



NHD @ the USMM

Topic: Communications in History

The United States Marshals Museum is a strong supporter of, and believer in, National History Day (NHD)! This document will help you understand what the Museum has to offer that may assist you with your NHD topic and research.

Topic Selection

Topic selection is arguably one of the most important parts of NHD! A good topic, one that you are interested in and that has clear boundaries, can make for a great project. On the other hand, a topic you don't really care about, and/or that doesn't have clear boundaries, can make for a very challenging project. Be sure to check out the video on our website about the theme- a good understanding of the theme can also help with topic selection!

Here are a few tips we have for choosing a topic-

- 1) Choose something you are interested in! You're going to be spending a lot of time with your topic over the next few weeks/month. Choose something to investigate that you truly want to learn more about.
- 2) Local history topics are always a great choice. Learn more about where you live! Maybe take a national topic and look at it from a local perspective?
- 3) Think about topics from the opposite side of things. Has there been an instance where miscommunication effected an event or person? What happens when communications fall into the wrong hands?
- 4) Make sure your topic is not too broad. It's pretty much impossible to do a successful project on Communication in World War II. Narrow it down.
- 5) Do a little preliminary research. Are there a good amount of primary sources available on your topic? If looking at world history topics, especially ancient or medieval topics, are there enough primary sources that have been translated into English (or other languages you read)?
- 6) Make sure you can show the historical significance and lasting legacy of your topic.

Our Collections and Other Resources

Though the USMM is not an archive, and we do not have a large collection of documents, we do have a collection of over 1,500 objects associated with the history of the U.S. Marshals - and that number is constantly growing! Artifact analysis can be an important part of research- for getting a better feel for a topic, event, or person. We can also help you find documents and other resources related to the marshals, law enforcement, and closely related topics in a variety of places.

A few examples from our collection include:

- Artifacts related to the riots at Ol' Miss in 1962, such a tear gas gun and the chief deputy's helmet.
- The largest collection of Bass Reeves artifacts in the country (one of the first African American deputies west of the Mississippi River, and the most well-known), including guns, his pocket watch, and a badge.



- Docket books related to district courts in Alaska and other parts of the country.
- Oral history interviews with marshals from the Civil Rights Movement to the present.

Our Curator, Dave Kennedy, is happy to help you with access to our collection. He can be reached by calling the Museum at 479-242-1789, or email at dkennedy@usmmuseum.org.

Here are some other great places you may be able to find resources for marshal/law enforcement related topics (in no particular order.)

Fort Smith National Historic Site: The FSNHS has a great collection of late 19th century marshal and federal court related documents and information, including an online database of Fort Smith Marshals. <https://fosmcourtdatabase.nps.gov/>

National Archives and Records Administration: As I mentioned before, the USMM is not an archive, and never will be. The main reason for this is that all documents created by the federal government are required to be submitted to the National Archives- including the records of the U.S. Marshals. Because the U.S. Marshals Service falls under the Department of Justice and works closely with the federal courts, their records are part of *Record Group 21- Records of the District Courts of the United States*. www.archives.gov.

The Library of Congress: The Library of Congress holds a great collection of resources, many of them available online. We specifically suggest their Chronicles of America project, providing access to newspapers from 1789-1963 from across the country. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

Your Local Library: Your local library can be a great place for resources! Though they may not be fully open, many libraries are offering visits by appointment or even online ordering and curbside pick up. Also, if you have a library card, many libraries offer a variety of free online resources such as World Cat and other databases.

Your Local Courthouse: If you are exploring a local topic that is law enforcement or court case-related, don't hesitate to reach out to your local courthouses. Courthouses often keep years' worth of records on topics ranging from the architecture of the building itself to cases that were tried there and more, depending on if it is a county or federal courthouse.