

Using Old Newspapers for Genealogical Research

By Martha Grenzeback

Old newspapers can offer amazingly valuable genealogical tidbits found nowhere else. Everyone thinks of obituaries and marriage notices, but there are many other useful things you can find out from newspapers, especially small-town newspapers in the nineteenth century, when editors were so hard-up for real news that you couldn't hiccup without it appearing in the paper. Wedding anniversaries, for example, were often given much bigger write-ups than the original wedding, including a list of all the guests, their relation to the couple, and the gifts they brought. Even something as brief and inconsequential as this:

“Mrs. Guy Knowlton of Floyd and her sister, Miss Vera Robbe, of Nora Springs, were in the city shopping between trains this morning”

can provide a valuable maiden name and relative, plus a possible town of origin, for Mrs. Guy Knowlton. It takes a lot of time and patience to go through a couple of years' worth of a newspaper at random—but you can organize your search around specific dates (deaths and marriages, for example), and in a small-town paper you will probably find other interesting items about your family in the process.

Newspaper Sources

There are three main ways to access old newspapers (if you don't have stacks of them in your attic): on microfilm through interlibrary loan; in the form of abstracts provided online by volunteers; or in digitized form by subscription or through free online sources.

Microfilm

First, you can largely find out what is available for a particular state in various repositories by looking it up in the US Newspaper Program, “a cooperative

national effort among the states and the federal government to locate, catalog, and preserve on microfilm newspapers published in the United States from the eighteenth century to the present”: see <http://www.neh.gov/projects/usnp.html>. Each state has its own link, and most of the newspapers you will find in this way can be borrowed on microfilm by interlibrary loan. Chronicling America, from the Library of Congress, at <http://www.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica/>, has a great directory to newspapers from 1690 to the present, which lists newspapers and the libraries that hold them.

If you know the name of the local paper you are interested in, you can look for it in WorldCat, a database available to every Nebraska resident which shows the holdings of libraries all over the country (and even abroad). Go to NebraskaAccess at <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/nebraskaccess/>, log in with your driver’s license, and select “FirstSearch.” You will then see this:

FirstSearch Home

- ◆ Welcome to the OCLC FirstSearch service, connecting you to information in a wide range of subjects in 12 da
- ◆ Looking for a general database to search? Try:
[ArticleFirst](#) - Articles | [ECO](#) - Journal Articles | [WorldCat](#) - Books etc.
- ◆ If you have saved searches, you can access them here: [Previous Searches](#)
- ◆ If you have saved marked record(s), you can access them here: [Saved Records](#)

Home Databases

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i News ?
Intro News Help

Search for:

In:

Search Clear

Jump to Advanced Search:

English | Español | Français | عربي

Select WorldCat from the drop-down menu of databases:

FirstSearch Home

- ♦ Welcome to the OCLC FirstSearch service, connecting you to information in a wide range of subject
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[ArticleFirst](#) - Articles | [ECO](#) - Journal Articles | [WorldCat](#) - Books etc.
- ♦ If you have saved searches, you can access them here: [Previous Searches](#)
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Intro News Help

Search for:

In:

- Education (no full text)
- Government (no full text)
- Journals (no full text)
- Medical (no full text)
- Quick Reference
- Proceedings (no full text)
- Select a Database to Search -
- ArticleFirst
- ClasePeriodica
- Ebooks
- ECO
- ERIC
- GPO
- MEDLINE
- PapersFirst
- Proceedings
- WorldAlmanac
- WorldCat**
- WorldCatDissertations

Jump to Advanced Search

English Español Français


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You can get to the same thing through the Omaha Public Library website (<http://www.omahapubliclibrary.org>) by selecting the Research tab and then “World Cat.” There you will have to type in your library card number and PIN. (Using this method, you can request an item by interlibrary loan directly from the item entry.)

Once you are in WorldCat, you can either type the name of a newspaper in the “title” field to see what libraries hold it and for what years, or you can often find

