

Interlibrary Loan and Genealogical Research

The term interlibrary loan stands for a borrowing and lending program in which most libraries nationwide participate in. Participating libraries share materials that are not owned by every library. This agreement includes libraries at the academic, archival, genealogical/historical society, judicial, and public levels. Some governmental agencies also participate to various degrees depending on the nature of the request and laws governing access to a given resource.

Many historical and/or genealogical societies large enough to have their own research repositories have lending services that offer a comprehensive array of genealogical books and materials. Two prime examples of this would be the New England Historical and Genealogical Research Library in Boston, Massachusetts and the National Genealogical Society Library Lending Collection in St. Louis County Public Library in St. Louis, Missouri.

Patron access for borrowing privileges with some historical and/or genealogical society's repositories tends to be limited to members of these types of organizations. Because of the scope and coverage offered by these research level collections, the membership fee is more than worth its price in terms of value for research purposes. Catalogs are usually searchable on the Internet or, depending upon the size of the collection, are available in published volumes.

Materials borrowed from other libraries and library systems for local library customers do not fall under the same borrowing guidelines as locally owned materials would. Borrowing policies and guidelines vary among all participating libraries. These variations may include check-out durations, fees for borrowing materials, and special handling criteria.

Unless special conditions apply, most libraries will not borrow items which the library already owns. High demand or items published within the past year cannot be borrowed using interlibrary loan under normal circumstances. Patrons are advised to search the online catalog prior to initiating all requests. Since most library systems offer remote access to their homepage and holdings, this is seldom a problem.

For genealogists, obtaining materials via interlibrary loan can be especially important given the cost, age, and scarcity of certain types of resources crucial for research purposes. This may be especially true for researchers seeking materials from other parts of the country, foreign countries, or rare ethnic specific materials.

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Tips for Using Interlibrary Loan:

1. There are no guarantees. A library can refuse to loan a requested item or title. They may offer other options such as photocopies, scanning pages, etc.
2. Library policies will vary. For example:
 - a. Some libraries offer the service completely free of charge.
 - b. Some libraries will request a “voluntary donation” to cover some or all of the costs.
 - c. Some libraries charge for postage for items coming from and/or returning to the lending library.
 - d. Some libraries add a surcharge for each item processed.
 - e. Rare or heavier (weight) books may be subject to special charges.
3. This is not an overnight service. Obtaining materials may take anywhere from two to six weeks although most materials arrive much sooner.
4. Photocopy requests are often processed with a one-week turnaround.
5. Some lending institutions may offer fax capability in lieu of sending the item for a fee provided the patron has the complete citation.
6. The borrowing library has no control over the lending period, fees, or stipulations such as in-house use of materials.
7. Loan requests must include all relevant information.
 - a. Book Requests:
 - (1) Author
 - (2) Title (complete title including subtitle and edition when applicable)
 - (3) Date of publication
 - b. Periodicals or Journals:
 - (1) Author
 - (2) Journal or Magazine Title
 - (3) Title of article

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- (4) Volume number and year of publication
- (5) Page numbers
- c. Microforms
 - (1) Author
 - (2) Name of book, magazine, journal when applicable
 - (3) Title of microform, film, or fiche
 - (4) Film, or fiche number
- 8. Most libraries have items they will never loan out. Lending libraries will inform the borrowing library of any issues or restrictions. The information will be passed onto the patron. In most cases, the borrowing library will offer to make copies provided the patron can supply page numbers or send a photocopy of the index and table of contents. Patron may submit another request for specific page numbers afterwards.
- 9. In most library systems, to request items from interlibrary loan:
 - a. Patrons must verify their current contact information.
 - b. Have a valid library card showing a current street/ mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone number. NOTE: Some libraries require an e-mail address prior to acceptance of any requests.
 - c. Patron must be in good standing as in fines paid up to date, no overdue items, etc.
- 10. Failure to return an ILL book will usually terminate any further right to request items. The borrowing library must reimburse the lending library for all costs to replace lost items. These costs are usually passed onto the patron's permanent record until the costs incurred by the borrowing library are fully reimbursed.

— *Compiled by Bryan L. Mulcahy, Reference Librarian, Fort Myers-Lee County Library*