



Historical Society  
of Pennsylvania

## How to Find the Materials You Need in HSP's Collections

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Founded in 1824, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is one of the oldest historical societies in the United States. Our collection includes some 600,000 printed items and more than 21 million manuscript and graphic items, including the holdings of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies (which merged into HSP in 2002) and the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania (through a 2006 Strategic Alliance Agreement). HSP provides a variety of tools to help researchers find the materials they need within this large collection. Some tools are available online, but others are available only in the library.

### **Discover - Online Catalog**

For most users, Discover ([discover.hsp.org](http://discover.hsp.org)) is the best place to begin a search. This online catalog includes information about HSP's print materials, manuscript collections, maps, microfilm, and more. Please note that each record in the online catalog includes a "holdings" tab and a "description" tab; you may find helpful information on each tab. While the majority of HSP's holdings are captured in this catalog, it includes only collection-level descriptions for manuscript items.

### **Digital Library**

HSP's Digital Library ([digitallibrary.hsp.org](http://digitallibrary.hsp.org)) is a growing online repository of images and digital files from our collections. To date, the Digital Library includes more than 75,000 images of manuscripts, maps, photographs, and prints, as well as video and audio records. Several of HSP's most notable collections, including the David J. Kennedy watercolors, are digitized in their entirety. All images are available for purchase as both archival prints and digital downloads, and new content is added every week.

### **Finding Aids**


Some manuscript collections have finding aids that provide background information, description about how the collection is organized, and inventories of what is contained within the collection. Some finding aids are available online, either as PDFs or as searchable web text. Other finding aids are available only at HSP's Reference Desk for now. If you have questions, ask a Reference Librarian.

### **Subject Guides**

The Society's collections center on eastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and parts of Delaware and Maryland, but also include a wealth of materials on the eastern United States, the founding of this country, and the diversity of ethnic and immigrant experiences across the United States. HSP has created an assortment of subject guides (available at [hsp.org/subject-guides](http://hsp.org/subject-guides)) that highlight areas of particular strength in our collections.

### **Balch Manuscript Guide**

This online guide (available at [hsp.org/Balch-guide](http://hsp.org/Balch-guide)) contains short descriptions of the collections (manuscripts, photographs, serials) of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, which merged with HSP in 2002. The Discover online catalog also includes collection-level descriptions for Balch materials, but this guide is organized by ethnic group. Note that this guide is no longer actively maintained.

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## **Overview of HSP Research Tools, cont.**

### **Card Catalogs**

HSP maintains a series of card files in the Reference Room. Information in these files may not be captured by online-only catalog searches. Card files in the Reference Room are broken down into the following sections. The manuscripts catalog (PC1) provides item-level access to several large manuscript collections.

**PC 1 - Manuscript catalog** - This catalog indexes at the item level nearly 1 million manuscript resources that were processed between the late 19th century and the 1970s, including letters, diaries, accounts, and minutes. Beginning in the 1970s, HSP switched to collection-level processing, and collection-level cards were added to PC1 into the 2000s. PC1 is primarily a name index and is no longer actively maintained, but it remains an extraordinary resource for deep access to manuscript collections.

**PC 2 - LCP in HSP catalog** - This catalog is a name index to the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP) manuscript collections. HSP administers these collections according to a cooperative agreement with LCP.

**PC 3 - Broadsides** - This catalog indexes the HSP's graphics holdings of broadsides and World War I and World War II Posters (available through title only).

**PC 4 - Graphics catalog** - This is a series of smaller catalogs of graphic items, including:

4a - catalog of images, portraits, and trade cards in the formats of prints, drawings, watercolors, and photographs

4b - catalog of coats of arms

4c - catalog of insurance surveys held in the Mutual Assurance Company and the Philadelphia Contributionship

4d - catalog of HSP's holdings of maps, atlases and all other cartographic material

**PC 5 - Music catalog** - This catalog indexes HSP's holdings of sheet music.

**PC 6 - Afro-Americana in HSP and LCP** - This catalog is a name index to manuscript collections of the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP) and the Historical Society containing Afro-Americana for the period of 1553-1906.

**PC 7 - Family History/Genealogy Catalog** - This catalog contains a variety of unpublished family history and genealogical records including bible, church, cemetery, probate, tax, land, immigration, and vital records.

### **Members-Only Databases**

HSP has partnered with Ancestry.com, the world's largest online family history resource, to digitize over seven million records from our collection. These records detail more than 300 years of Pennsylvanians' life history spanning from 1708-1985, including Pennsylvania Church and Town Records (1708-1985), the Oliver H. Bair Funeral Home Records (1920-1980), and the Revolutionary War Battalions and Militia Index (1775-1783). Members of HSP can access these databases for free through HSP's web site.

### **Ask a Reference Librarian**

We may have other tools and suggestions to help you find the information you seek. You can contact our Ready Reference staff at [readyreference@hsp.org](mailto:readyreference@hsp.org), call our Reference Line at (215) 732-6200 ext. 209, or just drop by the Reference Desk.

### **Overwhelmed?**

Let HSP do the work for you. Our Research by Mail service has skilled researchers just waiting to tackle your requests: from untangling family history quandaries or documenting your historic property to tracking down that elusive document for your academic research. Call our Research-by-Mail Line at (215) 732-6200 ext. 222, email us at [researchbymail@hsp.org](mailto:researchbymail@hsp.org) or visit [hsp.org/research-by-mail](http://hsp.org/research-by-mail) to get the process rolling.