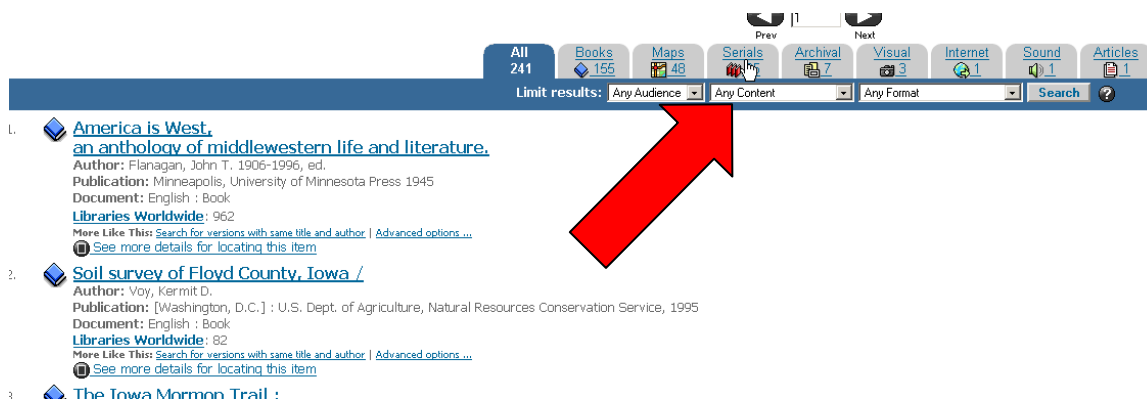
out about at least some of the local publications by typing the county or city name into the keyword field:

WorldCat Basic Search

- ◆ Enter search terms in one or more boxes and click on **Search**.
- ◆ **WorldCat Hot Topics:** Select a topic to search: 


















When you get your results, narrow it down to “serials”:



The result should be a list of potentially useful newspapers (make sure you've include the name of the state or you will have too many irrelevant hits).

Limit results:

- ☐ 1.  [Charles City semi-weekly intelligencer.](#)
 Publication: Charles City, Iowa : Intelligencer Print. Co., 1906-1915
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Newspaper : Semiweekly (twice a week)
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 4
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 2.  [Charles City weekly advocate.](#)
 Publication: Charles City, Iowa : [s.n.], 1902-1903
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Newspaper : Weekly
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 3
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 3.  [Floyd County heritage.](#)
 Publication: [Charles City, Iowa] : Floyd County Historical Society, 1990-
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Periodical : Quarterly (every 3 months)
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 3
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 4.  [Floyd County advocate.](#)
 Publication: Charles City, Iowa : B.F. Wright, 1905-1908
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Newspaper : Semiweekly (twice a week)
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 3
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 5.  [Floyd County weekly advocate.](#)
 Publication: Charles City, Iowa : [s.n.], 1902-1903
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Newspaper : Weekly
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 3
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 6.  [Floyd County advocate-herald.](#)
 Publication: Charles City, Iowa : L.H. Henry, 1908-1915
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Newspaper : Semiweekly (twice a week)
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 3
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 7.  [Floyd County, Iowa, farm & home plat & directory.](#)
 Corp Author: Farm & Home Publishers. Publication: Belmond, Iowa : Farm & Home Publishers 1900s-
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Annual
[Libraries Worldwide:](#) 3
[More Like This: Advanced options ...](#)
 [See more details for locating this item](#)
- ☐ 8.  [Floyd County advocate and Charles City herald.](#)
 Publication: Charles City, Iowa : L.H. Henry, 1908
 Document: English : Serial Publication : Newspaper : Semiweekly (twice a week)

You can request any of these on microfilm through interlibrary loan—the cost varies depending on the lending institution but is often merely postage.

Abstracts

Another way to find newspaper items of genealogical interest is through the many abstracts lovingly made by volunteers. This method is a bit more hit and miss—the best way to find them is probably through the Rootsweb and Genweb county pages or at the constantly growing Newspaper Abstracts page located at <http://www.newspaperabstracts.com/>. A nice set of links to various kinds of obituary searches and other newspaper indices can be found at http://www.ancestorphunt.com/obituary_search_engines.htm, where you can search comprehensively or by state. It includes links to a few specialized obituary indices, such as the American Friends Obituary Index at Earlham College: <http://www.earlham.edu/~libr/content/friends/obituaries/index.html>, and seems to search many of the Rootsweb sites. It also provides links to current newspapers, many of which provide online access to recent obituaries (usually the last month); current newspapers can also be easily located through <http://www.onlinenewspapers.com>. The Nebraska State Newspaper Extraction Project provides abstracts from newspapers all over Nebraska: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nenews/NSHS/nshsnews.htm>.

Digitized Newspapers

Best of all, however, more and more old newspapers are being digitized in their entirety and placed online. These fall into two categories: those that are available by subscription and those that are available free, usually through state archives, universities, or other major institutions. Some useful subscription databases are:

- Ancestry.com Historical Newspaper Collection.
- NewspaperArchive.com (available through its own site or, more cheaply, through the Godfrey Library or the Mid-Continent Public Library).
- 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (through Godfrey Library and Mid-Continent).

- Newsbank Early American Newspapers 1690-1876 (through Godfrey Library).
- GenealogyBank (especially if you need Dallas, TX).
- America's Obituaries and Death Notices (does not go back much earlier than the 1980s).
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers (Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Boston Globe, The Chicago Defender, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, The Washington Post).
- WorldVitalRecords.com.

