

Historical Newspapers

10 Tips & Tricks for Genealogy

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Why are genealogists so attracted to historical newspapers? Often, in the absence of official governmental documents such as vital records, newspapers can help establish and prove basic birth, marriage, and death information about our ancestors. In addition, a newspaper listing, such as an obituary, can be a starting point for further research and assist in generating research “to-do” list ideas.



- Search broad, then narrow.** Your initial search should involve a surname and an event name such as **Smithson birth** or **Smithson born**. Then narrow results with phrases in quotation marks or use Boolean operators to add or exclude words.
- Don't rely on OCR and indexing.** The OCR process used to convert scanned images to searchable text is not foolproof. There can be a 20% margin of error! Make sure you browse the images and use a variety of name variations and search strategies.
- Look for “ ___ Years Ago” listings.** If you can't locate a birth or wedding announcement, that event may be summarized on an anniversary date. Weddings are often mentioned in a “25 Years Ago This Week” section or similar listing. The same for births and other important local events.
- “Back search” news clippings.** How many times have you encountered an obituary or news clipping mounted on an index card . . . with no date or newspaper name? Take a phrase from the text and enter it into Google or another search engine. You may find that the newspaper has been digitized.
- Understand the “historical vocabulary.”** Know how modern-day terms were described in the period in which you are searching. A medical term such a **tuberculosis** might appear as **consumption**. Prior to World War II there was no World War I . . . it was often called The Great War. A name might be abbreviated . . . **Chas.** for **Charles**.
- Understand a newspaper's “layout formula.”** When starting, look at a typical issue and you'll realize that **Local News** usually appears on Page _____. The same goes for **Classified Ads** and **Legal Notices**. Finding what you need is easier when you know the layout.
- Not all newspapers are on-line.** Local libraries and historical societies may have bound volumes available for historical newspapers. In addition, many newspapers are still available only on microfilm or microfiche.
- Remember to save the entire page!** Always save the entire newspaper page image and not just a clipping. Note the original source of the clipped image: annotate the image with source citation text or use metadata to digitally add source citation information to the digital file.
- Take name changes into account.** Towns and cities periodically changed their names. Street names were also changed. In addition, some cities had their street grid “renumbered” so that a modern-day street address might be very different than that same address in 1910 or another year.
- Don't forget “point of origin” newspapers.** When ancestors migrated to a new location, very often they wrote a letter to the local newspaper updating residents as to their journey and progress.

Check out the **Historical Newspaper Resource List** on the back page!

Historical Newspaper Resource List

- **Historical Newspapers Collection – Ancestry.com (\$)**
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/group/histnews>
- **Cyndi's List – Newspapers**
<http://www.cyndislist.com/newspapers/>
- **Elephind**
“The goal of Elephind.com is to make it possible to search all the world’s online historic newspapers from one place. We aren’t there yet, but we are adding more newspapers every day.”
<https://www.elephind.com>
- **Free Newspaper Archives in the US**
<http://www.freewebnewspaperarchives.us/>
- **GenealogyBank (\$)**
“Search over 1 billion genealogy records to discover your family history. Research the largest digitized newspaper archive online to trace your family genealogy.”
<http://www.genealogybank.com>
- **Google News Archive – Newspapers**
Thousands of newspapers worldwide.
<http://news.google.com/newspapers>
- **Newspaper Abstracts**
Over 130,000 pages of user-submitted newspaper abstracts.
<http://newspaperabstracts.com/>
- **NewspaperArchive.com (\$)**
“NewspaperARCHIVE.com, the largest historical newspaper database online, contains tens of millions of newspaper pages from 1607 to present.”
<http://newspaperarchive.com/>
- **Newspapers.com (\$)**
“Newspapers.com is the online home of 86+ million pages of historical newspapers from 3,400 newspapers from around the United States and beyond.” Part of Ancestry.com.
<https://www.newspapers.com>
- **Old Fulton New York Post Cards**
Over 29 million pages of historical newspapers from the US and Canada
<http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>
- **Online Historical Newspapers Website**
<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home>
- **The Ancestor Hunt – Newspapers**
Extensive resources for newspaper research including newspaper listings and educational articles.
<http://www.theancestorhunt.com/newspapers.html>
- **The Olden Times**
<http://theoldentimes.com>