

Using Google and Social Media for Genealogical Research
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Using Google for Genealogical Research

Using Google for genealogical research can be a powerful tool to help you uncover information about your family history. Here are some tips and techniques for effective genealogical research using Google:

Great Google Queries

Start with what you know – Begin your research by gathering as much information as possible about your family, including names, birthdates, marriage dates, and locations. Talk to relatives and review any family documents or records you may have.

32 words - the number of words Google allows for any given search

- use them sparingly, wisely and uniquely (try misspelling a word or ancestor's name)
- effective searches should be 10 words or less

Use keywords! - Genealogical research and family history comes with its own lingo

- Use keywords that narrow your search. Instead of just "Paul Shuttleworth" include a hometown, occupation, or another family member's name
- Keyword examples: Family, Ancestry, Heritage, Family Tree, Records, Cemetery, Birth, Death, Marriage, Census, Immigration, Probate, Military, Land Records, Surname, Archives

Stop words – words Google regards as having little or no value in a search

- Examples: the, of, is, but, and, or, so, for, etc. Exceptions: Boolean Operators

Not case sensitive – Uppercase words vs. Lowercase words

- Google sees no difference between FAMILY HISTORY and family history. Exceptions: Boolean Operators

Use Advanced Search Techniques:

Google Advanced Search – If a basic search returns too many or too few results, users have the option of narrowing or expanding their search using Google Advanced Search. Advanced Search can be found under Settings. It can also be found here: http://www.google.com/advanced_search

Google's search engine offers various advanced search operators that can help you narrow down your genealogical searches. Some useful operators include:

- *Quotation Marks*
 - To search for an exact phrase, enclose it in quotation marks, e.g., "John Smith."
- *Wildcard (*) Operators*
 - Use an asterisk to represent unknown parts of a name or phrase, e.g., "Cha* Smith" would return Chas Smith, Charles Smith, and Charlene Smith. Use a question mark to represent an unknown letter in a name or word, e.g. "?atherine" would return both Catherine and Katherine.

- *Boolean Operators*
 - AND, OR (in all caps), and NOT between words or phrases, e.g. “Mary Anderson” AND “Edward Fall” AND Maine, e.g. OR or (|) “Johan OR John Fall | Faul,” NOT as (-) will eliminate terms or words you don’t want Google to return, e.g. “John Fall” -Maine will return results about John Fall but not Maine.
- *Site Operator*
 - Limit your search to a specific website by using "site:" followed by the website's URL, e.g., site:ancestry.com "John Smith."
- *Google Image Search*
 - Look for images and photos related to your ancestors and their hometowns. Use image search with relevant keywords to find old family photos, gravestones, or historical landmarks. Do a reverse image search with your own ancestor’s picture to find other pictures you may not know about. (This is a rare find, but you never know!)

Helpful Google Apps for Genealogy

- *Google Drive*
 - Create folders to collect research and documents for different family surnames.
- *Google Sheets (sort of like Excel, but collaborative)*
 - Create research logs to better track what you’ve searched and what still needs to be done.
- *Google Docs (sort of like Microsoft Word)*
 - Write your family history or research report, collaborate with others on a document.
- *Google Maps*
 - Google your ancestors’ address. What’s there now?
- *Google Translate*
 - Can’t read French? Copy the French words into Google translate and choose the language of your choice for translation. Voila!
- *Google Books*
 - Digitized books, including family histories, local histories, and biographies. Many are available for free.
- *Google News Archive*
 - Free newspaper archives. Not usually the most sought-after papers, but if your ancestor was from one of available areas then it’s a gold mine.
- *Google Earth*
 - Use <http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/> and www.earthpoint.us (requires a subscription) together to find and locate your ancestor’s land on the map.
 - Plot your family’s migration or pin where your family members are buried.
- *YouTube*
 - Want to know more about how to use these Google Apps for Genealogy? There’s a video tutorial on YouTube for that!

