

Partners in Research

DELAWARE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
RESOURCES FOR GENEALOGISTS

Leigh Rifenburg, Chief Curator

Lenape Land Acknowledgment

With thanks to Chief Dennis Coker



We begin by acknowledging with respect, we gather today in Lenapehoking, traditional homeland of the Lenape people for tens of thousands of years. Sometimes translated “*Original People*,” the Lenape were known as mediators and called “The Grandfathers” by the entire Algonqian Family Tree of languages. Encompassing the Delaware River Basin, Lenapehoking includes present-day New Jersey, most of Delaware, the Eastern parts of New York and Pennsylvania, and was home to 20,000 Lenape in three clans: the Wolf Clan in the mountains speaking Munsee dialect, the Turtle Clan along the Rivers speaking Unami, and the Turkey Clan by the big waters speaking Unilatchigo.

Within the first hundred years of foreign contact, 80% of the Lenape had already died from violent conflict and disease. In spite of the famous peace treaty between William Penn and the Lenape Chief Tamanend at Shackamaxon, Europeans forced the Lenape westward and northward to Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Ontario, where many of the descendants live today, named after a British General, Thomas West, Lord De La Warr, now pronounced Delaware.

But some Lenape never left. Hiding in plain sight as “Keepers of the Land” the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware based in Cheswold, Delaware, the Nanticoke - Lenni Lenape Tribal Nation in Bridgeton, NJ, and the Ramapough Lenape Nation in Mawaw, NJ, are three of the thriving Lenape communities today.

Let us acknowledge the historical and ongoing presence of the Lenape and the Nanticoke on this land where we now live, work, and celebrate “*All Our Relations*.”



The Plan:

1. Orientation (or re-orientation!) to the Delaware Historical Society (DHS)
2. DHS resources: what we have, what we don't, and how to make the most of it
3. Deep, dark confessions and other tales from the reference desk
4. Digital initiatives, improving collections access for researchers
5. Pro tips, tricks, and a few observations



About DHS



Collecting since 1864

- The only private nonprofit organization with the mission to serve as the statewide organization exploring, preserving, promoting, and sharing Delaware history, heritage, and culture to educate, inspire, and empower people and communities

Includes 9 historic buildings

- Research Library & Archives/Library Annex
- Delaware History Museum & Mitchell Center for African American Heritage
- Old Town Hall
- 4 Historic houses of Willingtown Square, including the new Delaware Center for Jewish History at the Coxe House
- Read House & Gardens in historic New Castle

Over 3 million collections representing “Everyperson Delaware”



"Done! Everyone in the family tree has been found & everything is perfectly organized including the photos," said no genealogist... EVER.

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Hard truth: Genealogy is never “done.” That’s why we’re here!



The Research Library & Archives



- Housed in a 1930s art deco bank building-was previously a branch of the Artisan Savings Bank
- Acquired by DHS and retrofitted as a research library and archival storage facility in the early 1970s
- Lower level of the building houses two collections storage areas and the original bank vault, complete with original vault door. The vault now stores some of DHS' rarest archival collections
- 3 full time Library staff (we wear a lot of hats!)
- Open to the public 4 days per week and the 3rd Saturday of each month by appointment



What we have

WILMINGTON SASH & DOOR CO.
LUMBER ALL IN THE DAY.
WILMINGTON, DEL.
Jan. 25, 1914.
203 W. 15th St.

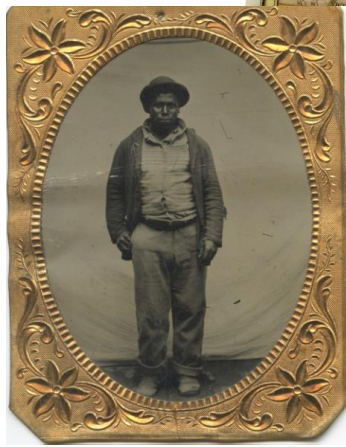
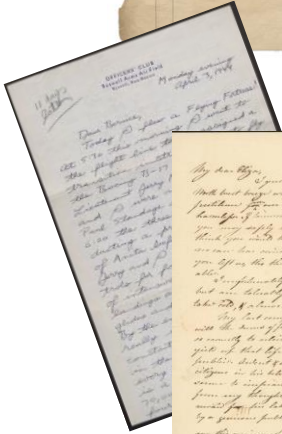
100	150	200	250	300	350	400	450	500	550	600
100	150	200	250	300	350	400	450	500	550	600

Ordered through W. A. Scholmaster by John Pierce
See payment in full
John W. Pierce

The Subscriber has for Sale,
Seine-Twine, Nova Scotia Grind-
Stones, Molasses by the Hhd. Madeira
Wine by the Pipe, half Pipe and quar-
ter Cask; a few cafes of Holland
Gin, & a quantity of Liverpool fat.
JACOB BROOM.
Wilmington, May 11th 1796.
TEN POUNDS Reward.
RAN AWAY from the sub-
scriber, living in Broad-creek,
Sussex county and State of
Delaware, on the 6th Sept. last, a
NEGROE MAN, named **CESAR**,
nearly 6 feet high, stout and well
made; he has a scar on one of his
cheeks, which is much whiter than
the rest of his skin; and a scar on his forehead
a pit of the small pox; he has a large beard, a stern
and furlly look, and is very short in his answer to ques-
tions asked him. Had on when he went away, a light
brown fustous coat, claret colored coat, blue and white
striped linsy waistcoat, red and white chequered trowsers,
and an old hat turned almost yellow. Whoever
takes up the said Negroe, and secures him, so that his
master may have him again, shall receive Five Pounds,
but if lodged in Dover Goal, or brought home, then
the above reward.
FRANCIS L. GODDARD
May 16, 1796.



