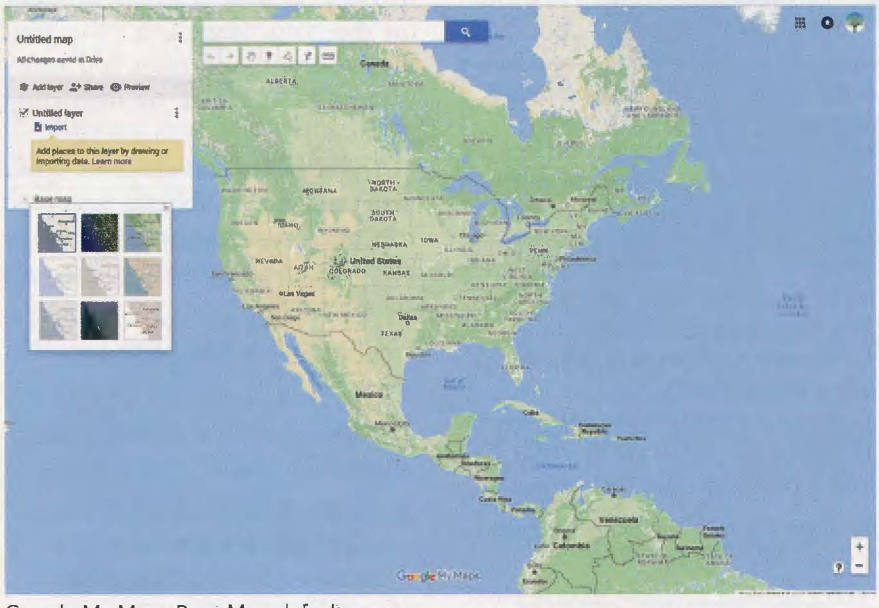
Google My Maps

Lisa A. Alzo shows you how to use this often-untapped feature of Google Drive for your genealogy

MANY GENEALOGISTS ARE LIKELY FAMILIAR WITH GOOGLE MAPS, *www.google.com*, and Google Earth, *www.google.com/intl/en/earth*, tools that respectively help with driving directions, and exploration of places in 3D or at street level. But Google also has another lesser known free mapping tool called Google My Maps you can use to create maps that show different kinds of information to share and publish online.



Google My Maps Base Map default map.

Using Google My Maps for Genealogy

As part of Google Drive, Google My Maps, *www.google.com/mymaps*, lets you customize and personalize a map of your own. On My Maps, you can save directions, add photos and other items to your map, import info to your map, style and label map content, and create custom icons.

Some examples of how you can use Google My Maps for genealogy include:

- Make your own map showing your ancestors' town of origin and where they traveled to
- Track migration patterns of an ancestor or family over time
- Show key information about a "cluster" community, marking churches, schools, social organizations, and other important places
- Map historical events that impacted your ancestors' lives (for example, the US Civil War, natural disasters, etc.)
- Create your own tour route for heritage travel

Creating Your First Map

In order to use Google My Maps, you need to first have a free Google (Gmail) account. If you don't already have an account, follow the steps at *http://mail.google.com/mail* to create one. Sign in and then navigate over to Google Drive (do this by clicking on the Google Apps icon at the right (it looks like a box made up of nine dots) and then click on the Google Drive icon. Once in Google Drive, pull down the arrow next to "My Drive" and then go to More, Google My Maps. You will then see a screen that has a blank untitled map.

You can start by clicking on "Untitled Map" and you will see a box where you can give your map a title and a description. Click "Save" and then you can do any of the following:

- Draw lines, shapes, or placemarks on the map.
- Import geographically-specific data including addresses, place names, or latitude and longitude coordinates.
- Organize your map with layers to hide or show different kinds of content.
- Style your content with different colors, placemark icons, and line widths.

Click the bar with the three dots to rename the layer, delete the layer, or open the data table in the map. All your changes will be saved in Google Drive. Click the "Learn more" link for help with adding

places to the layer by drawing or importing data.

Customizing Your Map

One of the best features is the ability to change the base map with one click. If you want a different look than the regular Google base map, you can select from nine different styles to find the one that best suits your desired map. Changing the base map can highlight your information by removing extra labels and state lines.

To change the base map:

1. Open a new or existing map in "My Maps".
2. At the bottom of the left panel, to the left of "Base map," click the drop-down arrow.
3. Hover over the thumbnails to get a description of the base map style.
4. Click any of the map thumbnails to view your data with the new base map.

Add Places and Search Results

There are two ways to save and map important places in Google My Maps: By searching for locations, or by drawing them directly on the map.

If you want to search to add a place, like a restaurant, hotel, or museum, or as a genealogist, a church, cemetery, or vital records office, you can use the search box provided.

Here is how to search for and add places:

Open a new or existing map in "My Maps".

