



Newspapers: Windows into the lives of our Ancestors and so much more!

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Abstract:

Every community had a newspaper of some sort, whether local or larger. These records hold hidden treasures that help to bring one's ancestors lives and struggles as though they were happening this very day on many occasions.

These newspapers did not miss any opportunity to share good and bad news of those in the community and surrounding areas. Their one goal was to help their community be aware of all that was important and pertained to their own lives.

Births, marriages, deaths, hangings, accidents, and even trial coverage's can often be found when all you are looking for is a simple birth, marriage or death date. Surprises lurk around each column of these newspapers and if one is not careful, one can become deeply engrossed in a particular article to the point of feeling like you are really there and are able to empathize with all who involved in whatever the drama may be at that moment in history.

In spite of this, one has to look at this information from the viewpoint of the writer to the reader during that time period. Taking into consideration all that is happening beyond the area of that community and into the world they are living in at that time.

As these newspapers were printed on a weekly basis, how timely was the information? Did newspaper deadlines prevent a story from being fully told? Were pertinent details left out or were assumptions printed instead?

Are these newspapers accessible today? How are they accessible? While some preservation measures have been taken, what additional measures are being taken to preserve these mirrors into the lives of our forebears and the environment and culture that filled their lives? Just what does the future hold for newspapers?

Keywords: Newspapers, Archives, History, Cultures, Genealogist, Family Historian

Newspapers: Windows into the lives of our Ancestors and so much more!

Today one can pick up a newspaper and learn about the current events as well as view information on those who have passed from this life onto the next along with a lot of additional information connected with the area represented by the newspaper. While newspapers have been around for a long time, there was a time when they had to be licensed and were often censored.¹

The history of newspapers is fascinating and amazing when one couples it with the all the advances that have taken place over the centuries to bring us to this point in time today. When one considers how much even the shape, size, and materials used have changed, not to mention the contents, it is truly a treasure trove waiting to be tapped into by those interested in the story behind the names, dates and places.

The *FamilySearch Research Wiki* states that "English newspapers began in 1620 and the content was limited to foreign news with a tax placed on each sheet".² The *London Gazette* claims to be the oldest surviving English newspaper and the oldest published newspaper in the United Kingdom with the first publication dated 7 November 1665 as *The Oxford Gazette*.³ The first official (allowed by the governor of the time) newspaper in the United States was in 1704 and called "The Boston News-Letter" and came out weekly.

According to Heber, "the first English daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, commenced publication in 1702; however, as with other early publications stamp duties were levied on paper as well as the newspapers from 1712 which made production costly."⁴ With such a rough start to the printed newspaper it is a wonder that the newspaper survived to what it is today.

¹ Herber, Mark D.. "Newspapers and Elections." *Ancestral trails: the complete guide to British genealogy and family history*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub. in association with the Society of Genealogists, 1997. 264-284. Print.

² "England Newspapers." *FamilySearch Research Wiki*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/>>

³ "Viewing Page 1 of Issue 1." *London Gazette* Home Page. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/1/pages/1>>.

⁴ Herber, Mark D.. "Newspapers and Elections." *Ancestral trails: the complete guide to British genealogy and family history*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub. in association with the Society of Genealogists, 1997. 264-284. Print

By the late 1700s there were many morning newspapers being published that also had births, deaths and marriages for the gentry in the beginning and eventually leading to including such information about the ordinary individual in the late 1800s unless they were mentioned in connection with a crime investigation.

The definition according to the *Merriam-Webster's* dictionary for newspaper is "*a set of large sheets of paper that have news stories, information about local events, advertisements, etc., and that are folded together and sold every day or every week*".⁵ Even at this point in time, the definition mentions *local events*. It is these stories that help bridge the gap between time periods and generations as one discovers what life was like during their lifetimes.

Every genealogist and family historian would love to discover a personal journal penned by one of their ancestors which would shed a small light into their lives. While some have these journals, most do not and yet, individuals have been writing columns of stories recording every day events since the late 1500s.

To gain a perspective from a specific time period, newspapers can help to convey insights into attitudes, people and events of that era and yet are often overlooked as searching through them can be a daunting task often with unsatisfactory results. The researcher essentially had to read all through page after page and day after day of newspapers hoping to find some relevant details about an ancestor or family member which was exceedingly tedious.⁶

The news in these publications varied according to the locale and definitely provides clues as to the life styles of different time periods. In addition, if one conducted a proper search, one would check multiple papers from the surrounding areas to get a feel for the culture and any bias on the part of the newspapers, their writers and owners. This is one of the major issues with newspapers and how they are used to sway whole communities depending on the political climate at the time. Even today, many are slanted one way or another depending on the writer and/or the publisher.

