Write down the names of people that lived near your family since they may be family or friends.
3. **Cemeteries** - www.findagrave.com has searchable cemetery listings but does not include every cemetery or grave. If you know where your ancestors are buried in Randolph County, our cemetery books might be helpful so plan to look there when you come. Make a note of who is buried around them; they may be friends or family.
4. **Obituaries** - if your ancestors died in Randolph County and you know when they died (or even about when they died) look for an obituary in our Index. The Index will let you know the date of the newspaper when an obituary was published; then you can use the microfilm to read the obituary (which often lists family members).
5. **Marriage records** - there are marriage books here in the Randolph Room and there are also digital images on Ancestry.com. This is a good place to find a woman's maiden name. For any that are more recent you will need to go to the Register of Deeds.
6. **Death records** - NC death certificates were not issued until 1909; certificates from 1909-1975 are available on Ancestry.com. Ones more recent than 1975 can be ordered from vital records or the Register of Deeds. Our collection includes Will Books (on microfilm and some transcriptions) and some Estate Indexes as well. Check out our microfilm listing to see if we have what you are looking for or check Ancestry.com.

7. **Surname files** - if your family was from this area, look to see if there is a surname file for them. There may be copies of records or just hints about your family history. There is a complete list of names available on our website.
8. **Soldier rosters** - if your family member was in a war check the books in the last aisle or ancestry.com.
9. **Family histories** - published family histories in the Randolph Room are all included in the library's catalog – take a look there to see if someone has published a book about your family's genealogy and history.
10. **Land records** - can be useful in finding out where your family lived. The Register of Deeds website (www.randrod.com) has a listing of these records. You can look in court documents to see if they were recorded there. We also have some books they may be included in.
11. **City directories** – these books have information on where people lived and usually their occupations and everyone in the household; we have many from the 1930s through the current year.
12. **Society information** - the Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, the Mayflower Families and the DAR patriot indexes are in our collection as well.
13. **Local histories** – our collection also includes church histories, a local cookbook collection and community histories, any of which might have insight into someone in your family.

Once you have a bit of information, use the [Family Group Record](#) sheet to record entire families. Sometimes when you get stuck you need to follow a sibling to find what you are looking for.