Genealogy Gems: News from the Allen County Public Library at Fort Wayne
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In this issue:
*Fall In!
*“Help Me Find My People” – A Review
*Submitting Research Requests to Repositories
*PERSI Gems: Halloween Ghosts
*Preservation Tips: Archival Plastics
*History Tidbits: ”The war began in my front yard and ended in my front parlor:” Wilmer McLean’s Civil War
*Genealogy Center’s November 2026 Programs
*Genealogy Center Bits-o’-News
*Staying Informed about Genealogy Center Programming
*Genealogy Center Social Media
*Driving Directions to the Library
*Parking at the Library
*Genealogy Center Queries
*Publishing Note

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Fall In!
by Curt B. Witcher
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In our 250th anniversary year as a nation, there can be no better time than November of this year to pay particular attention to the veterans in our families, living and deceased. Often stated in family history circles is the phrase, “every generation the possibility.” Indeed, as we plot our families’ histories on a national timeline, nearly every generation there exists the possibility that one or more of our ancestors defended our freedoms or provided aid and support to those who did. Let’s make this Veterans Day one on which we truly “fall in” with our focus on our military family members.

There are two great Genealogy Center programs this month specifically on military records and research. The first is on Veterans Day itself, Wednesday, November 11, 2026, at 7 p.m. ET. Together with the Allen County Genealogical Society of Indiana, we are presenting “McNamara's War: From Escalation to Honoring Vietnam's Veterans” with Michael Strauss. This presentation can be viewed in the Genealogy Discovery Center of the Main Library and virtually online. Strauss is an accomplished historian and professional genealogist. He has presented at many state and national seminars and conferences. He is especially recognized for his expertise in military history.

Then less than one week later on November 17, 2026, at 2:30 p.m. ET, Logan Knight will present “Digging into Military Records: Genealogy Research with Fold3.” Fold3 is quite the robust licensed database, part of the Ancestry.com suite of databases. Most of us only touch the surface of what can be accessed on this site. Logan is expert at articulating how the database is set-up and strategies for most effectively using it.

As a rich and plentiful source of data across so many generations, the skillful family history researcher looks for opportunities to discover and explore military records. Assuredly these are the best of times for accessing the various types of military records. A good list of types of military records one should endeavor to find when exploring the possibility of our ancestors' military engagement follows.

***Service records are documents that demonstrate a particular person served. These records include company musters, rolls and rosters, enlistments, discharges, prisoner lists, records of burials, and oaths of allegiance.

***Pension records are documents that verify compensation to soldiers, widows and/or their dependents after a period of military service. Different Acts of Congress/laws govern who qualified for a pension and the specific qualifications for receiving such a pension. Pension records are so valuable as the veteran or his dependent had to prove who he was, that he served, and further, that he qualified under the particular pension act under which he was applying.

***Claim records are requests or claims made to the government for compensation based on military and/or war activities that caused a financial or property loss. Claims can be both for goods and services provided in support of military endeavors and engagements as well as for damages. History and context are quite important in identifying claim records.

***Military histories are numerous and increasingly available online. These histories can be local, regional, state, and national as well as unit, or regimental/ divisional in compilation and organization. They can be as varied as those who served and the writers themselves. More modern histories often contain full indices, rosters, and historical "extras." There are nearly innumerable sources for these histories, and finding all relevant histories may take some perseverance. Military histories can be found online at local public libraries and state libraries as well as major libraries across the country. The Library of Congress has very substantial military history collections in their digital repositories. Other significant free digital silos include "The Making of America" and "Documenting the American South."

***Letters and diaries can be a rich source of information about one's military ancestor, both letters to and from the war front. These documents, while not often providing specific military service information, can provide rich texture and details about the lives of the military veterans and their families. They provide a wonderful and valued insight into the human side of the conflict or engagement. While it may take some intentionality and significant time, it is so beneficial to look for letters and diaries not only from the veteran and his family but also from members of his unit, regiment, and/or division. Some non-family civilians may appear in the pages of these records. Letters and diaries can be found in numerous college and university libraries as well as local and state historical societies. One might also want to search "ArchiveGrid" [https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/] and the "National Union Catalog of

Manuscript Collections" (NUCMC) [https://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/]. Remember that searching should not be limited to a veteran's or a potential ancestor's name. Search for these documents by specific companies, units, regiments, divisions, etc. associated with an ancestor's service.

