

Family History: Genealogy Made Easy
with Lisa Louise Cooke
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Episode 8: Best Genealogy Websites, Part II

In this episode we look at five organizations that provide free online access to genealogy records for those with North American roots: FamilySearch, the National Archives of the United States, Ellis Island Foundation, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, and Library and Archives Canada.

Now for some updates on these sites and MORE since the show first aired:

FamilySearch (www.FamilySearch.org) is still free and growing fast! It captures records from all over the world, not just North America and the U.K. It is now home to over 3.5 billion names in searchable databases, with over 35 million new records added every month. In addition, they've added over 60,000 digital books to the site. The layout of the website has changed dramatically since I described it in the original show. Click on Search to get to their databases, then enter an ancestor's name and, if you can, a life event (birth, marriage, residence or death). A significant portion of new online records are browsable but not yet indexed. So now, after you search for individuals in their databases, scroll down to the Browse section below the search fields. There you'll be able to see what records you can browse for a locale (choose the international region, then you can choose more specific locations). You can still order microfilmed records at the Family History Library to a satellite FamilySearch library near you. From the Search screen, choose Catalog, and you can search for and order available records by location.

The National Archives (U.S.) (<http://www.archives.gov>), also known as the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) also offers more on its website now. The premise of the site is that U.S. citizens have a right to access to the essential documentation of the nation, including the actions of the government. While just a fraction of their holdings are available for viewing online, you can use their website to figure out exactly what they have, which NARA location it's held in, and how to access it.

NARA says, "Because the records at the National Archives come from every branch of the Federal government, *almost all Americans can find themselves, their ancestors, or their community in the archives. Knowing how a person interacted with the government is key to a successful search.*" In fact they have a section on their website devoted to genealogists and family historians: (<http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/index.html>).

The portal for genealogists looks a little different now but still helps you see how to search and use the site for genealogy. There's a direct link to the 1940 census, with images, maps and descriptions. Remember that Footnote, the subscription site I mentioned that's digitizing military records, is now Fold3 (www.fold3.com), which we talked about in Episode 7.

EllisIsland.org (www.EllisIsland.org). From 1892 to 1924, more than 22 million immigrants, passengers, and crew members came through Ellis Island and the Port of New York. The ship companies that transported these passengers kept detailed passenger lists, called "ship manifests." If

one of your ancestors immigrated to America during that time frame, then the ellisland.org website is for you!

Though the records they hold are obviously narrow in scope, they are comprehensive and free! I gotta say that finding my first passenger list was just about one of the most exciting moments in all my research. There's a wealth of information on these passenger lists, and if you're very lucky the name and address of your ancestors' contact in the old country will be one of those nuggets.

And you don't have to stop at the passenger list. Ellisland.org also has images of the ships that unloaded its human cargo at Ellis Island, so that you can see the actual ship your ancestor traveled on.

In addition to the fantastic collection of digitized records, you can learn a whole lot about what ancestors went through by exploring the Immigrant Experience pages where you'll find first hand immigrant stories and an interactive immigration timeline called the Peopling of America.

The National Archives (U.K.) (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>) links from the home page to resources for ordering birth, marriage and death certificates for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Read about updating order information, including costs, at these sites. There is still a portal for genealogists (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/default.htm>) from which you can learn all about the various record groups I mention in the podcast and more.

Library and Archives Canada (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/>). This is a great resource for more than just Canadians. Many who immigrated to Canada continued on to the United States—many Americans have no idea that their immigrant ancestors passed through Canada!

The Library and Archives continues to add more valuable genealogical data to its site, including census data. Start from its Genealogy and Family History page (click on it from the home page). In addition to the features I mention in the show, they've improved their online indexes: scroll down on the above page and you'll find the Ancestors Search (Databases) link to a main search engine and individual databases for vital records, censuses, immigration, land, military and several directories.

Cyndi's List (www.cyndislist.com) and **US Gen Web** (<http://www.usgenweb.org/>) are still fantastic online resources, but add to your list these ones as well:

- DeadFred (www.deadfred.com), a photo identifying and sharing site;
- Google (www.google.com), for searching across the Internet for everything from individual ancestor's names to maps and local histories (especially through Google Books at www.books.google.com);
- The Library of Congress (www.loc.gov) family of websites, including the mega-newspaper site, Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>);
- WorldCat (www.WorldCat.org), an enormous card catalog for more than 10,000 libraries worldwide.
- Find a Grave (www.findagrave.com) and Billion Graves (www.billiongraves.com), home to cemetery inscriptions for millions of tombstones.
- Of course, there are many, many more websites for genealogists, but these will certainly keep you busy to start!

Finally, here are 3 tips for getting your hands on many of the *paid* records that we talked about in the last episode *for free*:

Tip #1 – Ask Your Local Library if They Have Ancestry.com

Many public libraries have a free library version of Ancestry's US records collection. If your local library doesn't, check with the reference librarian to find out if that library is part of a larger library system that does have it. In the state of California, for example, you can obtain a library card for any public library in the state. So even though my county libraries don't have Ancestry, the library in the next county which is just a few miles away over the county line does have it, so I just got myself a free library card at that branch. And in some cases you can access it online. So be sure and ask!

Tip #2 -- Many Subscription Databases are Available Free at Family History Centers

Family History Centers (or FamilySearch Centers, as they are sometimes called), are satellite facilities of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. These satellite centers can be found all over the world. Find the one nearest you at <https://familysearch.org/locations/centerlocator>. Bring a flash drive with you to save files and a few dollars to pay for copies if you would like to print out the records you find.

Tip #3 -- Downloadable Free Access to Pay Databases Chart from Family Tree Magazine

<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/upload/images/PDF/freedatabases.pdf>

This pdf lists a number of record collections available on subscription websites and where you can find them for free on other websites. It will require a bit more hunting around on your part, but will get you started inexpensively.

So armed with some of the best subscription websites and a handful of terrific free resources you are ready to really make headway and unlock the keys to your family history!