Want to Research your National History Day Project at the Maryland Historical Society?
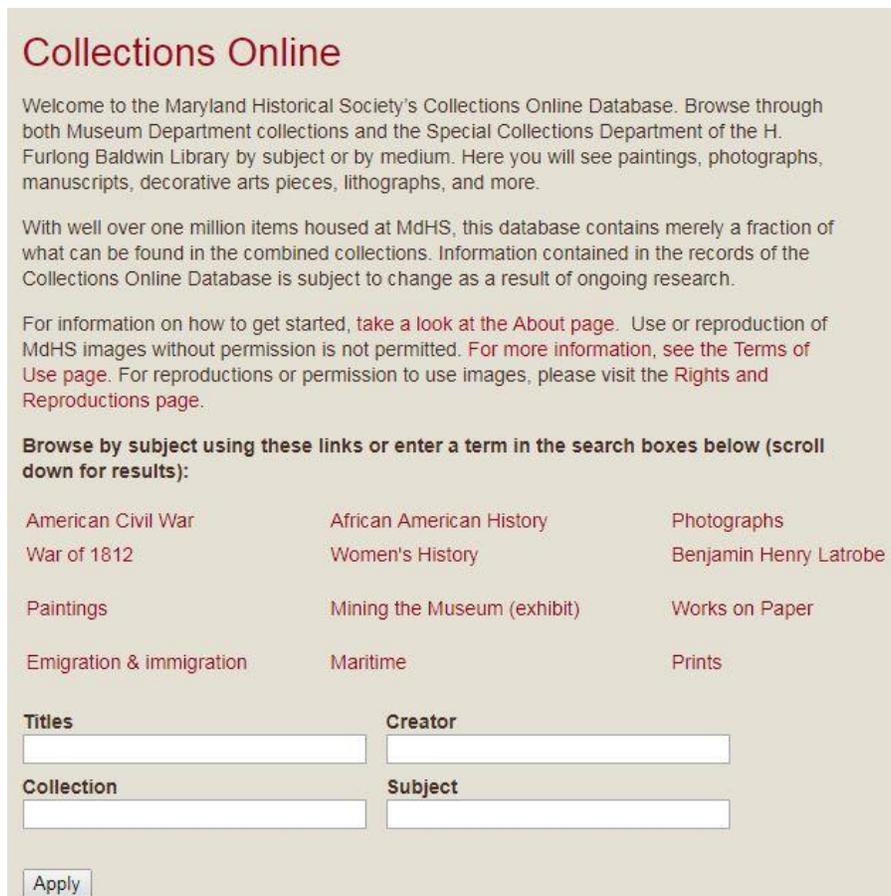
The Maryland Historical Society is the oldest cultural institution in the state of Maryland. Our collection contains nearly 7 million documents! These include manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, rare books, maps, prints, and broadsides. Our collection is housed in the H. Furlong Baldwin Library on the second floor of the Maryland Historical Society. The H. Furlong Baldwin Library is split in two sections. The first is the Main Reading Room. The Main Reading Room contains the library's reference collection, which primarily includes published works and secondary sources. It is more similar to a library like your schools, though you cannot check any items out. The second part of the H. Furlong Baldwin Library is Special Collections. Special Collections contains rare or unique items, such as photographs and manuscripts, including diaries, letters, and account books.

For a first time researcher, a special collections library is going to be scary. You are surrounded by old documents, you may be worried about hurting the documents, the room is normally silent, and it is cold. These are all normal things that every researcher has experienced. This guide will help you prepare for your research. Remember, if you have any questions while you are researching, don't be afraid to ask one of the archivist or librarians. They will be happy to help you!

Where do I start my research?

Before you visit the Maryland Historical Society, the best place to start your search is on our online collections database. We have two databases that will be useful for your search. The first is called Collections Online. (Remember, most of our collection revolves around Maryland History. If you are doing a subject that may not involve Maryland, we might not have any items.)

