



# No News is Bad News

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## The CORNER PIECES of Today's Presentation:

- The FRAME – Why Newspapers?
- The BIG PICTURE – Tips for Effective Newspaper Searches
- The DETAIL PIECES – Where to ~~Look~~ Find
- The CHALLENGES – Spelling, OCR & Other Snags

## THE FRAME: WHY NEWSPAPERS?

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 1600s – Earliest U.S. papers were progress reports sent “home” to England (around 1619) and single-page “broadsides” (1680s) published by the church to dispel community rumors. The first multi-page U.S. paper was the sole issue of Benjamin Harris’s *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick*. Published in Boston in September 1690, the paper was shut down just days later by the Massachusetts Bay governor.
- 1700s – In 1704, *The Boston News-Letter* became the first U.S. paper to be created with a printing press, but early printing was both slow and expensive, leading to small circulation. Noah Webster’s *The American Minerva* (1783) became the first NYC daily paper. These early papers were often used to promote political agendas.
- 1800s – In 1801, Alexander Hamilton founded the *New York Post* which is still in existence today. By the 1830s, an increase in pages (from 4 to 8 pgs.) led to an increase in “news” and current events over articles intended to sway public opinion. These changes coincided with faster printing capabilities which dropped the cost, making papers more affordable to the masses. News coverage grew in scope after the telegraph hit the scene in the mid-1840s, allowing papers timely access to information happening outside their local area.

Sites & Sources	🌐 McNamara, Robert. "History of Newspapers in America." <i>ThoughtCo</i> , 24 Feb. 2020, <a href="http://www.thoughtco.com/history-of-newspapers-in-america-4097503">www.thoughtco.com/history-of-newspapers-in-america-4097503</a> . Accessed 24 May 2024.
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### NEWS THAT “CROSSED THE POND”

- The Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America* database has over 21 million U.S. newspaper images dating from 1754 – 1963. Additionally, it has a “U.S. Newspaper Directory” that can be used to review surviving publications (original and microfilmed) that are held by libraries, historical societies, etc. across the country. When it comes to news that “crossed the pond”, you can use *Chronicling America*’s “All Digitized Newspapers” (tab) to review the newspapers in this database’s collection by state, language, and ethnicity – perhaps identifying specific papers which might have been of primary interest to your immigrant ancestors.
- One example of a paper with ties to a specific nationality is *The Boston Pilot*. While its name has changed periodically over the years, this publication – the longest-running Catholic newspaper in the U.S. – served as a “bridge” between Ireland and America back as far as 1829. Now maintained by Boston College, you can search and access scans of this publication and others (over 10,000 issues in all) on their website. Hint: Watch for the “ADVERTISEMENTS” sections in the mid-1800s to learn details of family searching for lost relatives.

Extracts of *The Boston Pilot* “Advertisements” from 1831-1920 are available on Ancestry.com & Library Edition, but – as always – it can be enlightening to read the originals which (in this case) include small sections on many Irish counties as well. Game-changer for Irish American and famine immigrant research!

Sites & Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ “Chronicling America.” <i>Library of Congress</i>, <a href="https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/">https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/</a> . Accessed 24 May 2024.</li> <li>✿ “Boston College Newspapers.” <i>Boston College</i>, <a href="https://newspapers.bc.edu/">https://newspapers.bc.edu/</a> . Accessed 24 May 2024.</li> </ul>
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## NEWS CLOSER TO HOME

- Obituaries, death & funeral notices. Watch for names of others listed in these articles – like friends/relatives, including the names of an executor/executrix/administrator/administratrix in charge of resolving issues of the deceased’s estate. Also watch for details that open doors to additional research – like a woman’s obit identifying her as a “Job’s Daughter” which indicates that she is related to (or was sponsored by) a Master Mason. Since both Job’s Daughters and the Masons have strict membership requirements (and application processes), this new information opens the door to new areas of research on this family.
- Military “scuttlebutt” & gossipy gems. Use these articles to confirm dates of military service, training, and rank advancements and to identify extended family connections when, “Denise Farrell and her cousin, Barbara Ann Benson came to spend the weekend with Denise’s sister, Monica, at college.”
  - Look for issues of (U.S.) *Stars and Stripes* on *Fold3* and overseas editions on *Access NewspaperArchives*.
- Understanding *their* world. Read the papers your ancestors might have read to experience first-hand accounts of the newsworthy events-- local, national, world – that occurred during their lifetimes. Use this to develop a better understanding of the choices they faced and the decisions they made.

## THE BIG PICTURE: TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NEWSPAPER SEARCHES

### TIP #1 – KNOW YOUR “POND”

- Begin a newspaper database search with a preliminary search of the publications (by title, location, and/or date) that are included in that database’s collection. Don’t waste time “fishing” for news about your ancestors in “ponds” (databases) that don’t have the papers you need for your research.
- Example: If you want an obituary for a relative who passed away in 1995, but the “local” newspapers in a particular database collection only go up to 1980, don’t expect to find the obit there, right? (Now, you may find *other* news – or gossipy gems – about that relative in the available pages, but....)

