



Pioneers of Greater Appalachia: Research in the Draper Manuscript Collection

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Born on 4 September 1815, Lyman Copeland Draper grew up listening to the Revolutionary War stories told by his grandfather and the War of 1812 tales of his father. He became fascinated with American history, particularly the history of the West.

After securing the financial backing of his cousin's husband, Peter A. Remsen, Draper began collecting information about the Revolutionary War and the settlement of the West. Travelling extensively, he met with and interviewed pioneers, veterans, and their children. He copied documents, clipped or transcribed articles from newspapers, wrote and received letters, and occasionally was given original documents. He copied maps and drew new ones. He even purchased parts of the collections of John Dabney Shane and Samuel J. Rea, historians working in the same time and places as himself. These he compiled into volumes by subject matter.

Upon Remsen's death, Draper was forced to find another source of income. He secured a position at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and continued to collect documents and other information. He also continued to compile and re-compile them into volumes.

Draper's intention was to use his manuscripts to write a book on Western history and biography which he tentatively titled *Sketches of the Lives of the Pioneers*. He died before his efforts came to fruition. In this, Draper was like a graduate student who never publishes because there might be some, presently unknown, piece of information that will render his current conclusions obsolete. In truth we are the same, waiting forever to publish our own family histories in the hope of one more clue identifying an elusive ancestor.

Draper will provide that his collection of manuscripts go to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin upon his death. When, the society took possession of the papers, the Society executive, Reuben G. Thwaites, oversaw the efforts to make the collection available for public use. This involved continuing Draper's arrangement putting loose manuscripts into bound volumes.

The Society arranged the volumes by subject into fifty series, each one given a one- or two-letter press-mark (A through ZZ with I and II not being used). Subsequently, the volumes were microfilmed and made available to libraries and other institutions. Any item can be found on film if the series, volume, and page number are known. Typically they are recorded in the format [volume series page]. For example, the citation 25 C 12 references volume 25 of the Daniel Boone Papers (series C), page 12. Sometimes the

“page number” is actually an item number in that particular volume rather than the page number. These became the 491 volumes that are now known as the Draper Manuscript collection.

Content of the Collection

In the twenty-first century, our vision of the American West tends to be colored by our experiences of television and movie Westerns. We think of the Wild West as the land of cattle rustlers, outlaws, and desperados, a land of stage coaches, saloons, ranchers, and a few Native Americans, with noble lawmen barely able to keep trouble at bay. Draper’s West is the Trans-Appalachian West (see map above), a place infinitely wilder than the West of our imaginations. The courthouse and the lawman were both on the other side of the mountains. The Indians were at least an equal if not greater force than the settlers. The two groups, in the best of conditions, lived in an uneasy truce. People had to rely on themselves. There was no cavalry to ride to the rescue.

By the time Draper began his collecting, this Trans-Appalachian West was a settled land. In talking to the children and the grandchildren of the pioneers and listening to the Revolutionary War stories, he felt he was on a mission: a mission to preserve a history that was already receding into memory.

How to find records

Although the Draper Manuscripts are rich in information, they are not the easiest resource to use. There are a number of indexes and finding aids that will help researchers use the collection. Each will be considered below.

Guide to the Draper Manuscripts

Any discussion of the Draper Manuscript Collection must begin with a discussion of Josephine Harper’s *Guide to the Draper Manuscripts*. Her work begins with a discussion of the entire collection, and then provides an overview of each series within the collection, and finally outlines the contents of each volume of the series. Indexes and appendices complete the volume and provide additional information for the researcher.

Calendars

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin published several volumes of indexes to parts of the Draper Manuscript Collection. Called the “Calendar Series,” they take their name from the chronological order of the abstracts in the front of the book. An index of the principal names (of people or locations) follows to help the researcher. It does not appear that every name listed in the papers is included in the index, but instead only the key names relative to the documents.

Calendars exist for:

Series J	George Rogers Clark Papers
Series U	Frontier Wars Papers
Series CC	Kentucky Papers
Series DD	Kings Mountain Papers
Series QQ	William Preston Papers
Series SS	David Shepherd Papers
Series TT	South Carolina Papers
Series UU	South Carolina in the Revolution Miscellanies
Series VV	Thomas Sumter Papers
Series XX	Tennessee Papers
Series ZZ	Virginia Papers

Transcriptions

Craig L. Heath transcribed and published several of the Manuscript Series. Each of these transcriptions includes an every-name index. Not only does the index make the documents accessible, but many people find the transcriptions significantly easier to read than the handwritten manuscripts. As with all transcriptions, the researcher must use the actual document in conjunction with the transcription to avoid perpetuating unintended transcriber errors.

