

Newspaper Research Steps

Step 1

Using the worksheet fill out the following information:

What are you looking for?

Birth notice, marriage notice, death notice, obituary, funeral notice, business advertisement, news article about relative, etc.... Look at your Newspaper Content Checklist.

Time frame?

What years, months or a specific date? Remember that notices may or may not happen on “the” date. Look before and after the happening, sometimes as much as 2 months. Consider how often the newspaper published. Also consider the website you are looking at may only have a certain number or dates of the publication.

Location

What state, what county, what city? TIP: When you do your search for the city paper and nothing shows up as being online, do a radius search. Try the next towns’ paper. Papers need to fill their space and if they don’t have enough news they will take articles from another paper, even if it is a week old.

What Ancestors are involved?

List the names of all the ancestors that may be involved in the event you are looking for, or all the ones that lived in that location that could be listed in the paper for the area. Don’t forget to name extended family. They may lead you to your direct ancestor.

Step 2

Find all the papers in the location and years you named above.

Start with your 3 Cool Tools:

1. NewspaperMap.com
2. Stanford Visualization Project
3. World Cat

Step 3

Now find out who has the paper(s) you want and determine if it is online or microfilm. Look at the free web sites first, and then check out portal web sites. If you subscribe to any of the fee based newspaper websites, certainly check those out first. If not, check with the libraries in your area. Some may subscribe to the fee based websites.

Remember that most newspapers are not online but more and more are added each month. So check back to the free websites.

If you cannot find your paper online then it is time to check archives, societies, and libraries to see what they have, not only online, but in microfilm. Or is the paper you want still in existence? Check at their website for the papers' archives.

When checking government type archives remember that many large cities have their own archives, Google the city name and Archives. Also try county and state archives. Next try Local Societies such as Genealogy and Historical. Also try county and state societies.

And don't forget to check local libraries and university libraries. If it is a small town newspaper the local library may have it or tell you where to find it. University libraries tend to have good archives for many papers. Some are even designated as the states' newspaper archival resource center. University of Oregon is for the state of Oregon. Each state has a newspaper archival repository. While they may not collect all the newspapers available in the state, they will have the main ones. You can Google the state name and the words "Newspaper Archival Repository" to get the repository for the state location you want.

Sometimes calling the current local paper, in the location you are searching, can lead you to where you can find the paper you want. The current paper may actually have your paper in its own archives. It is worth a phone call or email to check.

Step 4

Access the online website or the microfilm and start searching. If you are lucky and your paper is online, then use advance search to put in the name of your ancestor and what you are looking for using "keywords".

If you are using microfilm, bring your reading glasses and a coke!

No matter if you are online or off, the search process is long and tedious. Newspapers online have been indexed using OCR. Some print in a newspaper may have "c" and "e"

looking very much alike. The last name of “Nutter” will also bring up “butter” and “Matter”. So out of 438 results only 2 were actually Nutter. But you don’t know that until you look at each page. Tedious work.

Microfilm is very tedious because you are looking at most every page in the paper. While most birth, marriage and death notices were located in one area of a newspaper, that is not always true. Remember that newspapers had to use up their space and may squeeze an obituary on a different page so they don’t have “white space”. Or how your ancestor died may be of great news to the community and a whole front page article is written about it, along with the obituary. So looking at most of the pages in a newspaper is important.

More and more “finding” the paper that was published in the location and time frame you want is not as hard as the “search” in the paper for your ancestors name. So step 4 can be frustrating and certainly will be time consuming. However, you can certainly learn a lot about your ancestor’s daily life, what was happening in the world and locally, as well as discover that your ancestor was Mr. or Ms Party Goers on the Society page. So hang in there!

Step 5

But I found what I want, how can there be a step 5?! Cite your Sources!!!! If you found what you want, take a picture/copy of the front page as well. Make sure you have all your source information. Usually the front page will have all that plus the important news of the day, that can help complete your ancestors’ story.

Step 6

Verify what you have found in the paper with a primary source. Remember that newspapers are a secondary source and often times contain incomplete or wrong information. It is only as good as the person who wrote it and the source they received it from. Nine times out of ten the source that the reporter received the information from was NOT your ancestor.