

Using Newspapers to Aid in Family Research

Putting meat on the bones

Newspapers can be a very useful tool when researching ancestors and other relatives. They can often give you insights into the lives of the individuals you are looking for, and sometimes provide critical information as you seek to prepare names for the temple, or simply document a relative's life.

There are two main online newspaper search engines that I have used:

- a. Newspaperarchive.com (this is provided free at a FamilySearch library)
- b. Newspapers.com (you will need to have a subscription for this)

Newspapers.com is affiliated with Ancestry.com, so if you have an account with Ancestry.com, you will often see hints referring to Newspapers.com.

Both of these search engines generally cover the same newspapers, with a few differences. Note also, that they do NOT cover all newspapers.

When searching for relatives in newspapers, a few 'tricks' stand out:

- a. Women are frequently referred to as Mrs. John Smith
- b. Obituaries can often be by last name, such as Smith, John
- c. Names may include a middle initial or middle name
- d. Names can also be misspelled
- e. Try to narrow your search to a state, or even better, to a county

What can you find in newspapers? It is very much a mixed bag of things. Generally speaking, you will find more information on individuals in small-town papers versus large city newspapers, but this is not a firm and fast rule.

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| a. Birth announcements | i. Military service |
| b. Death announcements/obituaries | j. Photos (some of better quality than others) |
| c. Marriage announcements | k. Graduation information |
| d. Marriage license issuance | l. Team sports information |
| e. Divorce announcements | m. Petitions |
| f. Arrest information | n. Letters to the editor |
| g. Immigration/emigration notices | o. Business announcements |
| h. Membership in clubs/organizations | p. Public interest information |

When you research, you will find the good, the bad, and the ugly. Some of the articles I found were heart-breaking, but I included them all in FamilySearch. I have been thanked on more than one occasion by distant family members for doing so, because it provided information that they did not know or have a full picture of. I also believe that it gives a better understanding of the life of the individuals we are researching.