

Newspapers Online

SAY WHAT YOU WILL about the Internet, but there's little doubt that the World Wide Web has revolutionized the way genealogists and family historians can



conduct their newspaper research. The proliferation of optical character recognition (OCR) technology — while far from perfect — and the speed with which old pages can be scanned means that more and more newspapers are now posting their full archives, some dating as far back as the late 18th century, in glorious, high-resolution images on the 'net.

The days of sitting in the local library

searching endlessly through roll after roll of hard-to-read microfilm are becoming increasingly rare.

IS THIS THE END FOR MICROFILM?

In light of online newspaper archives' extraordinary growth, it's tempting to declare microfilm obsolete; a research relic, if you will. While that may be a bit premature (after all, who knows what the Internet will look like in 50 years?), it's safe to say that microfilm is no longer the only tool available to genealogists who are looking to do a bit of newspaper-based research. Ironically, the majority of online pages are actually scanned using the existing microfilm, so don't throw out those dusty spools just yet! The process of getting all these old newspaper pages online involves digitizing the microfilm on a commercial scanner, which allows for the resulting image files to be restored (if necessary) and for any marks, scratches or other noticeable damage to be removed. The

file is then run through the OCR process which reads all the words on the page and turns it into an index, which is then added to the existing fully searchable online database. In other words, finding any mention of your long-lost great-great-uncle Larry and his prize-winning squash from a long-forgotten town fair has got a lot easier.

RESEARCH FOR A FEE

Not surprisingly, the majority of the online archives I visited while researching this article charged a subscription fee, but in most cases, it was quite reasonable, especially considering the sheer volume of information that is put at your fingertips. However, nearly all of them offered either a free trial preview or allowed you to search for free and purchase any relevant results on a per article basis. While every archive I visited was fully searchable, some were by keyword only, while others offered more advanced search capabilities including first and/or last name, keyword/phrase and date including month, day and year. An important point to remember when searching is that your great-great-uncle Larry from Colebrook, Connecticut is much more likely to be mentioned in the smaller community newspapers than the larger national and international dailies. After all, a town fair is not important news for the bigger papers, but in the day-to-day minutiae of small-town life, Larry's vegetable-growing prowess is exactly the sort of news at which community papers excel. Often they will flesh out a story with mention of other details like his profession, where he lived, his age, names of family members and, if you're lucky, a photograph.

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

Don't be surprised to find mention of your long-lost relative in the unlikeliest of sections within old newspapers, both large and small. Classified ads, letters to the editor, business advertisements and social columns can end up being a gold-mine of information and details, as can the daily police blotter and sport reports. Newspapers also published lists of undelivered mail, hotel guests,

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building permits and other “news” items that wouldn’t even make it into the smallest of community papers nowadays. “Jimmy Smith, 14, of Wellington Avenue was bitten by a rat while playing yesterday” is a great example of the sort of gem you might unearth.

Remember too, that the possibility exists that you could stumble upon a past indiscretion that certain family members have tried hard to forget, so be prepared. Luckily, I didn’t. In fact, the most interesting bit of family-related gossip I discovered was that there was a famous Jewish vaudevillian named Menasha Skulnick (widely considered the Charlie Chaplin of the Yiddish stage, according to the *Toronto Star*) who may or may not be a long-lost relation somewhere down the family line. Another important point to remember when searching the archives is that editorial standards in newspapers weren’t what they are today, and spelling errors, especially of names, were quite common in old newspapers. One of the articles on Menasha Skulnick alternated between Skulnick and Shulnick, and even got it wrong in the headline! When searching by last name, be sure to enter in all known spelling variations; you’ll be surprised at what might turn up.

Nearly all search results in the various online archives compiled below are displayed as high resolution (300 dpi or higher) PDFs (Portable Document Format), which allows you to simply view the entire page, print it or save it to your hard drive for further adjustments (such as cropping, zooming, etc.) using photo-editing software such as Adobe Photoshop. In order to view PDFs, you will need to install Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is downloadable for free from www.adobe.com. You also have the choice of displaying/saving just the article that mentions your great-great-uncle Larry, or the entire newspaper page, complete with ads and other stories for added context. Seeing the article as it appeared in the newspaper on 12 May 1902, next to advertisements for imported silk umbrellas from Paris, “guaranteed painless” tooth extractions and reports of a new method of shooting partridges gives us a glimpse, however briefly, into our ancestors’ day-to-day existence.

PAPER OF RECORD

www.paperofrecord.com

- Collection of newspapers from Australia, Canada, Mexico, UK and USA.
- Features over eight million pages, with new pages added every week.
- Fully searchable by date, keyword, etc., and all keyword highlighted results are displayed as high-res PDFs that can be saved and/or printed.
- Subscription required — \$16.75 US/month or \$99.99 US/year.

