Loose Records in Archives, What Are They?

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Genealogists are always on the lookout for records they haven’t searched before or haven’t heard of before. One set of records that I find genealogists don’t know about or know very little are Loose Records.

Archives, libraries, historical societies, genealogical societies and even museums have bound record books. These bound record books contain such information as County Court Minutes, Marriage Records, Deeds, Last Will and Testaments and much more. Genealogists are usually well versed in finding, requesting and researching in these types of bound records.

There is another type of record source that genealogists should be aware of and seeking out to help them research their ancestors. This record source is Loose Records. Loose records are considered the “working papers” or “accompanying paper work” to the records recorded in a bound volume. Loose records, many times, can hold additional information and fantastic discoveries for the genealogists that are not found in the bound volumes.

**Bound Volumes**

- Records and information recorded in large bound books
- Many times bound volumes have been microfilmed and/or digitized
- May not contain ALL of the information pertaining to the event
- Do not stop with the records listed in the bound volumes, search for loose records

**What Are Loose Records?**

- Loose Records are records not found in bound volumes
- Very few Loose Records have been microfilmed or digitized
- Might be found tri-folded and in sleeves or packets
- A Gold Mine for the Genealogist!
Some bound volumes that could have loose records associated with them are:

**Loose Court Records:**

- Court case packets that contain loose papers
- Affidavits, subpoenas, witness statements, photographs, etc.
- Archived separate from the bound volumes
- Many are not microfilmed or online

**Loose Marriage Records:**

- Additional paperwork relating to the marriage recording process
- Permission letters, blood test results, copies of the marriage license, etc.
- Archived separate from the bound volumes
- Many are not microfilmed or online

**Loose Probate Records:**

- Additional paperwork relating to the probate of the deceased
- Affidavits, correspondence, invoices, receipts, etc.
- Archives separate from the bound volumes of wills, inventories, bonds
- Many are not microfilmed or online

**Vertical Files**

- A hodgepodge of loose papers filed by surname or subject name
- Normally found in filing cabinets in the research area or in the stacks
- Could contain just about anything that has been donated or found in the archives that doesn’t belong to any other records collection
- Contains family group sheets, newspaper clippings, family histories, business letterheads, photographs, copies of donated genealogical records, etc.

**Manuscript Collections**

- The most underused records collection housed in archives
- An organized collection of records housed in file folders and boxes

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- Usually donated by individuals, businesses and organizations
- The Finding Aid is the guide to these collections
- Could contain anything and most of the time are not microfilmed or online

**How to Find Loose Records**

- Loose records are almost always stored in back rooms of the archives in what are called the “stacks”. The stacks are simply the shelves that contain the boxes of records.

- Ask the archivist about loose records in their collections, they could have an index available.

- Check online websites of the archives, they may indicate they have loose records at the facility.

- Contact or visit and archive. Sometimes the only way to fully understand what records are available is to communicate or visit with the archives and archivist.

Loose records can be a gold mine for genealogists. They can fill in those gaps of missing information or tell us what our ancestors were doing between the census years. Genealogists should include “Loose Records” on their research to-do list!