- Unique manuscript materials, including letters, diaries, family papers, business and organizational records
- Over half a million images, including rare and early photographs, negatives, postcards, prints, and drawings
- Delaware newspapers dating back to the 1790s
- Hundreds of map, atlases, and deeds from the 17th century to the present
- Rare books, pamphlets, and serials, published family histories written by or about Delawareans and Delaware history
- A growing collection of African Americana





And what we don't...



- **Vital records government/legislative records**
We have a few issued before these records were required in 1913, but most are held at the Office of Vital Statistics (one in each county).
- **Government/legislative records**
Most are at the Delaware Public Archives in Dover
- **Delaware newspapers from about 1950-present**
Try the University of Delaware, Wilmington Public Library, or the Delaware Public Archives. Online newspaper databases like Newspapers.com and Chronicling America are also excellent sources.
- **Military service records**
We've found some records scattered in our collections, but the vast majority of federal service records are held by the National Archives.*

*HOWEVER.....



Notable exception: The Delaware WWI Service Records Collection



- Wilmington Institute Free Library launched a massive grass roots campaign to collect the service information from the roughly 9,000 Delaware men who served overseas
- About 1200 servicemen participated, completed a form
- Last section of the form allowed service members to record whatever they wanted about their experiences during the war. Many responses are incredibly poignant
- For many Delaware families, forms are the only surviving link to an ancestor because the federal service records most WWI army veterans were destroyed in a fire at NARA in the 1970s

Deep, dark confession #1

I am NOT a genealogist.

But I AM your research partner.





Your library visit: A few ways to get started



- Genealogical surname file
 - An encyclopedia of last names
- Family history folder collection
 - Miscellaneous genealogical records donated piecemeal for various family lines-each family surname receives a folder (beware of spelling variations)
- Published family history volumes
- Church and cemetery records
- Deeds/Tax records/Land records/Passenger lists



Climb down from the family tree and dig deeper



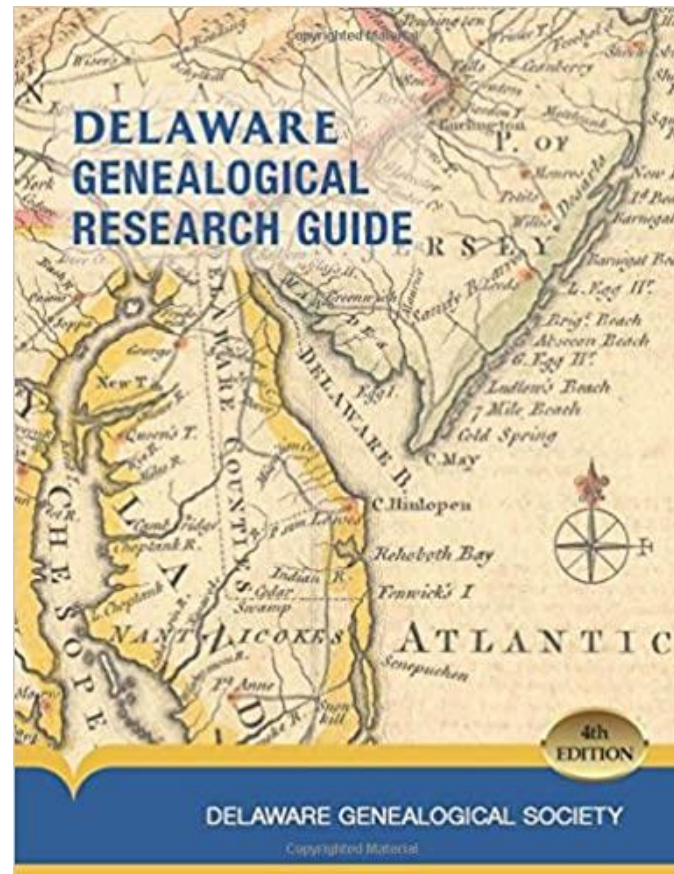
- Wilmington City Directories
- Organizational records, meeting minutes
- Alumni collections
- Yearbooks
- Diaries and scrapbooks
- Chandler Funeral Home records
- Ledgers and account books



A word about borders



An unsolicited recommendation from your friendly DHS librarian



Deep, dark confession #2

For a long time, I could not figure out the “why” of genealogy.

Why would anyone want to do this to themselves?

Then I met Evelyn.

Those little leaves on your Ancestry.com tree are cruel minions sent to make sure you stay up four hours longer working on genealogy.

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How can one ancestor be so much trouble?

