

Some of our Favorite Websites for Historic Research

Recently, we posted about a personal connection that Archaeologist Alycia Giedd made with northwest Indiana history. She discovered we were working near a small town where her ancestors used to live (Furnessville, Indiana). Alycia also learned that a handful of her ancestors, including her 4x great grandparents, were buried in the cemetery associated with this town. Once she realized connection with the town, she used her knowledge of uncovering the past to delve a little bit deeper in to her



family's history. That social media post generated quite a bit of activity, so we decided to share with you some of the tools we use during our research and how you can use them to research your own family history. Because digging for the past doesn't have to be done outside in the dirt, you can do it right from your fingertips on the computer.

We use several websites for historic research. Each have strengths and weaknesses, but there is no single "best" site. It all depends on your needs and interests. That said, many sites are very good - here's just a few of our favorites.

Historic Maps/Atlases

For us, a good place to start is with historic maps.

- www.historicmapworks.com
- www.davidrumsev.com

Tip – most of these maps are organized by county and township, so you may have to do a little bit of work upfront before you find the map you are looking for. From there, you can see if the map shows any landowners or any structures on that piece of land you are research. If the plot has a name associated with it, that's when the real research and fun begins. When Alycia was doing her research about Furnessville and her family, she was able to find the land her family once owned. She compared that with an updated map of the area and discovered that the interstate now runs through section of land, and the house is no longer standing.





Ancestry.com

If you have an ancestry.com account (which I highly recommend) login and type the name, county and date into the search engine. At this point you should be able to explore information on that person and their descendants from census records and any other information that has been uploaded to the site. When researching information on her ancestors at Furnessville, Alycia was able to learn about where they came from, how many children they, had local newspaper stories clippings about them, as well as death and burial information.

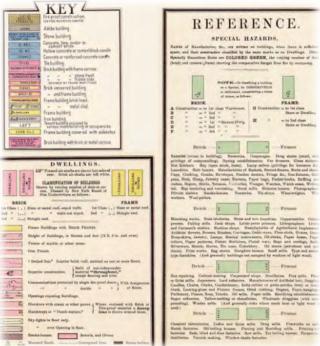


Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Other maps that provide essential information on urban buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries are the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. These maps can be found on the Library of Congress website.

https://www.loc.gov/maps/

These maps show specific buildings, locations of windows and doors, property boundaries, natural features, railroads, types of businesses, structure materials, and street names. The maps were used by insurance companies to determine the potential risks for





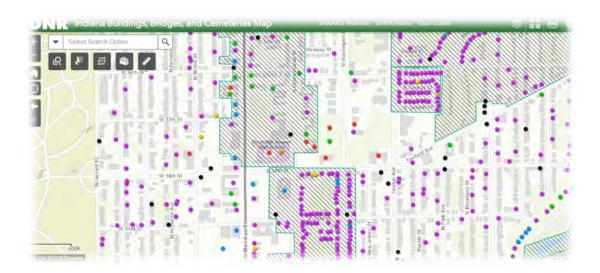


these urban areas. Because of the amount of detail used on the Sanborn maps, they are very useful when doing historic research. However, they are only useful in urban settings. They will not help you out if the area you are looking at is in a rural area.

State Databases

Another database that we use is the Indiana Historic Buildings, Bridges, and Cemeteries Map. This database is available to the public to search for information on historic structures and cemeteries throughout the state. Most states have databases like this so check out your local State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) webpage and see what they have to offer.

https://indnr.maps.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=1593429c17c34942a0d1d3fac03c4a80



And when all else fails, stop by your local library or historical society and ask them for any information they may have on the area you are researching. Chances are, they know a lot about it, know how to find out the information, or know how to put you in contact with someone who does.