1. In the left panel, click the layer you want to use. The selected layer will be blue on the left edge.
2. Search for the business, address, or point of interest that you want to add. A new, non-permanent layer entitled "Search: your search term" will automatically appear in the left panel and your results will show as green pins on the map.
3. To add that pin to your layers, click the result. Then click "Add to map".
4. To clear the search results, click the X above the results in the left panel. You can add up to 2,000 map features per layer.

NOTE: When you search for a place, you are typically getting modern maps/locations as results. You can always add links to historical maps online, or upload map images or historical photographs you have saved on your own computer to your map. To create maps with more extensive or detailed historical overlays, you will want to consider using Google Earth.

If you prefer to draw in order to add a place, do the following:

1. Open a new or existing map in "My Maps".
2. In the left panel, click the layer you want to use. The selected layer will be blue on the left edge.
3. In the toolbar, click "Add marker." Your cursor changes into a "+".
4. Click on the map where you want to place your marker.
5. In the info window, add a title and description.
6. To save, click "Save" or press "Enter".
7. See more information about a marker.
8. Open a new or existing map in "My Maps".
9. Click a marker on the map or in the left-hand panel. A white circle appears around the selected marker.
10. An info window appears with the content's title and other information.

You can hide a layer at any time by unclicking the check box to the left of it.

Adding and Editing Information

You can add and edit information and other content (including photos) to your map in an info window on the map, label and style your map content, and even add many placemarks at once by importing data.

Adding lines and shapes to your map can help you to trace your road trip, keep track of property lines, or box off a neighborhood where your ancestor lived.

Here is how to add a line or a shape:

1. Open a new or existing map in "My Maps".
2. In the left panel, click the layer you want to use. The selected layer will be blue on the left edge
3. In the toolbar, click the line or shape icon draw a line or shape. Choose whether you want to add a line or shape, or add a route.
4. Your cursor changes to a "+". Move the cursor to where you want to start drawing, then click once.
5. Click at each point of your line or shape. The more you click, the more precise your line or shape will be. To move the map, click and hold the mouse.
6. To finish drawing your line,

double click on the last point. To finish drawing your shape, click on the starting point.

7. Click "Enter" to save.

Import Info

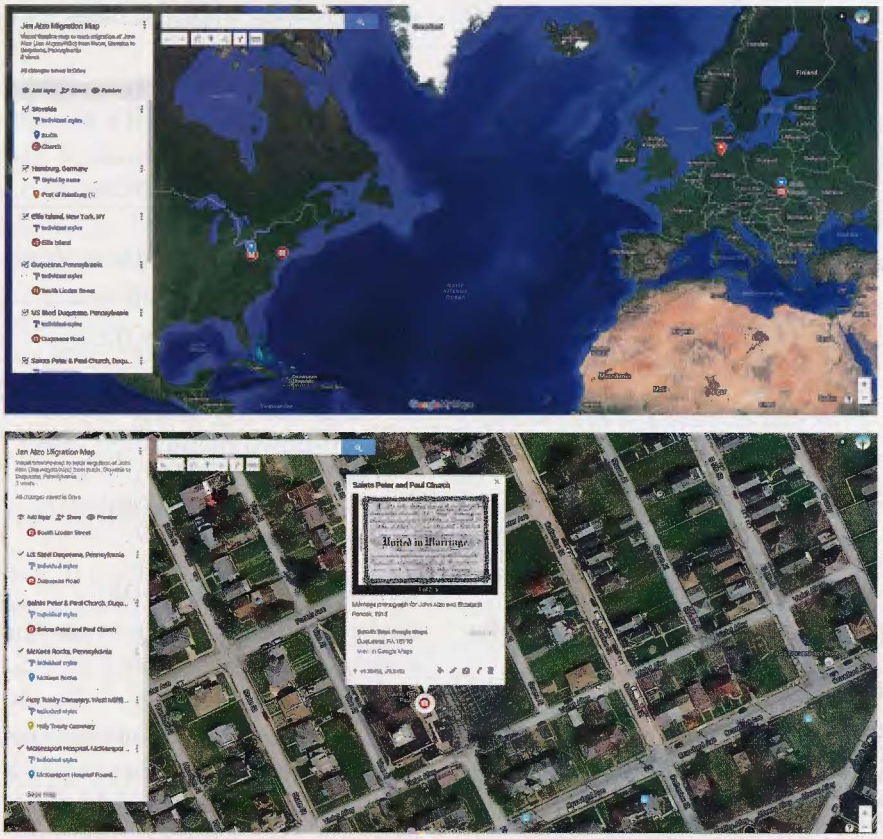
You can pull multiple pieces of geographical info into a map all at once. In the first step, you will prepare your data. You can import a CSV, TSV, KML, KMZ, GPX, or XLSX file, or a sheet from Google Drive. (Note: You can import only one data file per layer, and each file can have up to 2,000 rows).