Through the Omaha Public Library you can access many current papers, including the Omaha World Herald, through the ProQuest Newstand database (again, select the Research tab), which includes papers from all over the country, many going back about 20 years. SmallTownPapers (<http://www.smalltownpapers.com/>) offers scanned copies of over 250 small-town papers—they say going back to 1865, but most of them seem to be from the twentieth century. This database is also offered through WorldVitalRecords and the Godfrey Library.

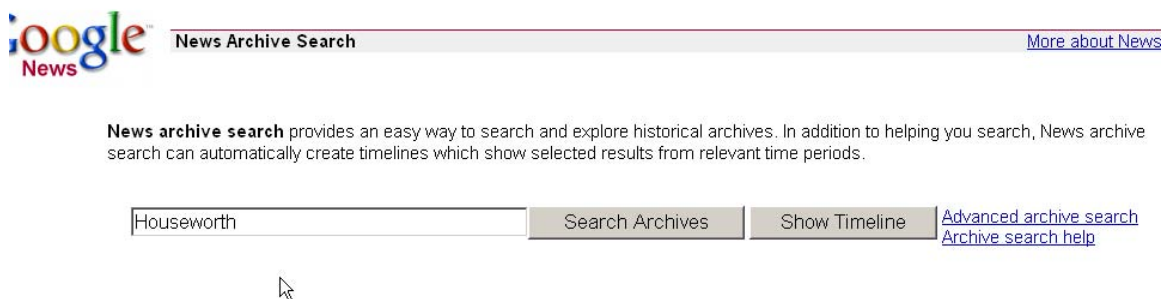
In fact, this is a wonderful time to be alive, since many institutions are digitizing newspapers and putting them online for completely FREE access. Some good free databases are listed at <http://www.researchguides.net/newspapers.htm>. For a particularly good source of Canadian and Mexican papers (as well as the Irish Times), try www.paperofrecord.com (you will need to register, and the search function is seriously clunky). More good fishing spots can be found with a Google search for “digitized newspaper” (as a phrase) or “digital collection” (which brings up such goodies as the Iowa Heritage Digital Collections at <http://iowaheritage.lib.uiowa.edu/>, also listed among Godfrey Library's free links). And try Chronicling America, at the Library of Congress, for newspapers from 1897-1910, for California, District of Columbia, Florida, Kentucky, New

York, Utah, and Virginia: California, District of Columbia, Florida, Kentucky, New York, Utah, and Virginia.

Finally, another great resource is Google News. Go to the Google home page at <http://www.google.com> and click on News.



Click on “News archive search.” There you can put in your search term(s).



When you get your results, you will be able to narrow them further by the options at the left (notably by decade or type of publication).

News Archives

Results 1 - 10 of a

[Browse Top Stories](#)

All Dates

[2000s](#)[1990s](#)[1960s](#)[1950s](#)[1918](#) ◀◀[Before 1918](#)

All Publications

[World War I](#)[Draft...](#)[Civil War](#)[Service...](#)[The Pantagraph](#)[Civil War](#)[Pension...](#)[United States...](#)[Haliburton v. Houseworth, Haliburton v. Houseworth, 848 F.2d 190](#)

Subscription - United States Court of Appeals, Sixth... - Fastcase - May 5, 1988
D. **Houseworth**; D. Proux; G. Borgert; G. McNamara; L. This matter is before the court upon consideration of the appellant's response to This court's February ...

[All 35 related](#) - [Related web pages](#)[Houseworth fought back from injury to lead Falcons' defense](#)

Pay-Per-View - Atlanta Journal/The Atlanta Constitution - NewsBank - Nov 15, 1990
George **Houseworth**, a senior linebacker on the George High football team who sat ... Averaging 10 tackles a game, **Houseworth** will be an integral part of the ...

[Related web pages](#)[Turner v. Houseworth, Turner v. Houseworth, 791 F.2d 935](#)

Subscription - United States Court of Appeals, Sixth... - Fastcase - Apr 22, 1988
NOTICE: Sixth Circuit Rule 24(c) states that citation of unpublished dispositions is disfavored except for establishing res judicata, estoppel, ...

[All 19 related](#) - [Related web pages](#)

News Archives

[Browse Top Stories](#)

All Dates

[1917 and older](#)[1913-1917](#)[1910](#)[1900s](#)[1890s](#)[1865](#) ◀◀[Before 1865](#)

All Publications

[Civil War](#)[Service...](#)[Morning Oregonian](#)[Marion Daily Star](#)[Civil War](#)[Pension...](#)[Daily Kennebec...](#)☒ [News Alerts](#)[HOUSEWORTH HAD HIS KNIFE](#)

Pay-Per-View - Atlanta Constitution - ProQuest Archiver - Aug 20, 1899
Drunken Negro Clears Out a Whole Office. THEN HE DARED THE POLICE HE Got Mad Because HIS Employers Didn't Pay Him Off Quick Enough--In Calaboose. ...

