Ancestry Library Edition 101

Searching for records and resources

Learn. *Explore.* Connect.

LA GRANGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Objectives:

1. You will learn how to differentiate between the various record types contained within Ancestry's records to gain a better understanding of what genealogical information can be extracted from each.
2. You will become proficient in operating the search interface by using advanced search features, side-bar limiters, and image viewing features to obtain relevant search results.
3. You will be able to utilize other Ancestry resources like the RootsWeb Wiki and the Learning Center to help in future independent research.

What is Ancestry? Briefly…

Ancestry emphasizes **beginning to intermediate genealogy**, although genealogists at all levels can benefit. Persons involved in genealogy know that **information will be found in multiple sources**. That being said, Ancestry is so popular for a reason; it is the largest, longest reaching services peddling genealogical resources on the market.

- 3 million paying subscribers
- Records from 80 countries of origin (out of 195!)
- 30+ international markets (countries with organizations partnering to share records)
- 20 billion records
- 100 million family trees
- 130 billion connections

Ancestry itself is a private company with a business model to commercialize genealogy. They have done a pretty good job, in fact, because it's the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world. With the Library Edition subscription, the user is barred from a few significant parts of the company's resources, but still has access to its tremendous database of records. Ancestry began in the 1990s selling floppy disks of Latter-day Saints publications. After making the jump online, Ancestry and its subsidiary products steadily grew in popularity. In the early 2010s, the company expanded to San Franciso and Dublin, Ireland, marking its dominance domestically and internationally. The Ancestry brand continued to expand its reach by buying out other genealogy services, now owning Fold3, HeritageQuest, Rootsweb, Find A Grave, Newspapers.com, and more. While having multiple partnerships with the Latter-day Saints and having utilized its records extensively, Ancestry is not connected to the Church in any religious way.

A Quick Summation of Pedigree Charts

Pedigree charts are a way for researchers to display their family history in an easy to read format. The chart reads from left to right, beginning with the most recent known member of your family. We will begin with our own names and trace our lineage backwards, moving right along the chart. Compiling your information here is a good way to record your ancestral research; however, the pedigree chart does not alone cover all information you might find. For example, many pedigree charts do not provide space to input siblings, occupations, social security numbers, or any extra relevant details you might wish to add. For this reason, pedigree charts should be viewed simply as a general tool to assist in organizing a basic mapping of your ancestral history—a point of reference to pivot back to during research.

In short, the information recorded on your chart will serve as the backbone for the narrative of your family history, providing the concrete facts for you and your ancestors.

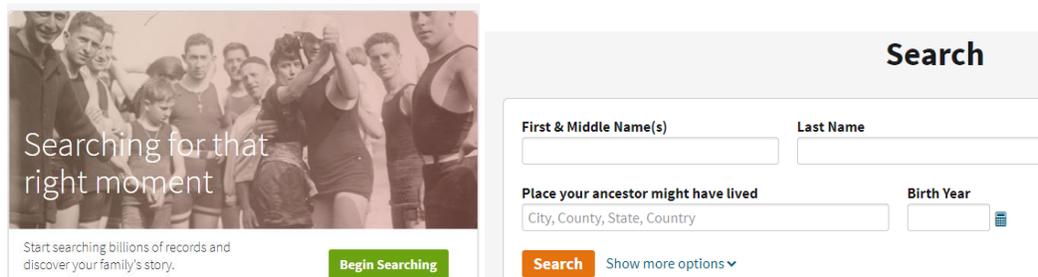## Navigating to Ancestry Library Edition
- From the La Grange Public Library homepage (www.lagrangelibrary.org) navigate to the "Research" tab near the top of the page. Select the Genealogy sub-tab to locate Ancestry and our other genealogical services and resources. Click on the page where it displays the hyperlinked text: "Search Ancestry Library Edition."

How Does a Subscription to Ancestry Library Edition Differ?