Import Content

1. Open "My Maps" on your computer.
2. Open a new or existing map.
3. In the legend on the left, click "Add layer".
4. To give the new layer a name, click it.
5. Under the new layer, click "Import".
6. Drag a file from your computer, select a Google Drive file or open a previous "My Maps" map.
7. Click "Choose a file to upload".
8. Pick one or more columns that identify the location of your data.
9. Click "Continue".
10. Pick a single column to label the data on the map.
11. Click "Finish".
12. Places will be automatically added to the map and available in a list in the legend on the left.

Add Photos, Text, and Other Items to Your Map

Once you've created a map in My Maps, you can add and edit extra information. You can add photos and videos, text notes about places on the map, and extra info, like a description or website.



TOP: Customized Google My Map the author created to track the migration of her grandfather. BOTTOM Closer look at one layer of the migration map for Jan Alžo showing the church (from Google search) where his marriage took place and the marriage license the author uploaded to the map.

To add and manage content:

1. Open an existing map in "My Maps" on your computer.
2. Click a placemark, shape, or line on the map. In the box that appears on the map, click "Edit".
3. To add text, type in the box.
4. To add images or videos, click the camera icon.
5. Choose how you want to add a photo or video. To add more photos or videos, click the + button. To remove a photo or video, click delete.
6. Click "Save".
7. Your changes will appear in the table view as well.

Style and Label Map Content

You can color the content on your map. Perhaps you will want to do this to distinguish the different cities or towns where an ancestor lived, or places you want to visit on a genealogy research trip. It is also possible to style your placemarks, lines, and shapes. You can style all your items in a layer together, or style them separately.

To style content together:

1. Open a new or existing "My Map".
2. Select the layer you want to edit.
3. Click "Style" below the layer title.
4. Select how you want to style your layer content under the "Group places by" dropdown:

Uniform style - This choice

makes all the content look the same, but allows you to change the color and icon shape of the places at once.

Sequence of colors and letters - This choice automatically assigns a color gradient and letter to each placemark icon, keeping the same order as Individual styles. You can change the icon shape.

Individual styles - This choice gives you the option to color all of your content one by one, and give them all different styling.

Style by data column - This choice gives you the option to use a data column to group your data for styling. Click one of the column titles to select it, then click the radio button next to the type of style.

Range - This option breaks up your numeric data set into up to eight "buckets" (i.e., groups). For the definition of "buckets", see *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bucket_sort*. You have the option to have this displayed in a gradient or assign each respective bucket a unique color.

Categories - This option groups your data into matching attributes and sorts them in descending order by amount of map content present.

Select from different colors, icon shapes, and line widths. You can also choose from a large set of fun icons by clicking the More icons button, or add your own custom icons.

Once you've selected how to style the overall layer, you can modify the style, or change individual elements.

If you want to style individual places, lines, and shapes, follow these steps

1. Open a new or existing "My Map".
2. Click the piece of content in the left panel you want to style.
3. Click the Color button or a different icon shape.
4. Label your markers, lines, and shapes

You can choose to display labels for any feature directly on the map for easy browsing:

1. Open a new or existing "My Map".
2. Select the layer to which you want to add the labels.
3. Click "Style" below the layer title.
4. Click the "Set labels" drop-down menu, then select the column header you want to have label the features on your map.

Create Custom Icons

You can add your own icons for map placemarks if you'd like to use an image that's not already available. For example, add an icon that represents your store to mark locations on the map. To add a custom icon, follow these instructions:

1. Sign in to your account.
2. Open an existing map in "My Maps".
3. In the legend on the left, click the layer where you want to add an icon. Make sure there's at least one placemark on the layer.
4. In the left panel, hover over the placemark and click the color icon Color.
5. Click "More icons".
6. In the "Choose an icon" window, click Custom icon.
7. Click Image URL
8. Enter the web address for your icon. Make sure the image you're using is public.
9. Click "Select".
10. In the "Choose an icon" window, click Ok.

Formatting an Icon (links, size, and color)

Your custom icon must be a live link on the web. You can upload a .jpg, .png, .bmp, or .gif file of any size to an image hosting website, like imgur.com. My Maps will scale the icon to the right size, which is 32x32 pixels.

If you want to use an icon with a transparent background, create your custom icon in RGB color mode. Icons with a transparent background created in indexed color mode won't work.

NOTE: Custom icons are available only for the map you add them to. They aren't stored in the list of available icons for later use.