***Federal government documents can be a rich source of contexting historical data for our military ancestors. Historically, the United States government is among the largest publishers in the world. A consequential percentage of federal government documents contain military or military-related data. This percentage gets higher the older or further back in time the military engagement was. In time periods when Congress was more engaged in the lives of the country's every-day citizens, one can find the legislative branch acting on pension requests and learning about the service of veterans from various states. Federal government documents are available in many libraries throughout the county as well as through interlibrary loans.

***Military & patriotic organizations by their very nature have many records and documents from individuals who have proven their qualifications to become members. Such organizations typically have robust, members-only websites as well as monographic and serial publications. There is much data to be gleaned from these organizational records.

The Genealogy Center's "Periodical Source Index" is an excellent, free online resource for finding all kinds of military records and information regarding every war and military engagement the United States has been involved in from colonial times to Desert Storm. Literally tens of thousands of military articles have been published in periodicals of all types from every corner of this country. www.genealogycenter.info/persi

Another Genealogy Center asset in addition to our robust online catalog is "Our Military Heritage" collection of digital resources. www.genealogycenter.info/military On this site, one finds a collection of free digitized materials covering many wars and engagements. You really don't know what you're going to find until you look, and the layout is pretty straightforward for easy review.

Make Veterans Day 2026 the time we fall in! Fall in by finding, reading, discovering and honoring. Find the documents that evidence our military ancestors' service, read the records we find for clues and leads to more information, discover the many stories our military ancestors have left us in their records, and honor those in our families who have served their country by sharing our findings with interested family members as well as with repositories like the ACPL Genealogy Center who will preserve such information for generations to come.

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"Help Me Find My People" – A Review
by Stormie Franks

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We all want to find our people. That is the core of all genealogy research: to understand

who we are by knowing where we come from. Finding our people can be full of joy and excitement, but it can also involve confronting family secrets and processing generational trauma. In her book, “Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery,” Heather Williams shines a light on unique resources for African American genealogy and offers a thoughtful discussion of the emotional labor of genealogy.

Williams traces enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals, not through census records or slave schedules, but using their own words and the words of their family members and friends. Messages from enslaved people can be found in correspondence between slave owners who would pass on messages from one group to the enslaved on another plantation. These can include key relationship details, ages, and the last known location of enslaved family members. Following the American Civil War, newly freed individuals sought to reconnect with family members across the war-torn country. Newspapers for local freedmen associations, as well as newspapers run by white abolitionists, published advertisements from freed people searching for family and friends from whom they had become separated.

In some cases, people hung on to information for decades, looking for a family member last seen on the auction block 20-30 years prior. These ads were run in newspapers across the United States and into parts of Canada. Pastors of African American congregations read these want ads from the pulpit weekly, hoping to help connect illiterate individuals with their searching families. Sometimes, the right person heard the ad, and the family was reunited. These rare reunions were also documented in the papers that ran the advertisements, encouraging other individuals to search for their families via the same means.

Even though many of these “lost family” ads went unanswered during the lifetime of their creators, they exist now as a powerful testament to the universal human desire to maintain family connections. These ads also provide precious information for researchers today who might be able to reconnect generations of lost family members. Williams’ discussion of these sources also forms a useful framework for both researching and emotionally processing generational trauma, separation and loss. Williams’ book is a great resource for anyone looking to go emotionally deeper in their family research.

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Submitting Research Requests to Repositories
by Sara Allen

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When genealogists begin searching for family information, a good place to start is by speaking to relatives and examining sources in their home such as photo albums and family Bibles. People also will use online sources including Google and AI to help them locate information or records. Eventually, they might head to their local public library, which typically will have some printed genealogical materials, along with genealogy databases and how-to classes. They may also visit regional and national libraries like

the Genealogy Center (we have over one million physical items from all 50 states and many foreign countries).

