

Newspaper Research Tip – 13 Hidden Gems in Old Newspapers to Amplify Your Ancestors' Life Stories

If you are trying to add to your ancestor's life stories, what better way than interesting newspaper articles about their lives? Absent direct accounts from your living relatives, seeking these hidden gems in old newspapers will tell you things about your ancestors that there is no other way, absent a biography or autobiographical book, that you would ever know these tidbits.

- **Job Ads** – If you don't know your ancestors occupation, the "Positions Wanted" section can be very useful. In this example, I wanted to know my grandmother's occupation. She had just moved from Brooklyn to Oakland, California in 1910 and I suspected that she was looking for work. Lo and behold, an ad that she had placed popped up that stated that she had stenography and typing skills and was looking for work in the legal profession. Even her address and phone number was included in the ad!
- **Advertisements** – You never know what you will find in advertisements. In one interesting ad, my great grandfather was a spokesman for some miracle digestive malady cure. And the bonus was that there was a photo of him. (By the way the miracle cure didn't work – he died of stomach issues two years after the advertisement was published). I also saw many ads from my 3rd Great Uncle, who had created a special sauce for food, and created and published ads to sell it.
- **Legal Notices** – did your ancestors have a business? Transfer a business? File bankruptcy? I have had all of those situations with my ancestors. In one example, my grandfather's business was sold to his two sons and the article was found in the legal section.
- **Lodges, Clubs and Societies** – was your ancestor a member or an officer in a lodge or club? There were sections in old newspapers that had meeting schedules and articles about elections of officers. Often, in an obituary, the deceased's membership in a lodge was mentioned.
- **Real Estate Transactions** – often titled this or "Recorder's Office", this may give you insight as to buying and selling of land and property by your ancestors.
- **Sports Results and Baseball Box Scores** – did your ancestors play sports? There might be articles in the Sports section. If they played baseball at any level, there might be a situation where their names shows up in a box score. My dad did and was mentioned frequently. And a citation of a female relatives hole in one in golf was in an article.
- **Politics** – in older newspapers, precinct captains and precinct workers were named; several of my own ancestors participated in helping people vote.
- **Vacations** – before the advent of air conditioning, in warmer climes, folks would travel to resorts, springs, and other spots and the names of the travelers were often listed.
- **Letters to the Editor** – was your ancestor outspoken? Did they often write a letter to the editor of the paper that was published?
- **Taxes Owed** – often lists of taxes owed to the city or county are listed. It is surprising to find an ancestor owing 3 dollars to the county for taxes.
- **State or County Fair Winners** – did your ancestor enter food, livestock, plants or crafts at the fair? Lists of winners and their submittals and awards are listed.
- **Missing Persons** – since in the 19th century telephones were certainly not abundant, stories about missing persons were often written.
- **Church Articles** – naming new church members or invitations to special services or events.