TORONTO STAR

<http://thestar.pagesofthepast.ca>

- Over two million pages dating from 1894 to 2002.
- Fully searchable by date, keyword, section, etc.
- Results are displayed as high-res PDFs that can be saved and/or printed.
- Free trial allows you to search and access all of 1945, including obtaining high-res PDFs of your results.
- Subscription required — Prices range from \$3.95 CDN for one-hour, \$9.95 CDN for 72 hours, up to \$29.95 CDN for one month.

NEW YORK TIMES (1851-2001)

WALL STREET JOURNAL (1889-1987)

WASHINGTON POST (1877-1988)

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR (1908-91)

LOS ANGELES TIMES (1881-1984)

CHICAGO TRIBUNE (1849-1984)

BOSTON GLOBE (1872-1922)

www.proquest.com

- Fully searchable by date, keyword, etc.
- Results are displayed as high-res PDFs that can be saved and/or printed.
- Only available through libraries and educational facilities.
- Each newspaper’s archives are also accessible through its own website (i.e. www.nytimes.com), via a searchable database that can be subscribed to on a per-article or annual basis. See newspaper’s individual website (under archives) for costs and other details.

OBITS ARCHIVE.COM

www.ObitsArchive.com

- Obituaries and death notices from more than 600 US newspapers.
- Each obituary or death notice is

**M.P.P. WELCOMES
JEWISH PLAY CAST**

“Like Home,” Says Actor,
Whose Career Began Here

Returning to the city where he started the spectacular career that made him one of the outstanding Jewish actors, Menasha Skulnick arrived in Toronto to-day with a company of 30 which will stage a musical comedy in Massey Hall to-night and to-morrow night by special engagement.

On behalf of the Jewish people of the city, John J. Glass, M.P.P., was at the Union station to welcome the troupe.

Breaking all existing records for the Jewish stage, the show ran nine performances a day for 32 weeks in New York. Joe Grossman, manager, said. Starring Skulnick, the play “Fishel der Gerutener,” is a story of two Polish youths in the United States. The prologue is played by children.

“It’s just like coming home,” Menasha Skulnick said as he arrived. “I’ll have a real holiday here and a chance to meet my old friends again.”

Be sure to search for all possible name variations. Menasha Skulnick is incorrectly spelled as Skulnik toward the end of the article shown above.

It’s important to remember that editorial standards in old newspapers weren’t what they are today, and spelling errors, especially names, were common

indexed by the name of the deceased person.

- In addition, the text of each obituary or death notice is searchable by place of residence, occupation, names of family members, or other personal information.

- Text-only results can be printed and/or saved.

- Searching is free, with the results available for purchase on a per-article basis (starting at \$3.50 US for one article up to \$39.95 US for a 90-day pass.)

PARATEXT

www.paratext.com

- Free to access, but only available through academic, public and special libraries.
- 19th Century Masterfile section of the Paratext website contains over 60 fully searchable reference databases and indexes including pre-1925 newspapers, indexes, periodicals, books, patents and US/UK government documents.

THE TIMES (LONDON)

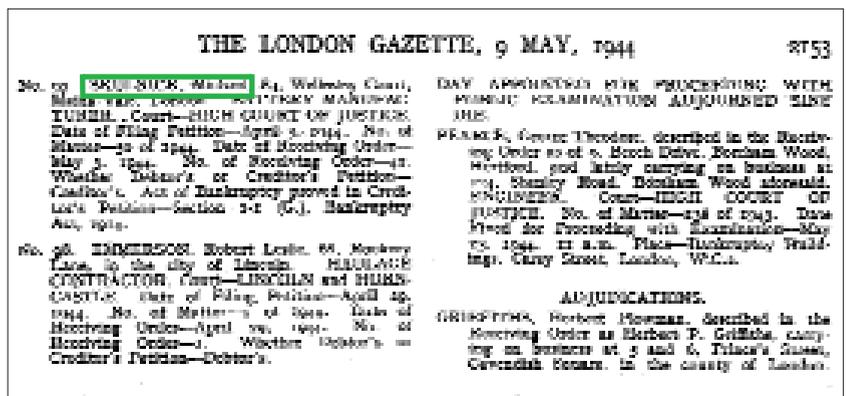
www.timesonline.co.uk

- Considered *the* paper of record for the UK.
- Online archives from 1985 to present can be searched free of charge, with the results available for purchase on a per-article basis (for as little as 17 cents an article).
- Fully searchable digital archives of the *Times'* complete run from 1785-1985 are also available online but only through select reference and educational libraries.

OTHERDAYS

www.otherdays.com

- Range of fully searchable (date, keyword) Irish newspapers from the 18th and 19th centuries, including the *Dublin Penny Journal* (1832-36), *Freeman's Journal* (1775-76) and the *Belfast Newsletter* (1801).
- Free trial preview available.
- Results displayed as high-res images that can be printed and/or saved.
- Membership required — \$44 US (annual), \$16 US (monthly) or \$8 US (72 hours) but this includes unlimited access to the site's entire online database of additional photographs, indexes, rare books and various other research tools.