At some point, researchers will realize that not everything is online, and they must order records, lookups, or research from long-distance libraries, archives, or courthouses. To do this, they must submit a research request to that repository for a copy of the records or pages they need. Let's talk about some components of a successful research request.

1. Check the repository's website and online catalog to determine if they have the genealogical or historical source that you seek.

2. If you live locally, visit the repository in person. You will almost always find out more information about your family members by visiting the collection in person, browsing the stacks, and speaking with the staff about local sources.

3. If you are writing a research request, be succinct and to the point. If you need copies of pages from a known book or resource, just supply the title, author, and pages needed, ask for the copies, and send the request. If the book is indexed, most repositories will look for a single name in the index for you also.

4. Resist the temptation of letting artificial intelligence programs like Claude, Gemini, or ChatGPT write your query for you. AI tends to add extraneous information not needed for the query and can also hallucinate sources for your research that do not exist.

5. Keep your request narrow, not broad ("send me everything about my ancestor"). Ask one specific, focused question about one person, such as "who did my ancestor Jason Willison (1889-1978) of Barry County, Michigan marry, and when and where did this marriage take place?" Typically, a repository will search their records for a specific name, specific record type, and specific place. They usually will not search in multiple states, for multiple names or with only vague identifying information.

6. If a repository tells you that the record or information you seek is found on Ancestry.com (free at most public libraries) or the free website FamilySearch.org, then they are trying to educate you about important online resources that every genealogist needs to know how to use. If you need assistance learning to use either site, librarians can help, but please do take the time to learn how to do your own lookups in these databases.

7. Every repository has its own guidelines for answering research requests. For example, some may charge copy fees. Some may not do lookups at all and will refer you to a paid researcher. Copyright law needs to be followed. Repositories do not typically sell their books.

Following these simple steps will help you get the best outcome from your research request.

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PERSI Gems: Halloween Ghosts
by Adam Barrone and Mike Hudson
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October is Halloween month and PERSI's attic and basement are rattling with the chains and boos of ghosts and ghoulies. In this terrifying segment, we cover selections from A-C in the database where ghosts are mentioned. Some of these ghosts are anonymous, but some are connected (supposedly) to actual deceased people. So spice up that family tree with ancestors who were alleged to have made an appearance beyond the grave.

Try a PERSI search here:

https://www.genealogycenter.info/persi/

Augustus Abner McGuire aka Old Diver, gravesite and ghost legends, 1856-1913, ME
Mullet Wrapper (Ocracoke Preservation Society, NC), Vol. 15, Issue 1 (Spr 2011)

Bee Hive Antique Mall, formerly Franklin Hospital, ghost stories, 1940s-2008
Now & Then (Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, TN), Vol. 25, Issue 2 (Fal 2009)

Bellwood Home shared with ghost owners, Confederate connections, Commercial Appeal item, 1860s-1972
Family Findings (Mid-West Tennessee Genealogical Society), Vol. 45, Issue 4 (Oct 2013)

Bernice Marchesseault Doiron recalls the Vachon house, ghost of Daniel Morse, 1910
Killingly (CT) Historical Journal, Vol. 17, Issue 1 (2011)

Bob Smith recalls dark tales, lingering spirits, ghost trains and more, 1940s+
Kentucky Explorer, Vol. 34, Issue 5 (Oct 2019)

Bonnie Agnes Gardner account her Forgey ancestors' encounter with a possible ghost, n.d.
Christian County (MO) Historian, Vol. 23, Issue 3 (Feb 2010)

Bobby Piner claims to have seen ghost, 1992
Researcher (Cateret County Hist. Soc., NC), Vol. 24, Issue 1 (Spr 2008)

Bud Marcum ghost story, L. J. Smothers family recollections, 1934+, WI, IN
Clay County (KY) Ancestral News, Vol. 28, Issue 1 (Spr 2012)

