

USING NEWSPAPERS

Sharon Aney

When we begin our genealogy we are advised that the important pieces of information are birth and death records. But a poem tells us that the really important information about a person's life hides in "the dash" between the birth date and death date.

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Finding "the dash" is difficult once we have moved to the times beyond the memories of our living relatives. Sometimes we have a journal or letters to refer to. But often we do not.

Where can we look to find out more about the life, accomplishments, reputations, idiosyncrasies, and perhaps surprises of people who were earlier residents in our gene pool?

Newspapers hold the possibility of learning more than you thought you could.

I knew that my father-in-law loved to golf and that he used to play in tournaments in his youth, long before I appeared on the scene. I decided to look into the sports pages of the Saskatoon and Yorkton newspapers. Besides recounts of his many wins there were editorial comments to describe his personality and reputation in the community: playing through a downpour of rain on a rain-drenched course Seel and Aney prepared for the game by wearing oil silk jackets and pants over their golf togs. Lawson and Anderson were not so well prepared and were thoroughly drenched.

Cliff Aney, Yorkton's only representative to the Willingdon Cup Trials July 18, 1950.

Aney was wild as a hawk off the tee

Cliff Soberg rated Cliff "The Horse" Aney as the toughest opponent..."

Mr. Clifford Aney, that big, happy – go-lucky, cigar-smoking, Swift man (he worked for Swift Canadian Meats) emerged the victor. But Sir Clifford had no easy time of it.

I would think that his ancestor, George Washington Aney was also thought of as a genial person, one who could take a bit of teasing by members of his community. I was able to access this newspaper through the Sparta Wisconsin Historical Society.

The April 29, 1879 issue of the Sparta Herald: announced that

"Geo. W. Aney is a happy father. A big boy has arrived and taken up permanent quarters with him".

(Incidentally this is the only documented record we have of the birth of Earl Aney)

Again Sparta Herald: March 18, 1882:

"Dr. Phillips of this village performed a very delicate and successful operation on a hare-lip for a son of Mr. G. W. Aney. The boy is three years of age and now has as much lip as anybody."

Descriptions of specific events can provide interesting details. Newspapers used to treat weddings as items of importance in the community. Sometimes a column reported “just the facts, Ma’am”.



Wetaskiwin Times of January 9, 1902.

But sometimes a long article described the whole wedding party, the gowns of the bridal party in great detail and a list of attendees from near and far. You never know.

Obituaries can be another source of extended family information.

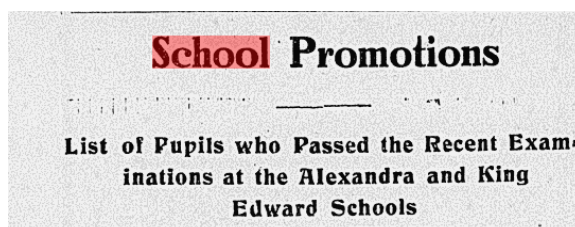
On December 18, 1934 Sparta Herald reported on the death of Wilmina Aney: Word was received on Thursday, December 6 by Mrs. C. O. Hebard, South Water Street, and brother, Emery Urich of the death of their sister, Mrs. G. W. Aney, the third one now laid rest of the four daughters of Mr. & Mrs. John Urich, who moved from Ohio and were early pioneers of Wilton, where with five children they settled on a Slayton Creek farm two miles north of that Place. The four younger children: Chas Urich, now of High Prairie Alberta, Canada, Mrs. Clark Hebard of Sparta and two little deceased sons were born at the Slayton Creek home.

The two Sparta relatives and Charles Urich of Canada are the only living ones left of the John Urich family. A son, Orlo who bought the home place from his parents when they moved west, was finally in a blacksmith shop with Levi Rathbun in Sparta. When his farm was sold he located near Conrad, Montana, where he died.

Everything except the names of Wilmina’s parents was news to me at the time. She had moved to South Dakota almost 50 years earlier, so keep in mind to look for papers in current and former places of residence.

Your ancestor’s achievements also may be found in news of local events such as music recitals, school graduations and promotions, 4H, business ads, athletic teams, etc.

Don’t forget to look at the town topics and social columns which often record activities, visitors and travel and others social gatherings of the citizenry.



However, one must keep in mind that local coverage was often subjective, with mothers of the bride gushing over their daughter’s lovely wedding gown, and sports writers being enthusiastic about local athletes.

As Mark Twain commented, *“Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as you please.”*

Even if your ancestor was not mentioned by name, coverage of local events such as extreme winter weather, floods, the coming of electricity would lead you to know that they were affected, and perhaps their circumstances were changed.

World Wars I & II were well covered, being of great local and national importance. The names of “our boys” were mentioned with pride in many articles about their training, departure, injury or death, and more happily, their returning home.

Where can we find these newspapers?

The Wetaskiwin Times newspaper and others from many Alberta communities have been archived and can be found at <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/>

Our local City of Wetaskiwin Archives, has archived Wetaskiwin Times newspapers as well as clipping files such as obituaries.

Never forget the local archives, historical society and library of the community where your ancestor lived. They may have old newspapers on microfilm, which is a good excuse for a road trip.

<http://www.cangenealogy.com/>

Dave Obee’s site has a wealth of resources besides newspapers

www.familysearch.org/wiki

Search for “newspapers”

<https://news.google.com/newspapers>

You might also strike gold by doing a google search for newspapers for a state, province or city of your interest

WashingtonDigitalNewspapers.org.

<http://MontanaNewspapers.org>

<http://news.ourontario.ca/timmins/search>