

Spotlight

Microfiche Collection Review Reveals Many Hidden Riches

Steve Turner

Many remarkable resources long hidden in the GFO's microfiche cabinet are emerging from the shadows. I was especially amazed at the wealth of Massachusetts, Virginia, and Tennessee materials, as well as many other powerful resources that we have in fiche form. Many of them had never even been listed in our library catalog.

Now that we have the great online OPALS catalog that makes searching so much easier, we have embarked on a long-term project to review and recatalog the entire GFO collection. The goals include improving the catalog entries, correcting errors, and phasing in a new call number system, notably eliminating the A000's on so many of our books and replacing codes like **M961 P852** with more intuitively meaningful codes like **Mult Port**. The audiocassettes and the Northwest Schools collection were the first areas addressed. Along with adding a few hundred audiocassettes, the old ones have been relabeled and all of them are now arranged in the cabinet by call numbers related to subjects rather than by almost meaningless conference schedule times. Final results will also soon be fully apparent for the Northwest Schools collection, with new labels and some changes in their shelving order that we hope will help make them easier to locate.

The microfiche collection was not at all on my radar when Cathy Lauer provided the push to tackle it next. She had noticed that many fiche were not in the catalog at all. Cathy wanted to get them all entered into OPALS so they could be found and she undertook all the necessary data entry work. Thanks to her terrific help, the microfiche will be among the first collection areas to have substantial review and recataloging completed.

Most of the fiche had very general call numbers (if they had any at all), so that many titles might be lumped



together, such as in Virginia, **975.5 A000 Hist**, for example. Now every item has received a new more distinctive and specific call number. More information was added to many records and new records were created for those previously not listed at all. The fiche records still tend to be rather skimpy, without subject entries, and often lacking even full author and title information; but compared to what used to be there, now the likelihood of finding relevant fiche resources has been greatly increased.

Here's a sampling of some of the valuable resources you may find in the fiche drawers:

- For three states there are such rich resources that it may pay to scan the fiche drawer for counties of interest just as you might scan the bookshelves:
 - » For Massachusetts, there are loads of town records and city directories.
 - » For Virginia, there are an amazing number of church and government records, histories, and county records of many kinds, plus long runs of key VA genealogical periodicals.



» For Tennessee, statewide and county historical and biographical sources are quite strong.

• For Oregon:

» You must know about the death, marriage, and divorce Indexes from 1971 to 2005, which I believe are available only in fiche.

» The invaluable *Library Association of Portland Newspaper Index* from the 1850s to 1984, covering the *Oregonian*, *Oregon Journal* and other sources, is also only in fiche outside the Multnomah County Library main building. Great for obits, etc.

» You will also find records of several Portland United Brethren and Methodist churches;

» There are very detailed historic government land survey records published by the BLM, for apparently everywhere in Oregon (and quite a few for Washington).

• Several other states, notably Connecticut, Kentucky, and Iowa, are represented by several important sources on fiche. On the other hand, so far we have few or no fiche titles for many states and most foreign countries. Foreign exceptions include:

» Some Quebec church records; and

» Quite a few Oxfordshire, England parish registers.

• There are also long runs of many key genealogical periodicals, valuable as backup when a needed paper copy is not in our collection or is missing from the shelves. These include (but are not limited to):

» The *Boston Transcript* genealogical column 1896- 1941;

» The *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 1912-1993;

» The *Genealogical Helper* 1950-1989; and

» The GFO's own *Bulletin* 1951-1981

So be alert for the possibility that something on microfiche may help your research, and take note when your searches on OPALS pull up fiche titles. They will be quite recognizable by a generic illustration of a set of fiche at left. Note that the fiche call numbers may differ from the call numbers for books on the same subject, until the book call numbers are changed in their turn in the fullness of time. Meanwhile, it is time for what was an unintentionally well-kept secret to become a well-mined source of genealogical treasure! Go fiche!

