

# Online Historic Research Links and Tips

**Successful online historic research very much depends on accessing and understanding how to use the best internet tools. The MWHS is dedicated to empowering community members to become citizen historians. The links and instructions below will provide access to the best web-based sources and how to use them.**

**I. UW Madison Libraries** are among the best sources to access a wealth of documents, including archives at the Wisconsin Historical Society <https://search.library.wisc.edu/>. Select “Keyword” for your search function and start exploring. Many databases, articles, journals and other categories are also available to search. Don’t be afraid of registering to access these archives; often you can request to review these materials at the UW Stevens Point or the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland.

Please note, the Wisconsin University System hosts numerous online research sites, many of which will be individually listed and explained below.

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/>

**II. Wisconsin Historic Aerial Imagery Finder** is a fantastic resources that uses a modern satellite image of the state with an overlay of a grid of white dots: <https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/WHAIFinder/#7/44.750/-89.750>. Each white dot is an early high resolution image of an aerial photo from the 1930’s. Merely click the dot above the portion of Wisconsin you wish to review, and a pop-up file will appear of the area selected. We recommend clicking the “Large” file for downloading to achieve the best resolution. If you find the image to be unsatisfactory, try another white dot on the site map that covers the same area. Not all files in this database are of equal quality.

<https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/WHAIFinder/#7/44.750/-89.750>

**III. Wisconsin Historical Society** has a wealth of varied collections. Using the link, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15310> users can select the drag-down menus under “Browse.” The best research link for area history is “collections” or go directly to <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15323>. Type in a key word into the search bar and explore. The “Maps and Atlas” link <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15301> is another favorite to capture cartography resources. Finally, the “Visual Materials” link is another great source for photos <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15285>.

The UW Digital Collection is another link that delivers access to rare files, images and documents, both for the WHS and from other sites <https://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/>.

**IV. Milwaukee Public Library** has a great site with many historical documents, found at: <http://www.mpl.org/>. On the main page select “Research” to reveal a host of great links. “Maps and Atlases” [http://www.mpl.org/local\\_history/maps\\_atlases.php](http://www.mpl.org/local_history/maps_atlases.php), “MPL Digital Collections” [http://www.mpl.org/special\\_collections/images/](http://www.mpl.org/special_collections/images/), and Historic Photo Archives [http://www.mpl.org/special\\_collections/historic\\_photo\\_archives/](http://www.mpl.org/special_collections/historic_photo_archives/), The McMillian Memorial Library Digital Collections, hosted by Milwaukee Public Library includes many pioneer, logging and train sources: <http://content.mpl.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/mcml>.

<http://www.mpl.org/>

**V. The National USGenWeb Project** is an amazing network of state-based geological and historic resources linked via state based webpages: <http://wigenweb.org/>. This robust site has numerous links that connect to a wide array of digital resources. Using the menu bar and links embedded in the text of the webpage users can explore digital documents for hours.

<http://wigenweb.org/>

**VI. Google Books** is arguably the best and fastest source for discovering historic print documents: <https://books.google.com>. Google has been scanning materials in libraries from all over the world for years, and posting their copies in Google Books, claiming, “Search the world's most comprehensive index of full-text books.” By combining their huge digital collection and search engines, Google has created one of the best research tools on the web. When doing searches in Google Books be sure to use a mix of different “Keywords” in your searches and try many combinations of terms. For instance, if you searched “Manitowish Waters Rest Lake Dam”, a follow-up search of, “Rest Lake Manitowish Waters Dam” might deliver different results. Also, be sure to look deep into your searches (15 to 20 pages), because some of the best sources are accessed later in the search process. Many of the documents you discover can be downloaded into PDF format and easily saved. What previously took days to research in libraries and depositories before the late 1990’s, now can be accomplished in a few hours from your home or office.

**VII. Board of Commission of Public Lands- Wisconsin Public Land Survey Records: Original Field Books and Plat Maps**, is another specialized source from the University of Wisconsin, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SurveyNotes/>. The maps and field notes are from 1833-1866 can be easily accessed by selecting “Search” from the menu bar. The next page reveals the map of Wisconsin which serves as a menu. Click on the county you wish to explore and select a township. The next page shows the field notes for each section of land and a high resolution maps of the township. The notes and maps identify the trees along section lines, trails, sugar camps, Ojibwa villages, some early logging and development. Later survey notes and maps are also included, providing better chronological context of the earliest development of our area. Surveyor protocols can be confusing so selecting “Land Survey Information” and “Site Use Information” on the home page may be helpful.

<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SurveyNotes/>

**VIII. Rip Track** is a great link for railroad information, <http://riptrack.net/wisconsin>. The links to timelines and list of railroads provides important historic context and chronological clarity. Rip Track also has a great bibliography of sources.

<http://riptrack.net/wisconsin>

**IX. The Bureau of Land Management** is a federal agency that has unique early land records, <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>. Select “Wisconsin” under the state, add the appropriate county under “County,” and enter the name of the person you wish to search. Be sure to look at “surveys” links to search maps. Also you can download the BLM patents in a PDF by selecting, “Patent Image.”

A more comprehensive search can be conducted by selecting, “Search Documents By Location.” Just click on the map menu and right click on the township to see all of the BLM owners. This function will allow the user to see all BLM Patents for the township. Amazing results for early land ownership is revealed, qualifying land claims by Homesteads, Military Warrant, Agriculture Script, Mineral Certificates, Cash, Credits, Railroad, Indian Patents and others. The map function illustrates the land claimed by the owner by clicking the box next to each claim on the patent. This allows the user to easily link their property inquiries to a specific part of the township. Original survey maps are also linked to help identify section numbers for townships.

<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>.

**X. Chequamegon History** is an excellent webpage with many original documents, images, maps and narration regarding a wide array of historical topics, mostly around the south shore of Lake Superior <https://chequamegonhistory.wordpress.com/category/wheeler-papers/>. The menu is located in a black rectangle with terms linked to many topics. The documentation regarding Native communities and their interactions with early pioneers, government officials, business interests and religious leaders are most insightful.

<https://chequamegonhistory.wordpress.com/category/wheeler-papers/>.

**XI. Internet Archive or WAYBACK MACHINE**, may sound like a scene from Mister Peabody cartoons, but savvy researchers know this tool well. Simply, the WAYBACK MACHINE allows researcher to recover part or all of internet sites that have been pulled off the web. All you need is the old URL for the web site, enter the URL in the search box and see the different dates the WAYBACK MACHINE backed-up the site you seek. From the 1990's until today different archived downloads are displayed on a timeline. By clicking on the timeline menu you can download sites that were previously lost. This site has saved-the-day more than once for historical societies, saving countless hours of duplicate work!