Previewing, Editing and Sharing Your Map

If you look underneath the title and description in the panel section of your map, you will see "Add Layer", "Share", and "Preview" which are all actions you can employ simply by clicking on the desired icon. "Add Layer" (the stack symbol) lets you add a new layer to your map. "Preview" enables you to see how it will look in view-only mode when you share your map. Click the "Share" button (the person silhouette with the + next to it) to generate a link for your map and share the link via email, on Google+, Facebook, or Twitter. You can set the link sharing to "On" meaning it is Public on the Web and anyone on the Internet can find and access the link and no sign-in is required, or "On" where anyone who has the link can access it (no sign-in required), or set it to "Off – Specific people" where you share the link only with specific people. You can invite people by entering names or email addresses and designate access privileges (can edit, or can view) and check a box to prevent editors from changing access to the map and adding new people who can access it. The default is set to "Private."

To permanently remove a map, go to Google Drive and right click it and then click "Remove". To be sure it is gone, go to "Empty Trash in your Google Drive".

You can also use my maps on your mobile device. For details, see *http://support.google.com/mymaps/answer/3052763?hl=en*.

My First "My Map"

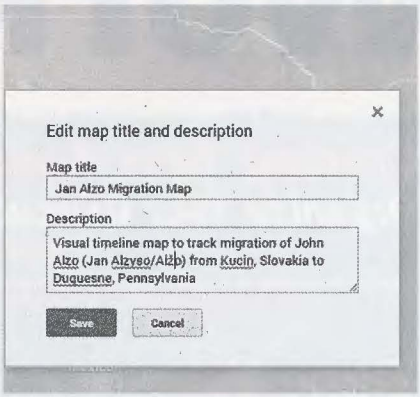
Using the instructions above, I was able to create a custom map to trace the migration of my grandfather, John Alzo (Jan Alzyso/Alžo) from Kučin, Slovakia to Duquesne, Pennsylvania. I was able to add placemarkers and photographs to the map to customize it, marking spots such as Ellis Island and the United States Steel plant where he worked for over 40 years (see screenshots). I selected the satellite "base map" and was able to upload or drag and drop photographs to Google Drive and then insert them into the places (I selected the camera icon to indicated the photographs). I searched for places/towns and then added them to the map (I used the pin icon to mark the places). The map is then stored in Google Drive and I use it as a visual timeline whenever I need to locate information about my grandfather.

Other Maps

Many users share their maps as Public and you can search for topics of interest. For example, there is a US Civil War battles map and a map of historic tours for Boston. You can search for them in Google My Maps under the Explore tab at *www.google.com/maps/d*.

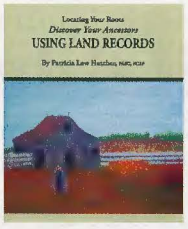
Summary

Google My Maps is a simple tool to visually plot out places and events for yourself or your ancestors. It is useful if you don't want the learning curve associated with Google Earth, but still want to track things on a customizable map. Having the maps stored and accessible in Google Drive enables you to save them and work on them on any computer.



Box to edit the map title and description of your map.

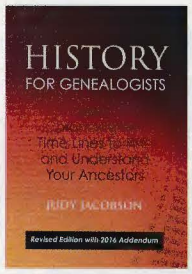
Author and lecturer LISA A. ALZO is a frequent contributor to *Internet Genealogy* and *Your Genealogy Today*.



NEW!

Locating Your Roots: Discover Your Ancestors Using Land Records

Land records — grants, deeds, mortgages, surveys, and more — are among the most valuable resources for genealogists to prove relationships and to point to new relationships. One of the strongest motivators for American immigration was land, and one of the strongest motivators for migration within America was land. Because of this, land records are the most common records available for pioneer ancestors. For many, they may be the only records. This invaluable guide will help you understand the various types of land records and give you the information you need to locate these records — and in the process, it may well open up new avenues of research for you.
Price: $43.45 ppd. ISBN: 9780806320373. Item #: GPC2595.



History for Genealogists

History for Genealogists is a rarity: It's one of the very few history books in print that is written for genealogists. Here's what we mean: Let's say you have lost track of your 1880 ancestor in Iowa. Have you considered that he might have moved there during the Economic Panic of 1873? Or maybe your forebears were living in Texas in the 1840s. Did you know that they might have come from Kentucky as part of the "Peters Colony"? Are you aware that you can learn a great deal about your ancestors if they belonged to a labor or fraternal organization like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, or the Catholic Family Life Insurance Society? In other words, knowing a little history can go a long way in helping you find elusive ancestors. Author Judy Jacobson dissects the past into scores of time lines. Researchers can also make use of a time line for the history of each of the 50 states, and, in brief, for the rest of North America, Europe, and more. Readers of the original 2009 edition will enjoy the new time lines concerning (1) life on the homefront during America's 20th-century wars; and (2) fashion and leisure in America from its beginnings through the middle of the 20th century.
Price: $43.00 ppd. ISBN: 9780806357683. Item #: CF8250.

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