

In Situ Genealogy

(Some reasons why we *need to go there*)

By Howard Maynard Faulkner

The famous bank robber *Willy Sutton* was asked by a reporter why he robbed banks. Sutton replied, *because that's where the money is*. Likewise genealogists go to Court Houses, State and Federal Archives, Historical Societies, Libraries, Cemeteries and elsewhere....*because that is where the mother load is!*

Dick Eastman, of *EOGN fame* (blog.eogn.com/), recently suggested he believes less than 2% of all recorded information genealogists would like to have exists today **ONLINE**. In other words if you want more than simple vital records, census records, and the occasional obituary, you will end up in situ, *the natural or original place*, where these documents are kept.

Of course many records have been lost to natural disaster or poor management practices. For example; basements, attics, sun light, high and low temperature, inappropriate humidity, and places where rodents and bugs roam freely, are poor storage environments. *Be sure to ask before you go!!*

The experienced genealogist will seek out the appropriate court house, library, and archive and plan a visit. These locations may be drivable in a day or less but occasionally may require an overnight stay. A quick bus trip to Boston and transfer via MTA will take you to the Massachusetts Archives in Boston. And there are those who make the ultimate pilgrimage to that great genealogical Mecca; *LDS Church Library in Salt Lake City*.

Before one gets into the car and heads out seeking family history riches, it is best to be well informed and prepared. Informed as to *exactly what records* are kept at the chosen site is most important. Equally important however is *being prepared* for onsite research. Take what is important, leave the rest at home.

Contact the repository you wish to visit well in advance to determine what holdings they have that you will require and if you may have access to them directly or indirectly. Most frequently certain original records are brought to you in a special room for your examination. However indexes, copies, and abstracts may be directly available. Determine the exact location of the facility, parking information, hours of operation, holidays observed etc. Some of this may be available online; if not a phone call will clear that up. Don't assume it will be open. It may be closed for a local holiday, painting, or a conference. If you wish to speak with a specific person ascertain in advance if he/she will be there that day.

Be certain to bring to the site what information you currently have to support your quest.

This will include **copies** (*never take originals*) of appropriate *Family Group Sheets, Pedigree Charts, and other pertinent documents* needed for this research.

Examples of specific records you might be seeking may include:

1. A **will** for your great grandfather who died in 1899 in Lynn, Essex, MA
2. An **obituary** for your grandmother's sister who lived and died in Minneapolis, Hennepin, MN in the month of January 1929.
3. An **application for naturalization** OR **naturalization record** itself for your great grandfather who arrived in this country in 1890.

To prepare for in situ research bring; a digital camera (flash OFF please), lots of sharp pencils, (NO pens), note paper (but not notebooks), erasers, and NO paperclips. A laptop computer is frequently helpful. Don't forget coins and bills for the copy machines...and food/drink/snack vending machines in the break room. Most importantly, BRING A VALID GOVERNMENT ISSUED PHOTO ID such as a Drivers License or Passport. These are almost always required today be it the local library, Library of Congress or NARA.