Sources – newspapers

Historical newspapers are a very valuable source for family history. Australian newspapers, especially local and country newspapers, published lots of material about individuals and families in their area.

Newspapers often contain information about people that you can’t find anywhere else.

The sorts of information you might find include births, deaths, funerals, marriages, obituaries, inquests, court cases, social events, church activities, school exam results, sporting events, legal notices, land sales, advertisements for businesses and military service.

Many researchers find material in newspapers that help them flesh out their family histories, making them more than just lists of names and dates.

While you are more likely to find non-Indigenous people in newspapers, this can be particularly useful when families include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.


**Trove digitised newspapers**

The National Library of Australia provides free access to digitised copies of historical newspapers through its website, Trove. Over 218 million newspaper articles are available and the number is growing all the time.

You can search digitised newspapers on Trove using keywords like your ancestor’s name and the place they lived. [https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/)

You can limit your search in various ways – by date, state, newspaper or article type.

Here are some tips for searching:

- When you search for a name, add a place name to your search. Searching for both a person’s name and place at once might bring up more relevant results. Also try variations of the person’s name (surname, given name, full name, different spellings). To search for a full name “John Smith”, put the name in quotation marks. To add and place, write AND Dubbo.
Try searching using both your ancestor’s name and the term ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Aborigine’ – for example, Tommy AND Aborigine. Newspapers often referred to Aboriginal people by their first names only or by nicknames, using phrases like ‘Tommy, an aborigine’ or ‘the aboriginal Tommy’.

Try searching using both the name of place your family lived and the term ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Aborigine’ – for example, Bega AND Aborigine. Many newspapers reported in general terms about Aboriginal people, rather than using names of individual people.

Remember that historical newspapers often reflect the racist attitudes of the white people who wrote and published them. You might find your ancestors described using words that are offensive, or you might find distressing personal details about your ancestors and their lives.

Read more about using digitised newspapers in Trove in the Trove Help Centre.


The National Library is continually adding more digitised newspapers to Trove, but not all historical newspapers are available yet. The latest year for the majority of newspapers is 1954 due to copyright restrictions. A very small number of newspapers are digitised beyond that date including The Canberra Times. An alphabetical list of newspaper titles by state and territory is available here: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/about. Read on for ideas about accessing newspapers that aren’t available in Trove.

**Hard copy newspapers**

For newspapers that aren’t digitised in Trove, you will need to visit a library that has original hard copies or microfilm copies. This research can be difficult and time consuming unless you have a specific date and/or event to look for.

Some newspaper indexes are available, but they may not include the sorts of terms you would want to look up.

State libraries are the best place to look for newspapers that aren’t available in Trove. Copies of suburban or country newspapers might also be held by a local public library, historical society or museum. For information about newspapers in State and Territory Libraries, use the following search phrases or links:


### Aboriginal newspapers

Newspapers and magazines published by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be useful. The following publications are digitised and available online:

- **The Australian Abo Call**, published by the Aborigines Progressive Association in 1938 - [https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/title/51](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/title/51). Click on this link to go to the Trove catalogue entry for this paper. Links to the digitised issues are on the right of the screen.

