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How to Find Biographical Information

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CENTRAL LIBRARY USERS' GUIDE

HOW TO FIND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The Queens Borough Public Library system offers many sources for biographical information in both its circulating and reference collections. Much of the information will be located in the History, Travel & Biography Division, but there will also be sources listed from other Central Library Divisions.

Unless otherwise noted, the sources mentioned in this list will be found in selected branch libraries as well as in the Central Library. Check in the Queens Library's computer catalog, the "Quick-Cat," or with a librarian to determine the exact locations if you have questions.

Bear in mind that many of the sources, especially the collective biographies, are for reference use only and may not be removed from the library. Also, some reference materials may require an I.D. card to be used.

I. INDIVIDUAL BIOGRAPHIES

To locate books about a person, look in the Quick-Cat with the person's name as the subject. For example:

HAWTHORNE, NATHANIEL

KING, MARTIN LUTHER, JR.

MAO, TSE-TUNG

TUBMAN, HARRIET

Individual biographies can also sometimes be located by using an occupation or a country, such as:

MUSICIANS--BIOGRAPHY

PRESIDENTS--UNITED STATES--BIOGRAPHY

ZOOLOGISTS--KENYA--BIOGRAPHY

If you needed to find a biography of an anti-apartheid leader, you could look under CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS--SOUTH AFRICA--BIOGRAPHY, which would lead you to titles such as:

Higher Than Hope: The Authorized Biography of Nelson Mandela, by Fatima Meer.
B Mandela M

Running to Maputo, by Albie Sachs.
B Sachs

II. COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHIES

Collective biographies provide information on several people, instead of just on one individual person. To locate these sources, look under the subject area, country, occupation, ethnic group, etc., with BIOGRAPHY as the subdivision.

For example, the subject heading AFRO-AMERICANS--BIOGRAPHY would lead you not only to titles on individuals like Jesse Jackson, but also to collective works like:

Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century, edited by John Hope Franklin and August Meier.
920.0092 B

The subject heading AFRO-AMERICAN SCIENTISTS--BIOGRAPHY would lead you to:

Blacks in Science and Medicine, by Vivian Ovelton Sammons.
R 925 S

The subject headings MATHEMATICIANS and MATHEMATICIANS--BIOGRAPHY would turn up books like:

Men of Mathematics, by E. T. Bell.
510.92 B
925.1 B43M

The Great Mathematicians, by H. W. Turnbull.
925.1 T942G4

Some other collective sources for both current and retrospective biographical information are:

Contemporary Authors.
R 928.1 C761

Current Biography.
Uncataloged

Dictionary of American Biography.
R 920.073 G5531

Dictionary of American Negro Biography.
R 920.0092 L

Dictionary of National Biography.
R 920.042 D554A

International Who's Who.

R 920.01 I61

Who's Who.

R 920 W62

Who's Who Among Black Americans.

R 920.073 W

Who's Who in America.

R 920 W62A

Remember, also, that biographical information can also be obtained from both general and specialized encyclopedias, such as:

Encyclopedia Americana.

R 031 E

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography.

Uncataloged, History, Travel & Biography Division only

New Encyclopaedia Britannica.

R 032 E

New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.

R 780.3 N

III. INDEXES TO COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHIES

How does one know if the person being researched will be included in a particular collective biography? It would be very time consuming to check each book's index individually. There are several indexes, however, in which the user can look up a person's name and see which source(s) include(s) him or her.

(1) The most comprehensive index is:

Biography and Genealogy Master Index.

R 920.073 B, History, Travel & Biography Division only

With its yearly supplements, *BGMI* can lead you to information on millions of the famous, and the not so famous, who are included in collective biographies.

(2) A valuable source for biographical information on African-Americans, as well as for

other people of African descent, is:

In Black and White, by Mary Mace Spradling.
R 920.0092 S

Aside from collective biographies, *In Black and White* can also lead you to articles in newspapers and magazines.

(3) For young people, a valuable tool is:

Index to Collective Biographies for Young Readers, by Karen Breen.
R J 016.92 B

This book can lead the user to information on approximately 10,000 people in sources written for elementary and junior high school readers.

IV. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

(1) *Biography Index*.
Uncataloged

Biography Index is a source for biographical material appearing in popular magazines, in some individual and collective biographies, and in non-biographical books.

(2) *InfoTrac*.
CD-ROM computer

Depending on which databases are used (General Periodicals Index; National Newspaper Index; Government Publications Index), *InfoTrac* can lead the user to information in over 1,100 periodicals, 5 national newspapers, and the publications of the U.S. Government Printing Office.

(3) *The New York Times Index*.
Uncataloged

The *New York Times*, which began being published in 1851, is an excellent source for biographical information, as well as for obituaries, on national, international, political, social, and business leaders. The *Index* would tell you the date, section, page, and column number that the article appeared in. In the *Times Index*, obituaries are listed under "Deaths."

The main drawback to the *New York Times Index* is that it is cumulated yearly; thus, you would have to search through many, many volumes to locate articles. This can be overcome by using:

(a) *The New York Times Obituaries Index, 1858-1978.*
R 929.3 N

(b) *Personal Name Index to 'The New York Times Index,' 1851-1989.*
Uncataloged, Magazines & Documents Division only

The *Personal Name Index* refers the user to the particular volume(s) of the *New York Times Index* that include(s) entries for the name(s) that one is researching.

(c) *The New York Times Biographical Service.*
Uncataloged, History, Travel & Biography Division only

The *Biographical Service* reprints obituaries and biographical articles from the *Times*.

V. GENEALOGICAL AND LOCAL HISTORY SOURCES

Very often, local history books can provide information on obscure people who would not be mentioned at all in general history books or other sources. For example, an early settler of Newtown (Elmhurst) would not be mentioned in general books on the history of New York; but he or she might very well be included in a source such as:

The Annals of Newtown, in Queens County, New York, by James Riker.
974.724 R

For those people doing genealogical research, chances are, unless your ancestor or the person that you are researching was fairly famous, he or she probably will not be listed in *Biography and Genealogy Master Index*. However, they might be included in:

The American Genealogical-Biographical Index to American Genealogical, Biographical and Local History Materials.
R 929.3 Z99A, Long Island Division only

AGBI can lead the user to information on millions of obscure people contained in published family genealogies, standard genealogical reference books, Revolutionary War records, and in other colonial and early national era sources.