Collections Online is a database of digitized images. It can be found at http://www.mdhs.org/digital-images or, if you are already on our website, under the "Library" tab as "Collections Online." This is what the collections online page looks like:

Although we are focusing on collections online, inventories for MdHS's photographic holdings can also be found by searching through the MdHS website search bar or through this page on the website: http://www.mdhs.org/library/special-collections-photographs.

If you are doing your National History Day project on any of the pre-selected subject areas (the items in red above the text boxes) then you can click on those and see the images that apply to those subjects. If your topic is not one of the pre-selected subject areas, then you can search for your topic. The best place to search is in the "subject" text box.

For example, a National History Day project is on World War II and Maryland. To begin the search, we will put in World War II in the subject text box and hit apply.

After hitting apply, the results below pop-up:

The results received, though, do not relate to World War II. In fact they relate to the War of 1812 and World War I.

This is a problem that many people have. By just typing in World War II in to the subject box, the search function is looking for images that contain the word "world", images that contain the word "war" and the numeral "II".

What we should do instead when searching World War II is put the word in quotations marks, like so:

This tells the search function to only find pictures that have the phrase World War II in their descriptions.

Let's see what the results are like:

Now we are getting better results! The images all relate to World War II.

We have found the image we want to look at. It is this one right here.

If we click on the image, we will be shown a larger image to examine. But, if we want look at the photograph in person, the information I need is in the red box.

This is the description of the image. It tells you the title and call number of the picture.

The title is "Baltimore – Air Raid Warning System – World War II – Unidentified Street Scene Group of men looking at piles of sandbags".

This information helps MdHS staff find the image for you.

What if the item I am looking for is not an image but an actual document or book?

To find these items, you will have to search a different online database. This database is called the "Library Catalog". It can be found in the drop down menu of the Library or it can be accessed on the library main page:

The library catalog page looks like this:

The catalog can be used to search both broad and narrow topics. The best way to search for an item for your NHD project is through the Simple Search Box. With the simple search box, you can put in your subject with or without quotation marks.

We are going to search World War II again:

When searching in the Library Catalog, your search will return both Primary and Secondary sources. Some of the items are listed as being in the Main Reading Room while some are listed as being in the Special Collections Reading Room.

Items listed in the Main Reading room can be accessed Wednesday through Sunday while items listed as being in the Special Collections Reading Room can only be pulled Thursday through Saturday.

Sometimes the search results may turn up items that have a link below them, like so:

These links are called finding aids. They tell you exactly what is in each box of the collection. Some collections have many boxes of documents, while some have only one. If you want to explore this finding aid, here is the link: https://www.mdhs.org/findingaid/george-blakiston-world-war-ii-collection-1942-1944-ms-3139-0

Use the finding aids to help you narrow down which boxes or volumes you want to look at. You do not want to spend your time looking at documents that are not relevant to your project. Knowing what box you want to see also makes it easier for our special collections archivists to do their jobs.

During your search through the collection, make sure to write down all the important information about the item you will want to see. This information will be used when filling out your collection request form!

So, you have found all of the information on the documents that you want to look at when you visit the Maryland Historical Society, what is next?

The first step is to schedule a time to come in and do research. To schedule, visit http://www.mdhs.org/special-collections-appointment-request. Here you will be greeted with a Google Form for you to fill out.

This form requires you to provide the time slot you wish to research in (these slots are 10 am – 1 pm, 2 pm – 5 pm, or 10 am to 5 pm) and the form requires you to provide the list of requested collections. This includes the collection name, call number, and box number. After you submit your form, you will be contacted by a member of the special collections staff to confirm your date.

Once you receive your confirmation from the MdHS staff, you will be all set to show up on your confirmed day and begin your research.

What do I do when I arrive on the day of my research?

When you first arrive at the Maryland Historical Society on the day of your research appointment, you will need to check in at the front desk of the museum. If this is your first time using the library, you will need to fill out a library registration form. You will then be asked to pay the $9 fee to research.