I'm going to name you after your father and grandfather so genealogists have a heck of a time trying to research you in the next century.

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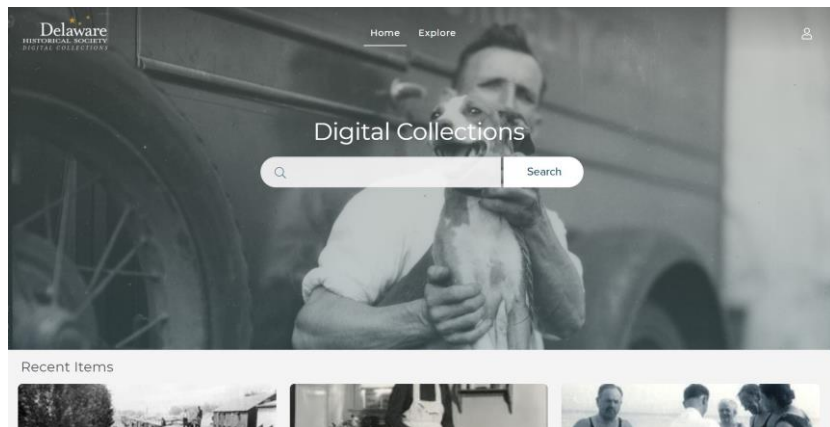
Meet your great-grandma

- Evelyn was the great-grandmother of a researcher who knew only scant details of her life and had never seen her picture.
- Upon learning that she trained as a nurse in Delaware, we searched the records in the Delaware Hospital School Collection and found this image from Evelyn's graduation.



It often pays for researchers
To think outside the box and look
beyond traditional genealogical
sources when tracing their family
histories. You never know where
you'll meet your great-grandma!

Digital initiatives and increased access



- New direct email for research inquiries
 - research@dehistory.org
- Brand new website-launched June 2021
 - Make research appointments, browse our catalogs
- Upgraded library and archival catalogs to improve ease of searching
 - Save items of interest as favorites and email to a librarian to pull for your visit
- Digital Asset Management System (DAMS)
 - One stop shopping for digital images and collections
 - Just launched! <https://digital.dehistory.org/>



Pro tips and tricks

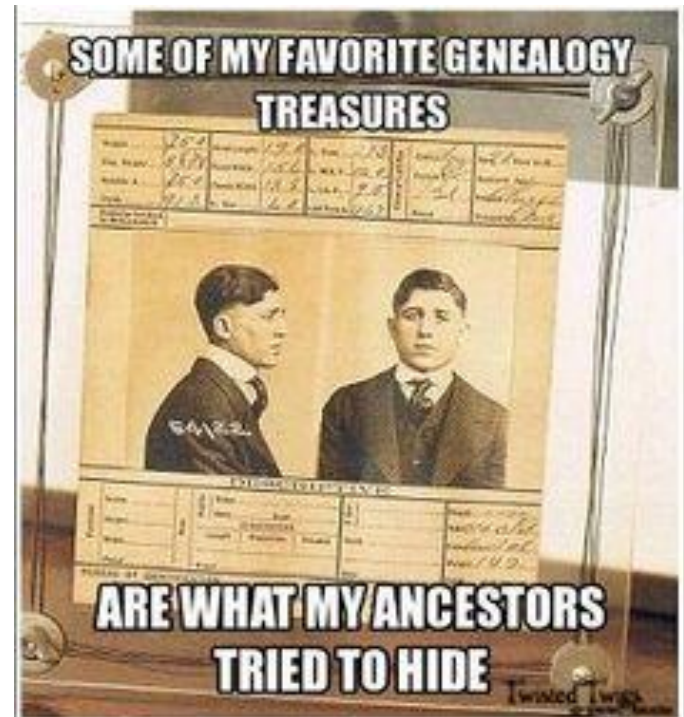
1. Don't assume that library staff know or recognize every family surname in Delaware (there are a lot of them!)
2. Think outside the box (or climb down from the family tree)-don't limit yourself to only the traditional resources (try city directories, other manuscript collections, yearbooks, alumni or organizational records, meeting minutes, ledgers, etc.)
3. Get comfortable with imperfect information and double-check sources where possible
4. Don't assume that your time at DHS will be a one and done. Family history research is never a straightforward path and you may find things in other repositories that lead you back to DHS, even if you thought you'd exhausted our resources
5. If you don't find it in our online catalog, it's time to visit in person. Get to know us-make an appointment!
6. There are no stupid questions. Don't hesitate to ask us anything-chances are, we've heard it before
7. Talk to each other-your fellow genies are often incredibly generous with their knowledge and experience



Food for thought

Whatever your motivation for researching your family history and whatever you find during that journey, we're here to help and we never judge.

It's all about connection...to the past and to something larger than ourselves. Understanding where we come from helps us to contextualize our own place in the world.





Thank You!

Please be in touch!

For research questions or to learn more about our resources,
contact:

research@dehistory.org

To discuss volunteer opportunities, contact Leigh Rifenburg:

lrifenburg@dehistory.org

Search our collections:

<https://dehistory.org/collections/search-collections/>