

33 Different Things You Can Find About Your Ancestors

By Searching Newspapers

- **Politics** – in older newspapers, precinct captains and precinct workers were named; several of my own ancestors participated in helping people vote.
- **Society** – in smaller towns and even larger cities, the society pages listed attendees at parties of all kinds.
- **Vacations** – before the advent of air conditioning, in warmer climates, folks would travel to resorts, springs, and other spots and the names of the travelers were often listed.
- **Out of area travelers** – many older newspapers welcomed temporary residents with their names in the paper, listing the hotels they were staying in, their permanent residence (city), as well as the families they were visiting if they were staying in their home.
- **Advertisements** – Local residents were quoted as having been cured by a variety of “interesting” remedies. Often photos and other descriptive information were included.
- **Classified ads** – often you can find your ancestors names in the “want ads” as either selling something or if they owned a business – trying to hire a new employee.
- **Sports** – if an ancestor was an athlete of any kind – possibly he would be cited in a baseball box score for college, high school or a local semi-pro team; or in an article regarding many other sports.
- **School graduations** – lists of graduates are often listed for as early as elementary school through high school and college.
- **School news** – lists of honor roll members, and other school events.
- **Military articles** – did your ancestor join the Army or go to war? Often there are articles about them, as well as where they were stationed and promotions they may have received.
- **Lodges and clubs** – announcements of new members, or officer lists as well as upcoming meeting schedules are often published.
- **Church articles** – naming new church members or invitations to special services or events.
- **Real estate transactions and transfers** – did your ancestor transfer real estate to another family member or buy/sell a property?
- **Engagement announcements** – Often an announcement of an upcoming wedding would be found in the society page and many times a photo of the bride-to-be.
- **Legal Notices** – did your ancestors get divorced or sell or transfer a business? These are often found in legal notices, including bankruptcy or other legal matters, including wills and estates.
- **Divorce proceedings** – lists of couples who were in the various stages of divorce are often listed in the Vital Statistics section.
- **Personal notices** – illnesses, visitors, celebrations of all kinds are often mentioned in the Society section.
- **Anniversary celebrations** – 25 and 50 year anniversaries often were rewarded with an article announcing the accomplishment, as well as a recounting of the celebration party and the attendees.
- **Death notices and obituaries** – obvious help to researchers to name children, siblings, “native of” information, etc.
- **Birth announcements** – although the child is rarely named – his parents are and that can be helpful, especially if a child only lived a few years and you have the death announcement.
- **Mail** – list of unclaimed mail can often be found in small town newspapers. Useful to determine if your ancestor had moved away.
- **Local crime** – in addition to articles about the more serious or “colorful” crimes, there often are listings of more petty crimes, such as burglaries or home/business break-ins.
- **Political cartoons** – In the 19th century, photographs were rarely included in newspapers – so drawings of the likenesses of people were included, especially for politicians. I have several of these for one of my ancestors who was a State Senator.
- **Missing persons** – since in the 19th century telephones were certainly not abundant, stories about missing persons were often written.
- **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.
- **Theater and television** – lists of actors and actresses in vaudeville, other theater as well as early television are often mentioned in articles. These articles add depth to their life stories.
- **Union activities** – lists of trade union officers are often mentioned as well as their activities and scheduled meetings.
- **Land applications and sales** – generally in the legal section – these might include notices from the Department of Interior.
- **Professional directory** – was your ancestor a doctor, lawyer, nurse, contractor, or embalmer? They might be found in these directories which are frequently published.
- **Marriage licenses and announcements** – when a license is issued, usually the names and addresses of the couple are mentioned. Also when the wedding occurs, often the event is listed as well, but not always. And of course there may be a detailed article about the wedding with a citing of many of the attendees.
- **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.
- **City and county government meetings** – minutes of meetings are published and names are mentioned of the commissioners or supervisors as well as those who have conducted business during the meeting. If your ancestor had a claim due from the government entity for work performed, these lists are also available often.
- **Letters to the editor** – was your ancestor outspoken? Did they often write a letter to the editor of the paper that was published?