A genealogist/family historian will look through the whole paper depending on the time period and the search objective. The reasons are many; however, a recent study concludes that:

Newspapers in Great Britain and America had a broad readership that resulted in enormous influences from their content. The major themes of the study are the effect

⁵ newspaper. (n.d.). Merriam-Webster. Retrieved January 17, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/newspaper>

⁶ Tanner, J. (n.d.). Adding to your Genealogy with Online Digital Newspapers. TechTips. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <https://familysearch.org/techtips/2012/04/adding-to-your-genealogy-with-online-digital-newspapers>

of newspapers on individual readers, society in general, and the political world on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, the newspapers became mirrors of the society in which they were produced and help show the differences that developed in Britain and America.⁷

It is the phrase "*mirrors of the society in which they were produced*" that make newspapers so valuable to genealogists and family historians. As newspapers would report the current news of the day, they would also report on relevant societal information, foreign news stories and all things deemed important to those in charge of the newspaper. In fact, governments and organization are quickly realizing that much of their history has been reported in newspapers.⁸

So one has to wonder, what is so valuable that can be found in these older newspapers? While the following is a partial list in answer to this question, it is worth mentioning that many of these are still in newspapers of today:

- Advertisements
- Births
- Businesses
- Church activities and affiliations
- Clothing styles
- Crime Investigations
- Death notices and/or investigations
- Land sales
- Legal notices
- Marriages
- Military service
- Obituaries
- Occupations
- Social events
- Sporting events
- Taxation

Local newspapers may also contain stories that include details about families that may not be found in any other source.⁹ As an early mode of preservation, most newspapers have been

⁷ Humphrey, C. S. (2013). Reading newspapers: Press and public in eighteenth-century britain and america. *Journalism History*, 38(4), 257. Retrieved 18 January 2014, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1321663332?accountid=41759>

⁸ Tanner, J. (n.d.). Adding to your Genealogy with Online Digital Newspapers. TechTips. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <https://familysearch.org/techtips/2012/04/adding-to-your-genealogy-with-online-digital-newspapers>

⁹ Digital Historical Newspapers. (n.d.). FamilySearch Research Wiki. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Digital_Historical_Newspapers

microfilmed and are usually located at a local library for viewing on a microfilm reader which is still a very tedious task, but for some newspapers this is the only way to view them.

Since about the late 1980s, newspapers started to be digitized which makes this resource easier to access. Today, most of the online newspaper archives are *any word* searchable which has its advantages and disadvantages. Searching for an ancestor's name is no more difficult than searching in Google or any other online search engine. Some of the larger collections charge a fee for searching, but there are other large collections that are free.¹⁰ In addition, there are some fee-based that are viewed with a personal subscription or made available through a local library.

The main disadvantage to this type of search is at times, the results are not quite what could be expected from the search. For instance, a recent search of the surname *Chapman* in the *Times Recorder*, Ohio, in 1923, provided a story of a "Mr. and Mrs. George W. Hanes of Chapman street, have be notified...".¹¹ The street name of Chapman is not the family surname being researched. Other times the subject or name you are search will be split into two and you'll have part of the search word in one place on the newspaper page and the rest of it somewhere else on that same page. While these results are frustrating, it is getting better as digitizing becomes smarter.

One of Britain's oldest newspapers, the *London Times* is available online at a variety of locations including the Family History Library (FHL) which covers 1785 to 1985. This publication was originally called *The Daily Universal Register* but was changed on January 1, 1788 and founded by John Walter who was also its editor.¹² Viewing this newspaper online requires a subscription through Gale Digital Collections, Fold3.com (1785-1919), and/or Ancestry.com (1788-1833).

In the following example, after a long trial, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and William Wakefield and Frances Wakefield (the wife of Mr. Wakefield, the father of the other defendants) were found guilty. Further, the defendants changed their plea from *not guilty* to *guilty* for the abduction of Miss Turner, and were order to stand committed in Lancaster Castle.

¹⁰ Tanner, J. (n.d.). Adding to your Genealogy with Online Digital Newspapers. TechTips. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <https://familysearch.org/techtips/2012/04/adding-to-your-genealogy-with-online-digital-newspapers>

¹¹ Infant Alleged Cause of Murders Located. (1923, November 17). The Times Recorder, p. 2. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <http://goo.gl/sQzrBq>

¹² The Times (British newspaper). (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/596228/The-Times>

referred to the case of Mrs. Wakefield.

The Jury, after retiring for 20 minutes, returned with a verdict of guilty against Edward Gibbon Wakefield, William Wakefield, and Frances Wakefield (the wife of Mr. Wakefield, the father of the other defendants.)

When the verdict was announced, strong marks of approbation were heard in court.

Mr. Baron HULLOCK then inquired what course the prosecutors meant to take respecting the second indictment.

Mr. Sergeant Cross requested time for consideration till nine o'clock on Saturday morning.

The Court then adjourned at half-past nine o'clock on Friday night.

SATURDAY MORNING.

At the meeting of the Court this morning, the defendants (Edward Gibbon Wakefield and William Wakefield) were indicted under the statute of the 4th and 5th of Philip and Mary, for the abduction of Miss Turner. They withdrew their former plea of "not guilty," and pleaded "guilty" to the 3rd count.

On the motion of Mr. Sergeant Cross, they were then ordered to stand committed in Lancaster Castle.

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Article from *The London Times*, 1827

An individual with those family names would be most interested to read the whole three long pages of this trial for any additional information with regards to family members.

In this next article from the London Times, a Thomas Hornby Morland was indicted for marrying Miss Mary Simmons on 23 September while his first wife was still living. It further stats he had married Ann Chapman in 1787 and left her in September and then was married a second time. Mary Simmons was the daughter of a very respectable farmer, near Wolverhampton.

The article goes on to say that they got as far as Dumfries and her father was able to bring her home. The trial information reported provides dates for each marriage, parent's names of both Mary Simmons and Ann Chapman, their residences along with additional details surrounding the relationships and how this travesty was handled by the various individuals involved.

¹³ Trial of the Wakefields. (1827, March 26). *The Times*, pp. 2-4. Retrieved January 18, 2013, from <http://goo.gl/UTXZTy>

OLD BAILEY.

SIXTH DAY.

BIGAMY.

Thomas Horrity Morland was indicted for feloniously marrying Miss Mary Simmons, at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, on the 23d of September last, his first wife being still living.

The Counsel for the Prosecution observed, in his opening to the Jury, that this offence had obtained to such a degree, as to be equally pernicious in its consequences with any crime with which this country was infested. This was a case of great enormity, and deserved the most severe punishment of the law. He was afraid the law showed more indulgence to offenders of this class, than to many others. He was afraid the punishment was not adequate to the offence.

The circumstances of this case were shortly these:—The prisoner in the year 1787, married a woman of the name of Ann Chapman; and in September last, he married at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, a young woman of the name of Mary Simmons, the daughter of a very respectable farmer, near Wolverhampton. He had placed her with a friend in London, for the purpose of learning the business of a mantua maker. She was unfortunate enough to be noticed by the prisoner in the street. In consequence of the arts of conversion which he possessed, he at length obtained an interview. They then entered into a correspondence, and on the 23d of September last they were married at St. Paul's, Covent Garden. He immediately took her out of town, and went as far as Dumfries, in Scotland.—The father soon got notice of it, and made several journeys to London and Dumfries, to recover his lost daughter.—The father found her at Dumfries, took her back to his house, and scolded the offender.

The night before the prisoner was married at St. Paul's, he had left his former wife, Ann Hardcastle, for marrying whom he is likewise to be tried at Suffolk, she not being his first wife.

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Article from *The London Times*, 1791

To the genealogist looking for what happened to these individuals, their relationships are clearly stated in this newspaper, but also because this was held in the Bailey Court, one could go to that trial record source and get the rest of the information regarding this case of bigamy, some of these are online at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>.

As one looks through the history of newspapers, one of the most glaring observances is that most of these newspapers are printed on cheap paper and once exposed to the elements of nature and improper storage, they begin to deteriorate rapidly causing concern by historians

¹⁴ Bigamy. (1791, January 20). The Times, p. 4. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <http://goo.gl/Remo7r>

for their loss before preservation can be implemented.¹⁵ This is evident from the condition of the digitized images just in two articles above from *The London Times*.

To try to prevent this from occurring, newspaper digitizing projects are everywhere including the news. “Google's doing it, and Microsoft is too. Some may think you need to be a gigantic corporation or huge university to tackle this technology. But in reality, institutions of all sizes can jump into the fray.”¹⁶ Organizations of all sizes and shapes have stepped up the task of digitizing the newspapers from their local and often surrounding areas.

Originally Google.com was very much involved in a newspaper digitization project they began in 2008; however, they abandoned it in May, 2011, alerting their partners of the decision to discontinue their current efforts to digitize the world’s newspaper archives and make them available online. They had completed 2000 newspapers with about 60 million pages available online under *News*.¹⁷

At this point, the Library of Congress began its project entitled, *Chronicling America, Historic American Newspapers*. Their website states they have nearly 7, 000,000 pages available for searching. Here is a screen shot of their main page:

A screenshot of the Chronicling America website. The header includes the Library of Congress logo, search fields for 'Search Loc.gov' and 'GO', and links for 'ASK A LIBRARIAN', 'DIGITAL COLLECTIONS', and 'LIBRARY CATALOGS'. Below the header, the National Endowment for the Humanities logo is visible. The main content area features a search bar with dropdowns for 'All states', date range 'from 1836 to 1922', and a text field for 'enter one or more search words'. To the right is a link to the 'US Newspaper Directory, 1690-Present'. On the left, there's a sidebar with links for 'About Chronicling America', 'About the Site and API', 'Recommended Topics', 'Help', and 'More Resources' which lists 'National Digital Newspaper Program', 'NDNP Award Recipients', 'Newspaper and Current Periodicals Reading Room', 'Ask LC Newspaper & Current Periodicals Librarian', and 'Historic Newspapers on Flickr' (part of the LC Flickr Commons photostream). The central part of the page shows a grid of three historical newspaper front pages: 'Ashland Tidings' (Bonn, Or.), 'The Bryan Daily Eagle' (Bryan, Tex.), and 'New-York Tribune' (New York [N.Y.]). Above the grid, a banner reads '100 Years Ago Today: Monday, January 19, 1914 (26 issues)'.

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¹⁵ Tanner, J. (n.d.). Adding to your Genealogy with Online Digital Newspapers. TechTips. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from <https://familysearch.org/techtips/2012/04/adding-to-your-genealogy-with-online-digital-newspapers>

¹⁶ Schlumpf, K., & Zschernitz, R. (2007). WEAVING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT BY DIGITIZING LOCAL HISTORY. Computers in Libraries, 27(3), 10-15. Retrieved from

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/231147502?accountid=41759>

¹⁷ Landgraf, G. (2011, May 24). Google Ends Newspaper Digitization Project. American Libraries Magazine. Retrieved January 19, 2014, from <http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/google-ends-newspaper-digitization-project>

18 Chronicling America « Library of Congress. (n.d.). News about Chronicling America RSS. Retrieved January 16, 2014, from <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

In addition, this website has a *US Newspaper Directory* covering 1690 to the present, listing of nearly all the newspapers published in America with an explanation of where copies of these newspapers are found, this directory is located here
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/titles>.

Societies and even local libraries are also providing a service to their communities and conducting digitization projects and making access available with no limited hours or fees if possible. These efforts have brought about a renewed interest with their members who bring others to help with these projects as well as adding their own contributions. Their efforts allow students, researchers and others the ability to access these valuable records anytime they need without the original restrictions connected to many of these delicate and fragile newspaper collections.¹⁹

There are large non-profit and for profit corporations who have extensive collections of digitized newspapers. The following are some of these collections:

- The British Newspaper Archive
 - Has about 5 million pages and is administered by Brightsolid
 - One can search but there is a fee for downloading
- 19th Century British Library Newspapers
 - Has over 3 million pages, 70 UK and Irish National and local titles
 - Subscription service available for Universities and libraries
 - Available at the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah
- Palmer's Index to *The London Times*, 1791-1941
 - Available for free at <http://www.internet.org>
- NewsBank.com
 - Over 5,000 newspaper titles
 - Available through Universities and Libraries
- Ancestry.com
 - 1,396 USA Collections
 - 58 European Collections
 - 23 Canadian Collections
 - 4 Australian Collections
 - 1 Africa Collection
 - 2 Asian Collections

¹⁹ Schlumpf, K., & Zschernitz, R. (2007). WEAVING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT BY DIGITIZING LOCAL HISTORY. *Computers in Libraries*, 27(3), 10-15. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/231147502?accountid=41759>

- FindMyPast.com
 - 120 million pages from 50 states, Washington, DC, Panama and the Virgin Islands
 - Irish Newspapers 1820-1951
 - Section Title: *Newspapers, directories and social history*
 - *British Newspapers 1710-1953* (ongoing 10 year project started in May, 2010)
- WorldVitalRecord.com
 - Newspaper Archive Collection (over 2,100, 000, 000 names)
- GenealogyBank.com
 - 6,500 Newspapers 1690-today
- MyHeritage Genealogy
 - 104,316,164 Records and other publications

While there is no complete list of online digital archives of newspapers, Wikipedia has attempted to provide such a list in their article entitled *List of online newspapers archives* available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives. While the list is far from complete, it is most impressive.

[Wikipedia:List of online newspaper archives](#)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This is a list of free and [pay wall](#) blocked digital online newspaper archives. Most are scanned from microfilm into [pdf](#), [gif](#) or similar graphic formats and many of the graphic archives have been indexed into searchable text databases utilizing [optical character recognition](#) (OCR) technology. Some newspapers do not allow access to the OCR-converted text until it is proofread. Older newspapers are still in image format, and newer newspapers are available as full text that can be cut and pasted. Most text is in ASCII, some are using Unicode for diacritical marks not available in ASCII. [Google](#) now indexes many newspaper archives.

Some local public libraries subscribe to certain online newspaper archives. For instance, some UK public libraries subscribe to *The Times Digital Archive* (1785–1985), and any member of one of these libraries is able to access this resource free from their home computer using their library card number. In many instances, library access may be restricted to in-building use, in the confines of the library itself, and not a service otherwise available away from that structure to cardholders.

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Another two sites that are working on providing a similar list is *Online Historical Newspapers Website* which covers Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico and the United States and *Newspaper*

²⁰ Wikipedia:List of online newspaper archives. (2014, January 16). Wikipedia. Retrieved January 19, 2014, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives

*Archives.*²¹ ²² For additional sites check out the FamilySearch Research Wiki article entitled *Digital Historical Newspapers.*²³

With digitization going on throughout the world in reference to historical newspapers, one should not overlook today's digital contributions through online newspapers like *Paper.li*. This paper allows anyone to be a publisher and many have taken advantage of this service provided by *Smallrivers SA* in Lausanne, Switzerland. Their philosophy is:

We believe that people (and not machines) are the ones qualified to curate the content that matters most. We also think that these same people can greatly help their own communities to find their way through this "massive content world" we live in. We're here to help!

Every day, around the world, millions of articles are featured on Paper.li, benefiting millions of readers. We are just at the beginning of an exciting new adventure and we think we're on to something good.

*We love the semantic web, we respect our content creators, we strive for simplicity, and we thrive on feedback.*²⁴

With this service, one can start an online newspaper instantly, the main thing to remember though is the amount of work it takes to produce even a weekly newspaper, in spite of that, there are many individuals who have taken the plunge and created a newspaper on their passion; whether it is genealogy, archives, history, libraries or even research, any topic is available. Here is a sample of the online newspaper entitled *Technology in Libraries* by Stan Bogdanov.

The screenshot shows the Paper.li homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the 'paper.li' logo on the left and a search icon on the right. Below the navigation bar, the main headline reads 'Create your online newspaper in minutes.' in a large, bold, serif font. Underneath this headline, there is a subtext: 'Automatically find, publish & promote engaging articles, photos and videos from across the web.' A horizontal blue line runs across the page below this text.

²¹ Robbins, Miriam . "Online Historical Newspapers." Online Historical Newspapers. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Jan. 2014. <<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home>>

²² "XooxleAnswers." XooxleAnswers. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.xooxleanswers.com/free-newspaper-archives/>>

²³ "Digital Historical Newspapers." FamilySearch Research Wiki. Intellectual Reserve, Inc, n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2014. <https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Digital_Historical_Newspapers>.

²⁴ About Us. (n.d.). paper.li. Retrieved January 19, 2014, from <http://paper.li/introduction.html>

Technology in Libraries

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FROM THE EDITOR

Stan Bogdanov

I dabble in Instructional Multimedia, Interactive Tutorials, Mobile Apps, Web Development, Programming, Music and Video Creation, Gadgets and Geekery. Say Hi!

Editor's note

This is an attempt to assemble information from all-over Twitter about libraries and technology. Various topics will be presented. Some glitches in the search algorithm might result in unrelated content, but overall it should be a pretty focused daily paper! Enjoy!

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As one can see, Stan Bogdanov's topics are current and one can subscribe to receive his newspaper as often as he publishes right to your email. These newspapers are all formatted in a similar fashion and include blog articles, videos, photos and technology with the emphasis being on the main topic, which in this case is *Technology in Libraries*.

In closing, genealogical and family history researchers would be wise to search through all newspapers where there is a possibility of an ancestor or the whole family; to miss this opportunity could be the one time the identity of an ancestor is lost. Newspapers can and often provide vital information, paint a written picture of their culture and shed light on the historical happenings of their time period, benefits that may not be found in any other resources.

²⁵ Bogdanov, S. (n.d.). Technology in Libraries. paper.li. Retrieved January 19, 2014, from <http://paper.li/StanRB/1295377602>