A Field Guide to Searching the Maryland Historical Society Library Collections

Overview:
The Maryland Historical Society’s (MdHS) H. Furlong Baldwin Library enables researchers, students, teachers, and others to have access to the records of Maryland’s past while preserving irreplaceable historical materials for future generations. The sizeable collection of books, journals, manuscripts, newspapers, maps, prints, obsolete currency, oral histories, ephemera, and microfilm which the library makes available to the public via the Reference Department and Special Collections is one of the nation’s most extensive and important historical resources.

Among the more than 7 million items at the H. Furlong Baldwin Library are Francis Scott Key’s original manuscript of "The Star-Spangled Banner," papers of Maryland’s colonial governors and signers of the Declaration of Independence, including the Carroll Papers, over 900,000 photographs, and considerable genealogical resources.

Thus, finding the materials necessary for your personal research can seem like a daunting task. This guide will help you navigate both our library catalog and website to find the appropriate resources.

The Reading Room:
The Walter Edgar Rhodes Reading Room is the reading room for H. Furlong Baldwin Library, where both Special Collections and Reference materials can be accessed. Special Collections materials include manuscript (MS collections) and photograph collections (PP collections), oral histories, rare books, maps, prints, broadsides, and ephemera. The collection of the Main Reading Room, or reference library, includes published works and articles on Maryland history, genealogical indexes and files, and more.
For further information on accessing the collections, please review our policies and procedures on the Library User Information page.

Where to Look:
The Library Catalog:
The vast majority of our resources can be found through our LIBRARY CATALOG. Records for all manuscript and photograph collections, rare books, and maps are accessible through the catalog, as are most reference materials, such as books, newspapers, and pamphlets. Indexes and newspaper files created by librarians will not be found in the catalog, but can be readily accessed in the library with the assistance of the reference librarian.

The LIBRARY CATALOG can be accessed through a dropdown menu under the library tab as seen at the top of all pages of the MdHS website:

OR, the LIBRARY CATALOG can be found on the library’s home page.
The catalog can be used to search both broad and narrow topics. Particular items, such as a manuscript collection or a specific book title, can also be found in the catalog. If researching a topic rather than a specific collection, it is recommended that a variety of search terms be used to produce the best search results.

Advanced search features may also be used to augment your search. These options can be found underneath the “Simple Search” box and “Search Types.” Clicking the “Show search options” brings up a variety of search options, such as year, format, language, etc.
Once search terms are entered, the catalog will bring up any number of related records. Special Collections and reference items will be indicated by their location. Special Collections materials are listed as being located in the “Special Collections Reading Room,” and reference items under “Main Reading Room.” Please note: “Special Collections Reading Room” materials subject to different policies and procedures are listed in the Library User Information page.

Clicking on the listed items in the catalog will bring up expanded records that contain more information about the selected item.
Some manuscript and photograph collection catalog records will have a link to the finding aid, which helps researchers further pinpoint the contents of the collection. The finding aid will provide a more descriptive look at the collection materials.

The Website:
Some Special Collections materials cannot be found through the library catalog, but inventories have been created and posted to the MdHS website. Individual photographs (Subject Vertical Files), prints, and ephemera are not listed in the catalog, but can be
found by searching the website. All of the finding aids for manuscript and photograph collections are also included on the website. There are two ways search for these items.

The Collections Overview page lists collection material by format, and inventory lists can be found through their respective links.

For example, visiting the “Prints and Broadsides” link will bring up a page listing the various print collections. Each link will lead to a similar page for each collection type.
The collections can also be searched through the search box located in the upper right hand corner of the MdHS website. However, inputting search terms into this feature will bring up everything available on the website using that term, so it is not the most exact search method.

This search option can be helpful when searching photograph vertical files (individual photographs filed by subject), which include Subject Vertical Files, Portrait Vertical Files, and Group Portrait Vertical Files. A more in-depth guide on searching for photographs for Baltimore buildings can be viewed [here](#).
Clicking the red links will bring the researcher to a finding aid or inventory list for the collection which features an item related to the search term.

The researcher may then have to scroll through the page to find the specific item which was highlighted in the search results.

What’s Available Online:
At the present time, most of our collection materials cannot be viewed online. Researchers must visit the library in-person, or if they are unable do so, photocopies or digital reproductions, can be provided for a fee. A limited selection of digitized items can be view on the Collections Online page of the MdHS website, the library Tumblr page, and the library’s blog, Underbelly: From the Deepest Corners of the Maryland Historical Society Library.

Other Research Resources:
The archivists and librarians at MdHS have created a variety of other resources that will aid researchers in search the library’s collections. Subject guides, which give resource suggestions on a variety of topics, can be viewed here. Published manuscript indexes are also available: Avril J. M. Pedley, comp., The Manuscript Collections of the Maryland

The librarians and archivists can also always be contacted to help with any research questions in-person during public hours, via email at specialcollections@mdhs.org or reference@mdhs.org, or by telephone at 410-685-3750 ext. 359.