

# News of Their Deaths: Finding Obituaries and Notices

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Newspapers can be a rich source of information about the vital events of an ancestor. For over two centuries newspapers have published notices of death, and more recently, detailed obituaries that may contain rich details on the life and family of an individual. Many obituaries list immediate and extended family members and relationships, which can be valuable to genealogy research.

## Tips on Searching for Obituaries:

- ◆ An obituary may have been published not only where your ancestor died, but also in the area where your ancestor lived previously. Broaden your search to multiple localities and newspapers.
- ◆ Many of the newspaper websites will allow you to narrow the search by date range. Try searching the date of death and two weeks afterward.
- ◆ If you do not receive very many hits when searching for an ancestor, try searching by surname only. If you receive too many hits, then use quotation marks around the name to narrow the search to exact hits.
- ◆ Women may be listed with their husband's name such as "Mrs. Ronald Packer" or by their own name such as Hazel Packer. If the obituary names a woman's brothers, you have a clue to her maiden name.
- ◆ Search alternate spellings for both the given name and the surname, and search with initials and the surname.
- ◆ Sometimes the only way to find the death notice is to browse the newspaper. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology has limits, and names may be missed, or mixed up in the index.
- ◆ Local libraries may have obituary indexes for local newspapers. Sometimes these are available online, but many are in card catalogs onsite. Contact the local library to locate these indexes.
- ◆ Details included in obituaries varied by time and place.



## Types of information you can find in an obituary

The more recent an obituary is, the more information it may contain. Older death notices may contain little personal information.

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|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Death date       | • Cause of death        | • Names of grandchildren |
| • Death location   | • Birth date / location | • Names of siblings      |
| • Name of spouse   | • Residences            | • Occupation             |
| • Names of parents | • Names of children     | • Military service       |
| • Age              | • Marriage date/place   | • Schools attended       |
| • Religion         | • Burial information    |                          |

## General Newspaper Research Hints and Suggestions:

- ◆ Many communities had more than one newspaper, so search all of them including smaller papers.
- ◆ Local newspapers contain more information on individuals than larger daily papers.
- ◆ Digitized papers are every word searchable and make finding individuals easier.
- ◆ READ the newspaper to learn more about the community in which your ancestor lived.
- ◆ **Remember to put the citation on the copy of the article. Include: exact title of newspaper, date, page number, and location on the page for future reference.**

## Visualization of the Growth of Newspapers in the U.S., 1690-2011

[http://www.stanford.edu/group/ruralwest/cgi-bin/drupal/visualizations/us\\_newspapers](http://www.stanford.edu/group/ruralwest/cgi-bin/drupal/visualizations/us_newspapers)

This map from Stanford University plots over 140,000 U.S. newspapers from 1690 to the present. The data comes from "Chronicling America," a Library of Congress project. You can slide the bar across the top to change the time period, and zoom into a certain state to see all of the cities. Click on the city to see a list of newspapers published in that city at the bottom of the screen. You can **filter the listing by language** for immigrant populations.



## Locating Historic Newspapers:

**Step 1** – Identify newspapers published in the location and time you are researching.

### Library of Congress -- Chronicling of America

Search the "U.S. Newspaper Directory, 1690-Present" for information about 153,000 newspapers published over three centuries. Enter a state and county as well as date range to pull up a list of newspaper published in the area of interest. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/titles/>

**Step 2** -- Locate a copy of the newspaper you would like to research.

- ◆ Once you have found a newspaper of interest in the "U.S. Newspaper Directory," scroll to the bottom to see the "holdings," including which libraries have newspaper or microfilm.
- ◆ Search online sites of digital newspapers to see if they have the paper you would like to research.
- ◆ Search World Cat, an online catalog linking over 10,000 library catalogs worldwide, for a library that may have the newspaper on microfilm. <http://www.worldcat.org/>

**Step 3** – Access the newspaper

- ◆ Digital images online
- ◆ Microfilm on interlibrary loan
- ◆ Search original papers onsite or through a library or historical society



## **FREE Newspaper Websites**

### **Library of Congress: Chronicling America**

This site provides access to more than six million searchable newspaper pages from over 153,000 newspaper titles, published in 32 states and the District of Columbia between 1836 and 1922.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

**The Ancestor Hunt** – Website by Kenneth Marks that has links, articles and tutorials for researching in newspapers. He has links by state to newspapers that have been digitized and are available online.