Bud Payne Ridge ghost legends, Roy Wince Mayes recollections, recorded 2011, FL
Pathfinder (Grundy County Historical Society, TN), Vol. 20, Issue 2 (Jun 2015)

Charles Sonny Weaver recollections of childhood, playing army, ghost stories, 1930s-1940s
Ashe (NC) Historical Society Newsletter, Sum 2010

Charlotte and Kevin Gallery recall ghost of girl in their house, age 9, 1995, Eng.
Lancashire (Lancashire Fam. His. & Heraldry Soc., Eng.), Vol. 16, Issue 4 (Nov 1995)

Cherokee ghost stories, monsters Utluhutu aka Spearfinger, n.d.
Trousdale County (TN) Historical Society Newsletter, Vol. 31, Issue 3 (Jul 2020)

Clifford Byron Baumgrass Baumgras encounter with ghost of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, 1887
Chippewa Gentalk (Chippewa Co. Gen. Soc., MI), Vol. 11, Issue 3 (Jul 2011)

Cynthia's ghost, granddaughter of Sarah and Giles Carter, Darrell Wayne Brown account, 2014, AZ, OK
Veterans Voices (Kansas City, MO), Vol. 62, Issue 1 (Spr 2014)

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Preservation Tips: Archival Plastics
by Christina Clary, C.A.

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A question that frequently pops up in regard to preservation is whether regular sheet protectors or photo storage pages are okay to use for older documents and photographs. The answer is usually no. Many commercially made sheet protectors are typically made from a plastic called polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, as it is commonly known. A compound called plasticizer is added to PVC to make it more flexible. With exposure to light and heat, the PVC will slowly break down, leading to a chemical chain reaction creating hydrochloric acid gas. The plasticizers will also migrate, making them feel oilier. The resulting deterioration will cause the protectors to yellow and feel sticky or oily.

Because PVC is chemically unstable, it will set off a chemical reaction in the item that it is storing, causing it in turn to deteriorate quicker. If you need to use anything made of plastic for preservation purposes, there are three types that are considered archival and therefore safe to use: polyester, polyethylene, and polypropylene. These are all chemically inert, meaning they will not chemically react with the document or photograph it is storing.

When choosing a plastic for archiving, you want to look for the terms "inert" and "stable" instead of the usual acid-free. The other term to keep in mind is "mil," which refers to the thickness of the plastic. One mil is one-thousandth (0.001) of an inch. Items that need more support need a strong plastic, or higher mil.

Of the three archival plastics, polyethylene is often the cheapest and most cost-effective. It has a slightly cloudy appearance and is highly flexible. It is the least rigid of

the three and the closest match for regular sheet protectors. If you need to buy in bulk and you do not need something that is completely transparent, polyethylene sheets are the way to go. They will not provide much support to older or more fragile documents though.

Polyester tends to be the most expensive, the strongest, and has the most rigidity. It is completely transparent and will not yellow or cloud over. Polyester is used in archives for encapsulation, a process where a sleeve for a document or photograph is created. Sometimes these encapsulations are completely sealed, or one side is left unsealed so that the item can be taken out. Polyester uses static electricity to keep items moving around too much, so it should not be used on anything friable (flakes easily). This includes artwork made using charcoal or pastels or items that are already flaking.

Polypropylene is between polyester and polyethylene in price, opaqueness, and rigidity. It is more flexible than polyester, but not quite as much as polyethylene. It is not as clear as polyester. It's a good choice if you want something stronger than polyethylene, but you need something more cost effective than polyester.

Using protectors made from one of these archival plastics is recommended for items that you may want to display or handle frequently. Just be aware that they may not be UV resistant, so items should be stored in a box or out of direct lighting when not in use.

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History Tidbits: “The war began in my front yard and ended in my front parlor:” Wilmer McLean’s Civil War
by Logan Knight

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Wilmer McLean must have had second thoughts when a cannon ball crashed through his house and embedded itself into his fireplace. It was July 18, 1861, in the small town of Manassas, Virginia. Here that the Union and Confederate armies squared off for the first large battle of the American Civil War, and McLean found himself in the middle of it.

