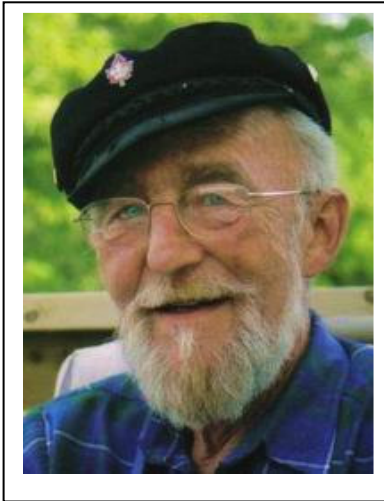


The Family Historian

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Column #1

Using Old Newspapers



Newspapers, especially local ones, can be a goldmine of information for the family researcher. The birth, marriage, and death notices often go beyond the basic names and dates to include other family information such as addresses, relatives who attended and where they were from, information on employment and membership in various organizations. All of these point to further avenues of research.

Of course, we have to verify all this information but, at least, we know what we want to verify and often where we can go to verify it. Birth announcements were really not common in the nineteenth century and many newspapers in the large cities did not carry obituaries except for prominent people until after the Second World War.

The rest of the newspaper is also of interest. It can tell us what was happening in the life and time of our ancestors, may have information on organizations to which they belonged and on their friends and neighbours, and include legal notices that may refer to them. School and church news will often mention names.

Often the social columns will feature special events in their lives, significant birthdays, anniversaries, retirement, visits from out of town and a host of other information that helps to put flesh on the bones of the vital statistics that we gather from church and civil records. Many researchers will check a paper for several weeks before and after an event to ensure that they don't miss any news about it.

If there is more than one local paper, it is usually a good idea to check them all. Whatever the reason for multiple papers (political orientation, religious, readership demographics, rural vs urban, etc.), there is one and that may impact the way they deal with your ancestors. A difference of this kind may open up a whole new line of inquiry.

If you are close to the town of your ancestor, you will often be able to find microfilms of the local papers in the local library, archives, historical or genealogical society. A few telephone calls or visits will be all it takes to locate them. Actual copies of the paper may still be available, bound into annual volumes, at the newspaper if it still exists or at one of the local repositories, but old newsprint can be fairly fragile and requires careful handling. If it is a relatively recent issue the paper may still have negatives or photos that were used and these copy a lot better than a picture scanned from a newspaper.

If you are researching from a distance, Library and Archives Canada published a *Checklist of Indexes to Canadian Newspapers* in 1987 and it can be found in many libraries. You can also go directly to their website at: www.collectionscanada.ca/8/18/index-e.html. You will be taken immediately to a link for the list of papers held by them with their reel numbers. The newspapers are organized by province and town. As long as your local library or archives has a microfilm reader, it can borrow up to six of these reels at a time from Library and Archives Canada.

If you don't have a computer, most public libraries have one with an internet connection for their patrons to use and will help you to get started.