### TIP #2 – KNOW YOUR TOOLS

- Quotation marks. Experiment with the use (or non-use) of quotation marks around a name to see if the number of search results changes. If change is evident – like with Newspapers.com, KC Star/Times, and others – make a note to use quotation marks with that database as a tool to streamline your search.
- Date ranges. Use date *ranges* when searching for details about an ancestor – not just their date of death. Life happens between birth and death, and so does news! Still not finding anything on your ancestor? Check AFTER their date of death to see if their name was included in the obituary of a parent/sibling/child who survived them or to see if a story about an event that happened during their lifetime reappears in something like a “50 Years Ago” feature.
- Wildcards. Ancestry, FamilySearch and many other sites offer a “wildcard” tool that allows you to bypass spelling issues by inserting a character (typically ? \* % \_ ) in place of a letter or string of letters. The search then displays all results with the remaining letters intact. For example, the results displayed for “JOHANSS?N”

would include JOHANSSAN, JOHANSEN, JOHANSSON, etc. Use the database’s HELP section to learn if/which wildcards can be used on that site.

- Unique database tools. Ancestry’s “Source Tab” – another database-specific tool – can be used to identify the name and date of the publication displayed as an index-only record on Ancestry. Use this citation information to search *other* newspaper sites for this article or when asking a “local” library about possible lookup options.

### TIP #3 – THINK LIKE THE FAMILY

- If your newspaper search isn’t yielding the results you’d hoped for, consider the SOURCE of the information – typically, the family – and revise your search based on your take of *their* answers to the following:
  - News: Who – friends, family, etc. – would be most interested in this news? Which publication should we use to reach these people?
  - Obit: Who needs to know about our loved one’s passing? Should we run an obituary or death notice in the local paper where they lived at their time of death, or should we run the notice in the town where the deceased grew up or lived the majority of their life? Should we announce their death in a church/synagogue newsletter? Which other family members should we list in the obit?
- You might also try adjusting your search by using a person’s nickname or initials instead of their given name.

## THE DETAILS: WHERE TO LOOK FIND

### ON-SITE ACCESS

- Visit libraries, state/county/town historical and genealogical societies in the area(s) where your ancestors lived to see what treasures they have in their material and microfilm collections.
- If a genealogy road trip is not in your plans, contact these same agencies by phone/mail/email to see if they offer a LOOKUP service; if available, these may/may not be free services.

Sites & Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ "List of Newspaper Archives." <i>Wikipedia</i>, 25 May 2024, <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspaper_archives">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspaper_archives</a> . Accessed 1 Jun. 2024.</li> <li>✿ "Newspaper Collection." <i>State Historical Society of Missouri</i>, <a href="https://shsmo.org/collections/newspapers">https://shsmo.org/collections/newspapers</a> . Accessed 25 Jun. 2024.</li> </ul>
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### ONLINE SITES & DATABASES

- You’ve already “met” *Chronicling America* and the Boston College collections.
- The RESEARCH tab on the Midwest Genealogy Center website ([www.mymcpl.org/genealogy](http://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy) ) offers Mid-Continent Public Library card holders immediate access to more than two dozen newspaper collections in their “Newspaper Databases” section and to large genealogy databases – like *MyHeritage* – which have their own searchable newspaper collections. MGC’s newspaper microfilm holdings are also accessed on this page.
- Here are a few other sites, chosen for the breadth of their collections/links and their free access to all.

Sites & Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ "Digital State Archives." <i>Google</i>, <a href="https://sites.google.com/site/statearchives/home">https://sites.google.com/site/statearchives/home</a> . Accessed 25 Jun. 2024.</li> <li>✿ Neuhaus, Chris. "Historical Newspapers - Open Access and Subscription Based." <i>UNI</i>, 21 Jun. 2024, <a href="https://guides.lib.uni.edu/historical-newspapers/newspaper-archives-by-state#s-lg-box-wrapper-3206792">https://guides.lib.uni.edu/historical-newspapers/newspaper-archives-by-state#s-lg-box-wrapper-3206792</a> . Accessed 24 Jun. 2024. &lt;Use to access <i>Advantage Archives!</i>&gt;</li> <li>✿ “Historical Newspapers and Indexes on the Internet - USA." <i>Research Guides</i>, <a href="http://www.researchguides.net/newspapers.htm">www.researchguides.net/newspapers.htm</a> . Accessed 25 Jun. 2024.</li> </ul>
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## THE CHALLENGES: SPELLING, OCR & OTHER SNAGS

### SPELLING, PRINTING, & MORE

- Despite Noah Webster’s 1806 dictionary, phonetic spelling continues to rule into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the spelling of names tops many genealogists’ lists of challenges to overcome. Throw in issues related to newspaper printing – pooling, light “kisses”, hyphenated names – and it’s not hard to understand why an OCR search may not “see” what you see as you visually scan a newspaper image.
- Solution? Awareness. *Expect* issues like these – especially in historical papers – and be prepared to loosen up your search parameters to accept “variations” and to produce a wider range of search results.

### MISINFORMATION

- Dewey did NOT defeat Truman, and the person “featured” in an obit likely did not write the obit, leaving some of the information found *in* the obit subject to error.
- Solution? Write it all down – with the source – then verify the details with more research and logic. A genealogical proof standard is more like the “beyond a reasonable doubt” legal standard in a criminal case, but sometimes we must wade through the civil suit’s “preponderance of the evidence” to get to our goals.

### STYLE & TRADITION

- Historical newspapers offer a glimpse of the *pafft* – that is, *past* – which may include words and stylistic choices (like the *ff* for *s* thing) which were in vogue for a time.
- Solution? Again, awareness. Know that, for a time, married women were listed in news articles as Mrs. (His Name), indicating that you may need to broaden your search to include “His Name” to come up with info on the “Mrs.”. As mentioned earlier, another option – especially for obituaries and weddings – would be to search for the names of relatives, business partners, etc. known to have survived the deceased or attend the celebration, since these names might lead you to the article you seek on your own ancestor.

Here’s hoping that your ancestors’ news was all enlightening! Happy puzzling!



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