How did it come to this? McLean was a nondescript grocer, who came up in the world the old-fashioned way by marrying a wealthy widow. This act allowed him to purchase a house, and farm called the Yorkshire Plantation, in 1854. Less than a decade later, the house would be commandeered by the new Confederate army as its headquarters during the First Battle of Bull Run or “Manassas” as the Southerners called it. General P.G.T. Beauregard noted: "A comical effect of this artillery fight was the destruction of the dinner of myself and staff by a Federal shell that fell into the fire-place of my headquarters at the McLean House. Frankly, the house was lucky to escape destruction. Its large profile dominated the landscape, making it a favorite target of Union gunners.”

The Confederates managed to win the First Battle of Manassas, driving the Union armies back to Washington and inaugurating the bloodiest war ever seen on the North American continent. McLean made his way as best he could, while the conflict raged

around him in Northern Virginia. He made his money primarily by selling sugar to the Confederates.

Things changed though with the Second Battle of Bull Run/Manassas, fought August 28–30, 1862. While McLean managed to avoid being part of this clash, he now had a pregnant wife to think of. This second battle on his doorstep meant it was time to get out. So, the family moved about 120 miles south to the sleepy village of Appomattox Court House.

For years, McLean kept his head down until April 9, 1865, when a man named Charles Marshall approached him for a meeting place. Marshall was the aide-de-camp to General Robert E. Lee, and he needed a safe place for him and another general to meet. Initially, McLean offered a run-down house for the rendezvous. When this was rejected, the sugar merchant, understandably reluctant, offered his own home at Appomattox.

At about one o'clock in the afternoon of the next day, General Lee and General Ulysses S. Grant met in Wilmer's parlor. Here, the Army of Northern Virginia agreed to surrender, basically ending the Civil War after the deaths of at least 750,000 soldiers and unknown number of civilians. While Wilmer may have breathed a sigh of relief at the end of the war, it did him little personal good. As soon as the surrender was signed, the soldiers basically took the home apart for souvenirs. His table, chairs, and even his daughter's ragdoll were stolen. Some of the veterans felt bad enough to throw money at the protesting McLean, but this seems cold comfort. At least he could say (as he may have done) that "the war began in my front yard and ended in my front parlor."

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Genealogy Center's November 2026 Programs
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November 3, 2026, 2:30 PM ET, "Tracing Crime Through Time: Genealogy Methods for True Crime Research" with Allison DePrey - https://acpl.libnet.info/event/17652892

November 7, 2026, IN-PERSON, 10:00 AM ET, "Writing Your Life Stories Workshop" with Jim Howerton - https://acpl.libnet.info/event/17375623

November 10, 2026, 2:30 PM ET, "Stories of the Final Chapter: What Death Records Reveal About Our Ancestors " with Sara Allen - https://acpl.libnet.info/event/17653046

November 11, 2026, 7:00 PM ET, "McNamara's War: From Escalation to Honoring Vietnam's Veterans" with Michael Strauss. An Allen County Genealogical Society program in person at the Genealogy Discovery Center and online. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_yh36JiduQECyslXU-eSWUA#/registration

November 15, 2026, 2:00 PM ET, "The Last Ships from Hamburg" with Steven Ujifusa. A Northeast Indiana Jewish Genealogy Society virtual program. Register at:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/fMF0R-OmQCqB0WehFZyRDA?mc_cid=0d90cfd83f&mc_eid=120fa3b682#/registration

November 17, 2026, 2:30 PM ET, “Digging into Military Records: Genealogy Research with Fold3” with Logan Knight - https://acpl.libnet.info/event/17653250

November 18, 2026, 6:30 PM ET, “AI Special Interest Group.” A program of the Northeast Indiana Jewish Genealogy Society and the ACPL Genealogy Center. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/9cS97yeYTH-mt-8Q-l3syg#/registration

November 21, 2026, IN-PERSON, 10:00 AM ET, “Writing Your Life Stories Workshop” with Jim Howerton - https://acpl.libnet.info/event/17375632

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Staying Informed about Genealogy Center Programming
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Do you want to know what we have planned? Are you interested in one of our events, but forget? We offer email updates for The Genealogy Center’s programming schedule. Don’t miss out! Sign up at http://goo.gl/forms/THcV0wAabB.

