

## Why I Love—and How to Use—the Newspaper Collections at MyHeritage



Sunny Jane Morton is known globally for her in-depth analyses of the giant genealogy websites: learn more in her new workshop, [Finding Your Family History on the Giant Genealogy Websites](#). Sunny is a Contributing Editor at Family Tree Magazine and YourDNAGuide.com; a blogger for FamilySearch.org; and an NGS-award-winning Editor of Ohio Genealogy News. She's also written [Story of My Life: A Workbook for Preserving Your Legacy](#) and is co-author of [How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records](#). Find her at [www.sunnymorton.com](http://www.sunnymorton.com).



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### Needle in a Haystack:

The trick to finding ancestors' names in old digitized newspapers is to use the right tool in the right way.

([Needle quote](#) from lecture and [value of needles](#))



### Why it's worth looking for newspaper articles about your ancestors

- Average obituary [mentions 10+ relatives](#)
- Names, dates, places and family relationships
- Other life-changing events: migration, divorce, bankruptcy, tragedy/accident, crime
- Reported events can lead to new records: divorce, court, school, church, employment
- Newspapers tell stories, so it's the place to FIND stories
- Photos! Unique images of ancestors [beginning \(in the U.S.\) in 1880s](#)

### Digitized newspaper results (especially unlooked-for)

- One-stop/one-step discoveries
- Results you didn't know you wanted—on relatives and *their* relatives
- Follow-up coverage of articles you didn't know to look for
- Placements in multiple newspapers (especially outside hometown)

### MyHeritage newspaper collections include...

Compendium collections: Individual U.S. state newspaper collections (36 states as of late 2020) and Canada/French Canada collections

Curated 3<sup>rd</sup> party newspaper collections: Chronicling America (United States); Trove (Australia); Delpher (Netherlands); Jewish Chronicle (England)

## The “haystack:” Searching digitized newspaper pages

[What affects accuracy](#) in searching digitized historical newspapers?

- Quality of original newspaper image: damage, fading, rips, etc.
- Variety of fonts, sizes, placement, capitalization, boxes (ads)
- Accuracy as low as [68%](#) (consistently lower for digitized-from-microfilm issues)

## How MyHeritage helps you “find the needle”

*Key question: What does MyHeritage use to search newspaper collections, its [SuperSearch™](#) genealogy algorithms or OCR?*

Apparent answer: An enhanced version of OCR. For precedent, see descriptions of enhanced OCR/discovery process described for MyHeritage [city directories](#) and [yearbooks](#).

### Enhanced OCR experience

- “These newspapers were processed via our OCR (Optical Character Recognition) lab in Utah. The lab enables us to look through historical newspapers and books at high capacity and tag the text effectively.” ([Source](#))
- Enhancements observed by me:
  - Allows for middle names/initials (results for William Smith include William Alden Smith and William R. Smith)
  - Sometimes recognizes gender (results for Louisa Pond include “Mrs. Pond”)
- Limitations observed by me:
  - Didn’t recognize spelling variations (results for William didn’t include Bill; results for Smith didn’t include Smyth or Smythe)
  - Didn’t recognize wildcard operators (? or \*) (Eliza\* only gave results for Eliza, and Sm?th didn’t give any results for Smith, Smyth, etc)

## Strategies for greater success

### General tips for OCR that apply to MyHeritage.

- Don’t just look at search results from your ancestral locale; they may have been mentioned in out-of-town newspapers.
- Search for targeted events that should have been reported at particular times, such as weddings or deaths or bankruptcies.

**Look under Discoveries > Matches by Source > Record** Matches for newspaper collections with potential discoveries in them.

### Follow up with your own searches.

The screenshot shows the MyHeritage search interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Home, Family tree, Discoveries, DNA, and Research. Below the navigation is a search bar with several input fields: "First and middle name(s)" containing "Henrietta", "Last name" containing "Ellis", "Year of birth" (empty), and "Place" (empty). To the right of the "Place" field is a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there are several buttons: "ADD DETAILS", "Publication title", "Publication date", "Publication place" (highlighted with a red box and a red arrow pointing to it from the "Place" field), and "More" (with a plus sign). There are four red circles with numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Circle 1 is over the "First and middle name(s)" field. Circle 2 is over the "Year of birth" field. Circle 3 is over the "Place" field. Circle 4 is over the "More" button. A red arrow points from the "Place" field to the "Publication place" button.

1. Run repeated searches with different name spellings and variations, especially with women. Louisa Miner Pond could appear as Lovisa/Lovisa; Miner/Minor/Pond; Mrs. Thaddeus Pond; Mrs. Pond. A search for Louisa/Lovisa Pond should find L. Pond or L.P. Pond. My experiments with putting all names in either name field didn't pan out.
2. When I entered a year of birth, I sometimes saw search results prioritized within 70 years or so after that date. It's possible the ones that didn't do that were because there weren't any better search result options.
3. You have two place options. The first looks like it's a birthplace, but it doesn't have to be—just a place associated with that person's life. You also have an option to define a place where a newspaper was published.
4. The +More option shows that the default search includes results in other languages and doesn't require exact matches (you can change these options here). There's also a keywords field I didn't find useful when used with names, since results didn't prioritize matches including both names and keywords (showed me occurrences of either one).

**Run searches on ancestral keywords and local history**—but put your keywords in the name fields rather than keyword. Experiment with combinations of name and different ancestral keywords: name of street, occupation, friends, hobbies, church, school, scandal or court case terminology.

Search

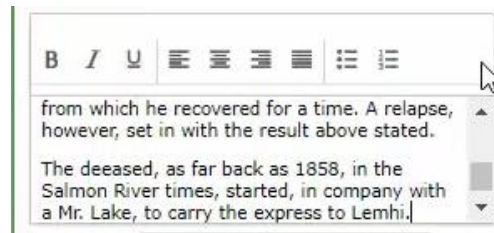
Name

First and middle name(s) Last name

Chardon School

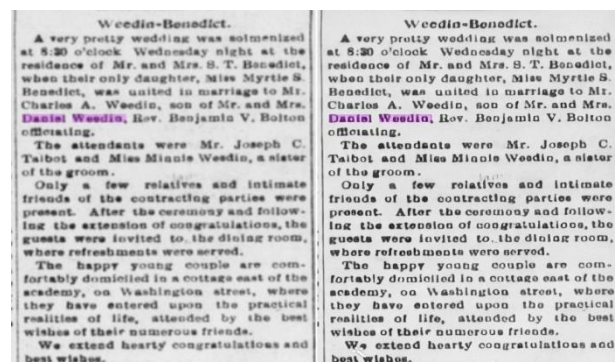
Credit: [A Genealogist's Experience with MyHeritage Library Edition](#) by Cheryl McClellan, Geauga County (Ohio, USA) Public Library

**Edit the transcription** when you attach it to your ancestor's tree profile. Open the digitized newspaper page in a separate window and edit/transcribe as needed. Watch for additional information you may otherwise gloss over.



**Sharpen blurry newspaper images with [MyHeritage Photo Enhancer](#)**, as shown here.

Idea credit: Adapted from [Thomas MacEntee's use of this tool](#) on an old document.



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