LONDON GAZETTE

www.gazettesonline.co.uk

- The *London Gazette*, first published in 1665, is the oldest, continuously published newspaper in the UK and probably the world.
- Online archive covers the 20th-century *London Gazette* and the *Belfast Gazette*, from 1900 to 1997.
- The *Gazette* contains a wide range of official notices including state, parliamentary and ecclesiastical notices, transport and planning notices as well as corporate insolvency and personal bankruptcy notices. In addition, a number of supplements are published covering military honors and awards, premium bonds, armed forces promotions and company information.
- Free to search; searchable by keyword including person's name.
- Results are displayed as hi-res PDF images of original pages.

ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVES

www.accessible.com

- Newspaper archives include the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (1728-1800), the *Liberator* (1831-65), several African-American newspapers of the 19th century including the *Colored American* (*Weekly Advocate*), the *North Star*, the *National Era*, and the *Provincial Freeman* and various Civil War newspapers including the *New York Herald*, the *Charleston Mercury* and the *Richmond Enquirer*.
- Results are displayed as transcribed

The London Gazette returned several results for a Michael Skulnick in London, England.



Accessible Archives now has an entire section devoted to the various online newspaper archives including the New York Herald, above, and other Civil War-era newspapers.

Newspapers Online

pages, not PDFs.

- Free trial available.
- Available in libraries and educational institutions, although personal subscriptions are also available.

HISTORICAL NEWSPAPERS

<http://historynews.chadwyck.com/>

- A division of ProQuest, Historical Newspapers features Palmer's Index to *The Times* which covers the period from 1790 to 1905; the Official Index to *The Times* which takes the coverage forward from 1906 to 1980; The Historical Index to *The New York Times* which covers *The New York Times* from 1851 to September 1922 and Palmer's Full Text Online, 1785-1870, providing access to the full articles referenced in Palmer's index to *The Times*.
- Only available in libraries and educational facilities, although certain indexes, such as Palmer's Index to *The Times*, 1790-1905, are available on CD-ROM.

NEWSLIBRARY.COM

www.newslibrary.com

- More than 850 fully searchable US newspapers and other news sources (magazines, newswires, etc.)
- Text-only results can be saved and/or printed.
- Searching is free, with results available for purchase on a per article basis (starting at \$3.50 US for one article, \$14.95 US for five articles and up).

ANCESTRY.COM'S HISTORICAL NEWSPAPERS

www.ancestry.com

- More than six million fully indexed and searchable pages from over 400 different newspapers across the US, UK and Canada dating from the 1700s through 2001.
- Newspaper subscription also includes access to Ancestry's Obituary Collection that contains more than two million obituaries.
- Keyword highlighted results displayed as high-res digital images that can be saved and printed.
- Free 14-day trial available.
- Subscription required (from \$14.95 US).

NEWSBANK

www.newsbank.com

- More than 1,500 US and international newspapers available online, featuring over 100 million articles.

Distribution of Skulnick Families in the US in 1920



Number of Skulnick families



Compiled by Ancestry.com from the 1920 US Federal Census records

Click on a state to view Skulnick census records

1920 Skulnick Update
Year Last Name

How is this helpful?

- You can decide where (in which states) to start searching for Skulnick records.
- You can see how Skulnick families moved over time by selecting a new year and clicking the "update" button.

What do I do next?

The information for this map came from Ancestry.com's US Federal Census Collection.

- Census records can tell you little-known facts about your ancestors such as birthplace, residence and occupation.
- [Click here](#) to search Skulnick census records.

- Fully searchable by keyword, date.
- Available only in schools, libraries, colleges and universities.

NEWSPAPERARCHIVE.COM

www.newspaperarchive.com

- 29 million newspaper pages online from close to 2,000 newspapers including UK, US, Canada, Ireland, Denmark, South Africa, US Virgin Islands and Jamaica.
- One million new pages of content added every month.
- Results displayed as high-res PDFs that can be printed and/or saved.
- Subscription required from \$6.95 US/month to \$29.95 US annually.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

www.micromedia.ca

- Micromedia ProQuest features over 150 years of history, and 1.3 million full-image pages, of the complete works of *The Globe and Mail* newspaper since its inception as *The Globe* in 1844.
- Available on a subscription basis to libraries and educational facilities.

Every site listed here is hassle-free and easy-to-navigate and there are sure to be others that are just as worthy of your time and money. Do a little digging for "online newspaper archives" on Google and if there's a particular newspaper you're after, chances are it'll be online in some form. There is no shortage of quality, affordable websites that offer searchable online newspaper archives, and with millions of pages being added every month, the research possibilities are virtually endless, so keep checking the websites for new additions.

Ancestry.com's Newspaper search results can also give you the geographic distribution of families matching your desired surname. For instance, it says that in 1920, most Skulnicks lived in New York State. It also gives you the option of viewing the relevant census records.

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