[Related web pages](#)[PULLS OF THE PEELERS.](#)

Pay-Per-View - Atlanta Constitution - ProQuest Archiver - Dec 28, 1897
Will **Houseworth**, a negro porter, was carried to THE police barracks last ... **Houseworth** claimed to have been knocked from a trolley car by a motorman on ...

[Related web pages](#)[View Isaac Houseworth military records in the Civil War Service...](#)

Subscription - Civil War Service Records - Ancestry.com - Jan 1, 1865
the Civil War Service records indicates that Isaac **Houseworth** served in the military. This military record may include the soldier's home address, ...

[Related web pages](#)[California Supreme Court Reports - PEOPLE v. RODLEY, 131 Cal. 240...](#)

Pay-Per-View - California Supreme Court Reports - Loislaw - Dec 29, 1900
THE alleged will was shown to be In THE handwriting of Mrs. **Houseworth**, ...
"I desire that Mrs. Minnie **Houseworth** have all my property at my death, ...

[All 3 related](#) - [Related web pages](#)[View ISAAC HOUSEWORTH military records in the War of 1812 Service...](#)

Subscription - War of 1812 Service Records - Ancestry.com - Jan 1, 1815
the War of 1812 Service records indicates that ISAAC **HOUSEWORTH** served in the military. This military record may include the soldier's home address, ...

[Related web pages](#)

Minnie!

Although many of these reference pay-per-view or subscription databases (including Ancestry and NewspaperArchive.com), they provide some valuable information. I found a snippet relating to my most mysterious Minnie Houseworth, in a reference which I can now go look up at the Creighton Law Library. Clicking on the link itself takes you to the provider page (in this case Loislaw), and enough information to go look up the resource.

Welcome to Loislaw

Below are summaries of your Google search as well as other relevant search results. To view their full content or to search our libraries for other information, you must first obtain a Loislaw 24-hour [Primary Research Pass](#) for \$24.99.

California Supreme Court Reports - PEOPLE v. RODLEY, 131 Cal. 240 (1900)

The defendant was convicted of perjury and sentenced to imprisonment in the state prison for the term of twelve years. He appeals from the judgment and from an order denying his motion for a new trial. The transcript on appeal contains a bill of exceptions. The defendant was a practicing physician, and for at least a portion of the time covered by the evidence he was the mayor of Chico.

Here are other relevant Loislaw search results

California Supreme Court Reports
PEOPLE v. RODLEY, 131 Cal. 240 (1900)
Crim. No. 643.
December 29, 1900.

The defendant was convicted of perjury and sentenced to imprisonment in the state prison for the term of twelve years. He appeals from the judgment and from an order denying his motion for a new trial. The transcript on appeal contains a bill of exceptions. The defendant was a practicing physician, and for at least a portion of the time covered by the evidence he was the mayor of Chico.

Some Random Newspaper Links

Digitization projects around the world:

<http://icon.crl.edu/digitization.htm>

<http://bcdlib.tc.ca/links-subjects-newspapers.html>

Canada

Alberta

http://www.ourfutureourpast.ca/newspapr/np_home.asp

All US States:

US News Archives on the Web:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/slanews/internet/archives.html>

Colorado

http://www.coloradohistory.org/chs_library/research_coll_files/rc_dig_np.htm

Kentucky

<http://216.68.116.14:8081/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=main#focusfocus>

Maryland

<http://www.washcolibrary.org/newsindex/Index2.asp> (Hagerstown Newspaper Index 1860-1865--covers nearby areas of W. Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania)

Massachusetts

Boston Pilot Irish Immigrant Ads: <http://infowanted.bc.edu/>

Missouri

Historic Missouri Newspaper Project: <http://newspapers.umsystem.edu>

[SHS of Missouri - Index to Selected Missouri Newspapers Home](#)

New York

<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/nysnp/index.html>

[Northern New York Historical Newspapers by Northern New York Library Network \(NNYLN\)](#) (<http://news.nnyln.net/>)

<http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>

Pennsylvania

<http://apps.libraries.psu.edu/PACFTB/newspapers/searcharticle.cfm>

Utah

<http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/unews/>

Vermont

Spooner's Vermont Journal:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~lmfwelch/Spooners/index.html>

Virginia

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/newsindex/default.asp>

Washington

<http://www.secstate.wa.gov/history/newspapers.aspx>

Wisconsin

<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wlhba/>