- It's wealth of sources is still limited. There is a distinct lack of historical newspapers, family and local history collections, obituaries, periodicals/journals, military records, and Freedman's Bank records, a major genealogical resource for tracing African American ancestry.
  - The La Grange Public Library's subscription to HeritageQuest covers many of these holes.
- The Library Edition has less personalized functionality.
  - Users cannot create and upload public family trees (you only can browse them).
  - Users cannot directly communicate with other members on the message boards.
- AncestryDNA is a separate service, and not covered in the Library Edition. The La Grange Public Library can't afford to send everyone a DNA kit!

That all being said, you get access to the main reason people pay for Ancestry—to search the largest digital genealogical database out there. Not only is it the largest, but many of the collections are unique and may provide information not found elsewhere. Ancestry provides myriad ways to find what you're looking for, and what makes this service so popular for genealogical research is that you don't have to know what you are looking for—you just have to start looking.

Upon reaching Ancestry's homepage, select the "Begin Searching" button toward the middle of the page. All of their records are organized within collections, which can be seen as the bolded text to the right once the search page loads. You'll notice each record is filed into one of these subjects: Birth, Marriage & Death; Census & Voter Lists; Immigration & Travel; Military; Schools, Directories & Church Histories; Tax, Criminal, Land & Wills; Reference, Dictionaries & Almanacs.

The idea behind the Ancestry Library Edition's basic search function is the ability for anyone to find quick and reliable information by inputting a name, year of birth, and a location where they may have lived. The search pulls relevant records from each of the above collections based on your search terms. As serendipitous as it discovering certain records might feel, it is important to temper expectations. Ancestry provides the jump-off point for the family history researcher. The records found on this database are often general and they typically only display confirmation information—that is, information that verifies that a relative was indeed born at such and such a date, or that they were living at a specific address during a set timeframe. Ancestry helps to validate these facts, confirming that the information written into your own personal logs or pedigree charts is accurate.

Overview of Record Types

1. **Census & Voter Lists** (Because of privacy laws, census records aren't released until 72 years after the census was conducted. Only up to 1940 for now.)
   - Street addresses, heads of households, age at first marriage, and other family members. In the first 6 censuses, only the heads of household were listed by name. All others were noted through tick marks. Around 1880 questions regarding relationships within each family were added.
   - Mother of how many children born; how many children living. Infant mortality rates were higher the farther into the past you go, and wars have claimed the lives of many. Multiple marriages may create discrepancies in the number of children in the family.
   - Over the years and as the population increased, the federal government has required more and more data to be collected about individuals. Until 1850, the census forms required only the head of household to be named—after that, everyone was listed but with no explanation of how members of a household were connected. In 1880, enumerators began asking how each person was related to the head, and it collected a lot of new data. The government's information requirements never went in reverse—each census contained more questions until space on the form was maxed out.
   - From 1790–1870, the Federal Census was arranged by state, county, township, or city. From 1880–1940 the Federal Census was arranged by enumeration district—geographical regions designed for the census taker, or enumerator, to reach every home within a reasonable time frame. Like gerrymandering for genealogy.
   - Nationality can be sometimes skewed as a nation's borders may have shifted radically over the years.

The 1900-1910 US Census records for Polish immigrants listed their country of birth as Germany, Russia, or Austria due to border changes. Some would write Aust Polish *or* Ger Polish *as a way to preserve their nationality, as seen here, but many more did not. As a result, certain records during this time may indicate conflicting nationalities and birth locations.*

2. **Birth, Marriage, & Death records**

    o   Church records are a great resource for discovering the birth, marriage, and death of an individual. They can give a glimpse into a family member's religious affiliation and degree of involvement.
    o   Records go back as far as the 1600s, and include information on christenings, burials, confirmations, and Sunday School lists.