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Genealogy Center Bits-o’-News
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Look for the Genealogy Center merch! You really should check it out! The special Genealogy Center section of the store with some pretty cool items. Just added: some holiday ornaments! http://acpl.dkmlogo.online/shop/category/4726261?c=4726261 Please remember that your purchases support the Friends of the Allen County Public Library, and they in turn support the Genealogy Center. As much as ever, this support is so very important.

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Genealogy Center Social Media
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Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/GenealogyCenter/
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/genealogycenter/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/ACPLGenealogy
Blog: http://www.genealogycenter.org/Community/Blog.aspx
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/askacpl

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Driving Directions to the Library
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Wondering how to get to the library? Our location is 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the block bordered on the south by Washington Boulevard, the west by Ewing Street, the north by Wayne Street, and the east by the Library Plaza, formerly

Webster Street. We would enjoy having you visit the Genealogy Center.

To get directions from your exact location to 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana, visit this link at MapQuest:
http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?formtype=address&addtohistory=&address=900%20Webster%20St&city=Fort%20Wayne&state=IN&zipcode=46802%2d3602&country=US&geodiff=1

>From the South
Exit Interstate 69 at exit 302. Drive east on Jefferson Boulevard into downtown. Turn left on Ewing Street. The Library is one block north, at Ewing Street and Washington Boulevard.

Using US 27:
US 27 turns into Lafayette Street. Drive north into downtown. Turn left at Washington Boulevard and go five blocks. The Library will be on the right.

>From the North
Exit Interstate 69 at exit 312. Drive south on Coldwater Road, which merges into Clinton Street. Continue south on Clinton to Washington Boulevard. Turn right on Washington and go three blocks. The Library will be on the right.

>From the West
Using US 30:
Drive into town on US 30. US 30 turns into Goshen Ave. which dead-ends at West State Blvd. Make an angled left turn onto West State Blvd. Turn right on Wells Street. Go south on Wells to Wayne Street. Turn left on Wayne Street. The Library will be in the second block on the right.

Using US 24:
After crossing under Interstate 69, follow the same directions as from the South.

>From the East
Follow US 30/then 930 into and through New Haven, under an overpass into downtown Fort Wayne. You will be on Washington Blvd. when you get into downtown. Library Plaza will be on the right.

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Parking at the Library
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The library's current parking system started on November 3, 2025, and may still be new to some. It is a real advantage for those using the Genealogy Center because the first three hours of parking are free. Then, as before, it is $1 per hour up to a maximum of $7 per day.

One can read all about the new system at www.acpl.lib.in.us/parking-at-main. There is a

great FAQ section that will answer many questions one may have. And of course, one can always reach out to your friends in the Genealogy Center.

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Genealogy Center Queries
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The Genealogy Center hopes you find this newsletter interesting. Thank you for subscribing. We cannot, however, answer personal research emails written to the e-zine address. The department houses a Research Center that makes photocopies and conducts research for a fee.

If you have a general question about our collection, or are interested in the Research Center, please telephone the library and speak to a librarian who will be glad to answer your general questions or send you a research center form. Our telephone number is 260-421-1225. If you'd like to email a general information question about the department, please email: Genealogy@ACPL.Info.

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Publishing Note
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This electronic newsletter is published by the Allen County Public Library's Genealogy Center, and is intended to enlighten readers about genealogical research methods as well as inform them about the vast resources of the Allen County Public Library. We welcome the wide distribution of this newsletter and encourage readers to forward it to their friends and societies. All precautions have been made to avoid errors. However, the publisher does not assume any liability to any party for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions, no matter the cause.

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Curt B. Witcher and John D. Beatty, CG, FASG co-editors

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