Using Social Media for Genealogical Research

Ideally, social media is an online forum that brings people together in pursuit of community. Social media facilitates discussion and the sharing of ideas. It encourages the creation of content and the collaboration of people from all over the world; people who come together over a common interest, story, belief or idea. Social media is engaging, interactive, connective and fun. It can also be addictive. Genealogists use social media for personal genealogy research and to help others with their research by enlisting a larger worldwide community of genealogy enthusiasts.

SOCIAL MEDIA CATEGORIES (obviously not an exhaustive list)

Social Networking – *Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok*

A site that enables users to communicate using posts, comments, images, messages, etc.

Social Publishing Platforms – *WordPress, Blogger, Substack, Medium*

A site dedicated to helping users share their individually created content with the world.

Social Bookmarking – *Pinterest*

A site for tagging and storing bookmarks with links to other sites.

Media Sharing – *YouTube, Spotify, SoundCloud*

A site to upload your videos, photos and audio to share with other users.

Wikis – *Wikipedia, WikiTree, FamilySearch Wiki*

A website that allows collaborative editing of its content and structure by its users.

Online Reviews – *Yelp, Google Maps*

A site that allows users to write reviews on local businesses, events, historic sites, etc.

Social News – *Reddit*

Social news, content, and discussion forums featuring user-posted stories ranked based on popularity.

Interest Based Networks – *FamilySearch, Ancestry, Spotify, GoodReads*

A topic specific site targeted to a community of like-minded individuals.

MAJOR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR GENEALOGY RESEARCH

- *FamilySearch* – Someone posted a never-before-seen pic of Great-Grandpa on his Memories page!
 - Share pictures, memories, documents, and audio files about you and your family members
- *Facebook* – Hey everyone, I love genealogy!
 - Groups and pages dedicated to genealogy and family
 - Check out social media genealogy guru Katherine R. Willson's site for almost 17,000 Facebook genealogy groups: www.socialmediagenealogy.com
- *X (formerly known as Twitter)* – Follow your favorite historical societies or genealogists #genealogy
 - Hashtags and genealogy communities
- *Instagram* – Let's use the hashtag #MacFam2024 for posting pictures of our family reunion.
 - Create a family hashtag that everyone uses to post family pictures.
- *Pinterest* – Look at all my ideas for creating a wall of family history mementos.
 - Create a board and gather genealogical ideas from around the web
- *TikTok* – Watch this *tips and tricks* video for doing genealogy research on Ancestry.
 - Short video clips for sharing genealogical content and information

Advantages of Using Social Media in Genealogy Research

- Access to a wide genealogy community
 - Have a question? You will be amazed at how much help is offered when you're in the right group. Feel free to cross post.
- Collaboration and information sharing
 - Need someone to take a picture of a gravestone not found on Find A Grave? Just ask.
- Crowdsourcing genealogical challenges
 - Can't read the census takers' handwriting? Post a screenshot. There are excellent paleographers waiting for a good challenge.
- Finding distant relatives and connections
 - Surname groups are abundant on social media.

Best Practices for Genealogy Research on Social Media

- Privacy concerns and data protection
 - Many groups won't search for living people. Posting information for living people is discouraged or not allowed. Read the rules of the group.
- Effective communication and etiquette
 - If you want real help, include details.
 - Everyone is a volunteer. No one is getting paid to help you. Be nice.
- Verifying sources and information
 - Trust but verify. Admins are vigilant about who they let into a group.

Challenges and Limitations

- Inaccurate information and potential pitfalls
 - Not everyone is online and not everyone is honest or open about their family.
- Privacy issues and ethical concerns
 - Don't post anything you would be uncomfortable with the world knowing.
- Dealing with disagreements and conflicts within genealogy communities
 - Just be nice. Or step away. Tell the admins if something untoward is happening in a group.

Remember! Social media is an important tool in your genealogy toolbox. Social media isn't going away, so make it work for you in useful and engaging ways. The genealogy community is huge, and many people want to help. Please ask!

Remember! Not all genealogy information is readily available online through a Google search! As awesome as that would be, research requires a combination of online and boots on the ground research, including visits to local archives, libraries, and cemeteries.