3. **Military records**

    o   Military records includes details on dates and places of enlistment and discharges, the type of discharge, company and regiment, and rank. Domestic history provides a physical description (height, complexion, eye and hair color), age and birthplace, occupation, marital status, religion, and in many cases, the name and location of the nearest relative.
    o   Generally speaking, the individuals containing the most military records are the ones who need reports written about them, (usually for misconduct, desertion, injuries and deaths). If your ancestor does not show up in the database, it probably means they served their tour and returned home without incident.

4. **Immigration & Travel**

    o   Passenger lists were federally mandated by the US government in 1820, thus not guaranteeing information on immigrants before this time.
    o   For passenger lists after 1893, new fields relating to marital status, last residence, final destination, literacy, financial status were added, and then again in 1906 when physical description and place of birth were included.
    o   Similarly with census records, the earliest immigration records have less information than later ones. The data points kept expanding until 1905, when the Government Printing Office began to produce blank manifest books that used two pages for all the questions, instead of just one. In other words, each passenger's information took up a single line that crossed two ledger-sized pages, not one as in all previous years. So if you are searching Ancestry for immigrant ancestors who arrived after 1905, remember to check for that second page in the image set.
    o   Contrary to popular belief, no surnames were changed at U.S. ports like Ellis Island. Passengers recorded their own names on the travel logs at the point of departure, and these logs were handed over to the officials at the destination to ensure each passenger was accounted for. These logs played no part in "Americanizing" surnames, as they had no legal jurisdiction to do so.

Searching for Records

- The basic search engine will allow users to search immediately by First, Middle, and Last name, as well as a place where your ancestor might have lived and their approximate birth year.
- Additionally, more advanced search limiters may be selected by clicking on "show more options" next to the search button.
- The multitude of search fields on Ancestry is as much a strength as it is a weakness. While the flexibility of the search engine allows you to input any combination of data points precisely, you should use these fields sparingly. Having all these fields is not really an invitation to add in everything you might know or can guess about the individual, it mainly allows the user to put in other facts they might have available in place of others.
- Important to note, Ancestry evaluates records for name recognition according to different criterion, including:
    - Exact Matches: Records that contain a last name that is exactly what you typed in will appear in your results.
    - Soundex Variations: Soundex is a common algorithm used to generate alternate spellings of a surname based on sound of the spoken word.
    - Phonetic Variations: If you choose phonetic, Ancestry finds records with sequences of letters similar within the name. (SC
    - Similar Variations: There are alternates and spelling variations that are commonly used such as Hashe for Hash, that don't necessarily sound phonetically similar.
- It may be beneficial to utilize Ancestry Library Edition's **wildcard** functions for more flexible name searching. These searches must contain at least three letters.
    - Asterisks (*****) are used to match any number of characters at its placement in a name. For example, a search for *Wil** can match names like *Will, Wilbur, Willy,* or *Wilhelm.* This symbol is useful for when you are unsure of an ancestor's full name. This wildcard is typically placed at the end of names to generate the most successful of searches.
    - Question marks (**?**) are used to match only a single character in a name. For example, *Caitl?n* will produce *Caitlyn,* or *Caitlin* as results. This symbol is useful for when you might suspect a name's spelling might be one letter off, and can generally be placed anywhere within the name.

Clicking on any of the "down arrows" expands each category to display even more specified record types to choose from.

Hovering your cursor over any result will display a preview pane, as seen here. If a record contains an image, a clickable thumbnail appears next to "See More".

- Things to make note of on search results pages…
  - The Search Filters bar on the left side of your screen can become your best friend. Start by manipulating how broad or exact you would like your ancestor's name matched. There's not one correct way to search for a name.
    - You can edit the search from this section as well, adding or removing certain information to refine the results.
  - All Categories, the next section of the filter bar, gives you the ability to limit the results to a specific collection of records. This is very helpful if you want to only discover immigration papers of your ancestor, or locate a particular census for a name.
    - Click on the collection heading and expand the list of records below. Once refined, