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Finding the News You Can Use

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Introduction

Newspapers print articles of local, regional, national, and worldwide interest. Newspapers printed since the mid-1800s provide details of direct relevance to family historians and for historical background. Often the greatest challenge is finding the newspaper edition.

Researchers access newspapers in digital collections, on microfilm and occasionally the original edition. Historians use newspapers with published histories, civil records, church records, and original records to solve research problems.

Newspapers printed after the year 1925 may not be available online because of copyright restrictions. 21st century newspapers often have digital copies.

Uses of Newspapers for Family History Research

A newspaper article might say when an individual was born, celebrated a birthday, attended or hosted a party, was in school, was engaged, was married, entered military service, completed military service, was employed, had a child, had an accident, changed employment, moved in or out of the area, was sick, visited relatives, hosted visiting relatives, received an award, died, and was buried.

Specialized newspapers come from ethnic, religious, racial, and political groups. Newspapers may serve as a substitute for civil records that were destroyed.

Many English speaking newspapers reprinted articles from other places. Search various newspapers for articles of interest. Newspapers may report events in the life of local inhabitants even when these events occurred elsewhere.

Not all countries enjoy freedom of expression. Some countries only have newspapers that the government supports.

Strategies for Locating Newspapers

Use the following techniques to locate newspapers:

1. Check Internet Websites. Many of the websites will charge a fee or may be accessible through a library subscription.
2. Search multiple websites and consider a variety of search terms. Combine surnames, localities, given names, and events in search parameters.

3. Check bibliographies of published newspapers in an area.
4. Use Interlibrary Loan for microfilm copies.
5. Check newspapers from a week or two before or after major family events to find mention of out-of-town visitors and relatives.

Some newspapers are transcribed online but most are every word searchable through optical character recognition (OCR). Because of OCR technology, newspaper searches provide wonderful results depending on the accuracy of the word recognition.

Publications

William Forsyth, "PRoQuest: Digital Newspapers" presented at the National Genealogical Society Family History Conference, May 2013.

FamilySearch Wiki. "United States Newspapers"
https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Newspapers

J. Mark Lowe, "Newspapers: The Story of the West" presented at the National Genealogical Society Family History Conference, May 2013.

U.S. Library of Congress. Chronicling America. Web links to many digital newspaper collections in the USA.
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

U.S. Library of Congress. The Reading Room.
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/oltitles.html>

Wikipedia, "List of online newspaper archives." The IFLA Newspapers Section maintains this wiki page.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives

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