After you have checked in and paid, you can head up to the second floor of the Maryland Historical Society to the library. *(If you need help, ask the front desk staff)*

Before you enter the library though, you must put away all bags, food and drink, pens, folders, and other items besides a pencil and a piece of paper. The historical society provides free lockers for you to store your items. Also make sure that your hands are clean and dry.

After you have stored your items in the lockers, you can enter the library.

When you enter, you will be greeted by a member of our library staff. They will have you sign in, make sure you have put away all of your items, and then have you find a seat.

Make sure to bring the list of documents you want to look at with you so that you have the information to put on the Collection Request Form

What do I do after I have sat down?

In front of you at the table, there will be a small box with Collection Requests Forms inside of it. *The forms look like these:*

These forms provide the special collections staff with the information needed to find and pull the item that you want to look at.

Understanding a Collection Request Form:

1) First and last name are your first and last name.
2) The "signature refers" to your signature.
3) The "date of request" is the day that you are there.
4) The "call number" is the set of letters followed by the set of numbers that show up under the title of an item when you search it. For example, the World War II collection that we look at earlier, its call number is MS 3139.
5) The "author" is the author of the document or item.
6) The "title" is the title of the document or item you want to see.
7) The "date of publication" is the date in which the document was created. It is usually just the year.
8) "Box or Volume" refers to the box number of the collection you want to see. Sometimes the item you want to look at may not have a box or volume number. In this case you can leave it blank.

After you have filled out your collection request form, you can hand it to the special collections staff member at the desk. *You can request up to three boxes or documents at a time*.

Once you hand the form to a staff member, you can have a seat and they will go pull the document from storage. There are document pull times at the hour and half hour. You may need to wait for your document to be pulled.

The special collections archivist will deliver the document to your desk and you can begin looking at your items.

Remember to be very careful with the items you are looking at as they are old and fragile

When you are finished with the item, tell the special collections archivist, and they will come and grab it for you. If you want to see more documents, all you have to do is fill out another Collections Request Form.

After you have finished researching, make sure to:

1) Tell a staff member so they can take your archival materials.
2) Clean up your area: put any unused Collection Request Forms back in the boxes on the table and make sure you leave only with what you entered with.
3) Sign out at the front desk of the research room.

Admission to the library allows you access to the Maryland Historical Society, so feel free to explore after you are finished with your research.

For more information, please visit: http://www.mdhs.org/library/library-user-information

Quick Guide

What does the Maryland Historical Society have in its collection?

The Library maintains an extraordinary collection of materials reflecting the history of Maryland and its people. This includes nearly 7 million documents! These include manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, rare books, maps, prints, and broadsides.

Where do I do research at the Maryland Historical Society?

Individual people who want to research at the Maryland Historical Society do so in the H. Furlong Baldwin Library. It is located on the second floor of the Maryland Historical Society.

What is a Special Collections Library like?

For a first time researcher, a special collections library is going to be scary. You are surrounded by old documents, you may be worried about hurting the documents, the room is normally silent, and it is cold. These are all normal things that every researcher has experienced. If you have any questions, don't be afraid to ask one of the archivist or librarians. They will be happy to help you!

What do I need to do research in the H. Furlong Baldwin Library?

A researcher needs to complete a few steps in order to research at the Maryland Historical Society.

1. Explore the Library Catalog and gather information on documents you want to see.
2. Make an appointment using the Special Collections Appointment Request form.
3. On the day of your appointment you will be asked to complete a registration form and pay a $9 admission fee.
4. Before you enter the library, make sure you put away your backpack in the free lockers and only have a pencil and a notebook with you. Make sure your hands are clean and you have no food or water with you.
5. When you enter the library, you will be greeted by a MDHS staff member who will have you sign in.
6. Find yourself a table and begin your research!
7. When you are done looking at an item, let a staff member know, and they will come and take the box from you.
8. After researching, make sure you sign out at the front desk.