Transcriptions exist for:

Series A	George M. Bedinger Papers
Series V	Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina Papers
Series Z	Illinois Papers
Series GG	Mecklenburg Declaration
Series TT	South Carolina Papers
Series ZZ	Virginia Papers (volumes 1-5 only)

Others have also worked on transcriptions of parts of the Draper Manuscript Collection. The following volumes are known to exist:

Series B	Belue, Ted Franklin, <i>The Life of Daniel Boone</i>
Series C 4-13	Crabb, Anne, <i>Warrior-Pioneers: Extracts from the Boone Papers</i>
22 S 241—268	Doyle, George F., <i>Lyman C. Draper's Notes on His Interview with Samuel Boone</i>
6 S 19—241	Hammon, Neal O., <i>My Father, Daniel Boone</i>
21 U	Lobdell, Jared C., <i>Action at the Galudoghson</i> December 14 1742
Various	Payne, Dale, <i>Frontier Memories, Frontier Memories II and Frontier Memories III</i>
Series D	Puryear, Robert Barton III, <i>Border Forays and Adventures</i>

Indexes

Karen Mauer Green compiled an *Index to the Draper Manuscripts: Series NN, The Pittsburgh and Northwest Virginia Papers*. The index includes every name mentioned in the text. A brief introduction explains how to use the index for efficiently finding the documents in the original manuscripts.

Draper himself indexed some, but not all, of the volumes. If he created an index, it is included within the volume. Some of his indexes are more detailed than others. Some are more legible than others. Draper made these indexes for his own purposes; he did not make them for us. It is unclear if he indexed every name or only the ones he was interested in for his planned books.

Documentaries

In the early years of the last century, the Wisconsin Historical Society published five compilations of items extracted from the Draper Manuscripts. The items were selected from across the various series and volumes to explain in a chronological order some of the events of the Revolutionary War and the time immediately preceding it. The five, in historical order, are:

- Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774.*
- The Revolution on the Upper Ohio, 1775–1777.*
- Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777–1778.*
- Frontier Advance on the Upper Ohio, 1778–1779.*
- Frontier Retreat on the Upper Ohio, 1779–1781.*

Other authors have also compiled histories from the Draper Manuscripts. The patterns of indexing and citation vary with the individual author. Some of these works are:

Harry G. Enoch	<i>Affair at Captina Creek.</i> <i>In Search of Morgan's Station and "the Last Indian Raid in Kentucky".</i>
Louis Knott Koontz	<i>The Virginia Frontier, 1754—1763.</i>
Jared C. Lobdell	<i>Further Materials on Lewis Wetzel and the Upper Ohio Frontier.</i> <i>Indian Warfare in Western Pennsylvania and Northwest Virginia at the Time of the Revolution.</i> <i>Recollections of Lewis Bonnett, Jr. (1788-1850).</i> <i>The Bonnett and Wetzel Families.</i>
Edward P. McCullough	<i>The Early History of Montgomery County, Kentucky.</i>
Dale Payne	<i>Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers.</i> <i>Narratives of Pioneer Life and Border Warfare.</i>
Darren R. Reid	<i>Daniel Boone and Others on the Kentucky Frontier.</i>

Strategies for Finding your Ancestors

The Draper Manuscripts are not now and not ever likely to be an easy resource to use. With planning and persistence, however, they do not present an insurmountable challenge.

The key to a successful search is to exhaust all reasonable possibilities. Start with Harpers Guide, then move into the calendars, the transcripts, the printed indexes, and the documentaries. If you proceed in a logical order of searching through the materials, it is definitely possible to find your ancestors in the Draper Manuscript Collection.

For More Information

Detailed information about the Draper Manuscript Collection [<https://tinyurl.com/y94heatc>] or [<https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/Draper%20Manuscript%20Collection%20guide.pdf>]

History & Genealogy's Collection Guide for the Draper Manuscript Collection [<https://tinyurl.com/yc5kady2>] or [<https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/HG16%20Draper%20Manuscript%20Collection.pdf>]



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