<http://www.theancestorhunt.com/newspapers.html>

**CURRENT Newspapers** -- Directories by state of current newspaper websites:

<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/usstate/usatable.htm> or <http://www.50states.com/news/>

## **Obituary Collections Online**

- Obituaries.com** – current obituaries from funeral homes (not necessarily published in papers)
- Legacy.com** - current obituaries from funeral homes
- GenealogyBank.com** – Recent Newspaper Obituaries (daily feed from hundreds of papers)
- FamilySearch.org obituary collections** (new emphasis on indexing obituaries)
- Search for state specific collections, such as these for Louisiana and Ohio

<http://neworleanspubliclibrary.org/obits/obits.htm>

<http://index.rbhayes.org/hayes/index/>

## **Subscription Newspaper Websites**

**Genealogy Bank** (a division of Newsbank)

<http://www.genealogybank.com>

Historical Newspapers (1690-1980) - includes over 7,000 newspapers from all 50 states

America's Obituaries (1977 to current) - includes more than 229 million obituaries

**Newspaper Archive**

<http://www.newspaperarchive.com/>

Contains 2 billion newspaper pages from 1607 to present, with many from 1900 to the present.

**Newspapers.com**

<http://www.newspapers.com/>

Contains over 130 million pages from 3,700 newspapers from the 1700s to 2009.

**ProQuest Historical Newspaper Collections** – available for institutional subscription and includes select big city United States newspapers – check your local library for access

<http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>

**19th Century U.S. Newspapers** - 1.8 million pages from over 500 newspapers in the U.S.

**Early American Newspapers, Series I, 1690-1876** - one million pages of early newspapers.

Access to these databases is available through institutions and genealogical societies such as The New England Historic Genealogical Society at <http://www.americanancestors.org/search/external-databases/> or the Godfrey Memorial Library at <http://www.godfrey.org>

# Locating Historic Newspapers – A Research Checklist

## Links to Major Newspaper Collections

- The Ancestor Hunt at <http://www.theancestorhunt.com/newspapers.html>

## Online – Major collections of obituaries

- Obituaries.com
- Legacy.com
- GenealogyBank.com – Recent Newspaper Obituaries
- FamilySearch.org obituary collections

## Online – Major collections of digitized newspapers

- Chronicling of America at the Library of Congress (free)
- Genealogy Bank (\$)
- Newspaper Archive (\$)
- Newspapers.com (\$)
- Newspapers at subscription sites: Ancestry.com / Fold3.com / My Heritage.com (\$)
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers (institutional subscription)

## Online – State, Regional or Local Collections

Many historical societies, libraries and other private enterprises are digitizing newspapers and making them available online.

- State digital newspaper collections
- State historical societies
- Regional collections, such as Northern New York -- see <http://news.nnyln.net/> or <http://fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>
- Public and university libraries
- 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (institutional subscription)
- Early American Newspapers, Series I, 1690-1876 (institutional subscription)
- Google the name of the newspaper, or Google the location (city and state) and terms such as “historic newspapers”

**Offline** – Many repositories have newspapers in original or microfilm form. These may require an onsite visit, borrowing microfilm on inter-library loan, or hiring a researcher in the area.

- Library of Congress (largest newspaper collection – borrow on inter-library loan)
- State and local historical societies
- University libraries or local public libraries (in the locality you are researching)
- Contact a local expert – County historian, historical society, librarian or genealogist in the area

Never give up. There are LOTS of places to search for the newspaper you need.