History of Newspapers

- Newspapers date back over 400 years, the Romans used print media to spread news in 59 B.C.
- The printing press was invented by Johann Gutenberg in 1477.
- By the 1600's newspapers began to appear as regular and frequent publications in Germany, France, Belgium and England.

American Newspapers Timeline

1690 – The first American newspaper was published in Boston by Benjamin Harris without authority and was immediately suppressed, its publisher arrested and copies destroyed. In 1845 the British Library discovered the only known surviving copy.

1704 – John Campbell, Postmaster, published a paper. Even though it was heavily subsidized by the colonial government it still had limited circulation.

1720's – Two more papers were added in Philadelphia and New York.

1770's – By the Rev War there were at least two dozen papers throughout the colonies, Boston, Philadelphia and New York remained centers of printing. Articles were a major force in swaying public opinion to independence.

1775 – 31 newspapers

1783 – 43 newspapers throughout the US. Newspapers played a vital role in affairs of our budding nation. The "No holds barred style of journalism," developed, many articles would be considered libelous by today's standards.

1789 – 92 newspapers being published

1791 – Ratification of the Bill of Rights guaranteed freedom of press. Growth continued.

1810 – 376 newspapers throughout the US

1830 – Advances in printing and papermaking technology led to an explosion of newspaper growth. Papers could be sold for just a cent a copy. The availability of cheap, interesting reading material was a significant stimulus to literacy in America. By 1835 there were 1,200 newspapers in print.

1844 – Invention of the telegraph information could be transferred within minutes, allowing more timely and relevant reporting.

1850 – The Census included 2,526 newspaper titles. Powerful giant presses appeared, which were able to print ten thousand complete papers per hour. The first "pictoria" weekly newspapers emerged; they featured for the first time extensive illustrations of events in the news, as woodcut engravings made from correspondents' sketches or photographs (recently invented).

1860's – The Civil War created an unprecedented demand for timely, accurate news reporting; this transformed American journalism into a dynamic, hard hitting force in the national life. Reporters, called "specials," became the darlings of the public and the idols of youngsters everywhere. Many accounts of battles turned in by these intrepid adventurers stand today as the definitive histories of their subjects.

1880's – 11,314 different papers were recorded in the 1880 census.

1890's – The first circulation figures of a million copies per issue were recorded. Unfortunately copies are now quite rare due to poor quality paper and the success of WWII paper drives.

1900's – The features of modern newspapers appeared - bold "banner" headlines, extensive use of illustrations, comics, expanded coverage of sporting events. Media consolidation also started in the early 1900's.

Content

- Newspapers can add details to events recorded in other sources.
- Information may be recorded in newspapers that would not be contained in traditional record sources.
- Current events taking that may have affected your ancestors' lives.

Vital Records – In addition to birth notices, marriage notices, obituaries and burial permits check for related stories.
- Accounts of wedding showers, articles about the couple leaving or returning from their honeymoon, out of town guests may be relatives, and divorces.
- Check anniversaries of events, both marriages and deaths.
- Accidental and violent deaths – check for news stories and coroners inquests

Land Records
- Notices of real estate transfers
- Notices of homestead

Court Records
- Look for notices of estate settlements and sheriff's sales
- Dockets for court cases.

Immigration & Migration
- Check port cities for passenger lists, ship arrivals, articles about journeys
- Schedules for other modes of transportation – river boats, railroads, stage coaches.
- Naturalizations

Occupation & Businesses
- Ads
- Election Returns
- News Stories
- Crop Reports

Current Events
- Local Health Issues
- Sports Stories
- Community Events
- Organization Meetings
- Gossip
- Police Blotters
- Military – National and Local
- Weather reports

Alternative Newspapers

Think about what kind of groups your ancestor may have been part of – church congregations, unions, schools, businesses, and ethnic groups. These groups all had newspapers and they may contain even more information about your ancestor than the traditional newspaper.

Pluses & Minuses of Using Newspapers

Not all newspapers are available online. The every word searches on the internet make it easier to locate what you are looking for, but don't underestimate what you can find while reading the paper. If you can't locate a digital newspaper you might have to use microfilm which is available through inter-library loan. If some kind soul hasn't spent many grueling hours creating an index, your only choice is to read issue after issue.

Details in newspapers can help you locate other records that aren't indexed. For example, use the court dockets to determine dates to search.

Keep in mind that articles are written from someone's perspective. They include their biases and may not present the whole story. Stories are only as accurate as the information provided by sources.

Stories may be found in places you don't expect. Check papers where family members lived at the time of the event and places where your ancestor used to live. Often stories carried notations to other papers asking them to run the story.

How to Find Newspapers

What papers were published in the area and time period you are searching?
- FamilySearch.org Wiki. Look up the location where your ancestor lived.
- Library of Congress Chronicling America https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/
- Use County Histories and City Directories to find newspapers. These are available on Google Books https://books.google.com/, Internet Archive https://archive.org/ and HathiTrust Digital Library https://www.hathitrust.org/.
- US Newspaper Program http://www.neh.gov/projects/usnp.html
- Local Libraries, Historical Societies and Archives
- Newspapers US & Worldwide http://www.refdesk.com/paper.html
- Cyndi's List http://www.cyndislist.com/newspapr.htm
- Allen County Public Library Bibliography of lists of newspapers by location http://www.acpl.lib.in.us/genealogy/05newspapers.pdf

Newspaper Sites
- Newspapers.com $$ https://www.newspapers.com/
- Newspaper ARCHIVE.com $$ https://newspaperarchive.com/
- Genealogy Bank $$ https://www.genealogybank.com
- Godfrey Memorial Library $$ – 19th Century US Newspapers and The London Times Digital Archive (1785-2006) https://www.godfrey.org/
- Ancestry.com $$ http://www.ancestry.com/
- MyHeritage $$ https://www.myheritage.com/
- Elephind search newspaper sites https://elephind.com/
- Portal to Texas History https://texashistory.unt.edu/
- National, State & Local Newspaper Archives – Links to digital newspaper sites. http://xooxleanswers.com/newspaperarchives4.aspx
- National Digital Newspaper Program - https://www.loc.gov/ndnp/
- Online Historical Newspapers https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/
- Richmond Daily Dispatch 1860-1865 http://dlxs.richmond.edu/d/ddr/index.html
- Massachusetts Newspaper Online Indexed Obituaries http://www.mass-doc.com/news_indexes.htm
- US News Archives – links to newspaper archives on web http://www.ibiblio.org/riverat/internet/archives.html
- Brooklyn Daily Eagle 1841-1902- http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle/
- Online Newspapers http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/
- Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/

- Library of Congress Chronicling America http://www.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica/
- Google News Archive http://news.google.com/archivesearch
- Old New York State Historical Newspapers http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html
- Northern New York Historical Newspapers http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/
- Quincy Public Library Historical Newspaper Archive 1835-1890 https://www.quincylibrary.org/newspaper-archive/
- Historic Missouri Newspaper Project https://shsmo.org/collections/newspapers/mdnp
- Boston Pilot – a database for advertisements placed in the Boston Pilot http://infowanted.bc.edu/results/
- Albany County Wyoming Obituary Index 1868-1964 http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wyalbany/obits/?cj=1&o_xid=0000584978&o_lid=0000584978
- Freedom's Journal First US African American Owned Newspaper – Wisconsin Historical Society https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS4415
- Newspaper Databases in the Penn State Digital Library https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/digital-newspapers

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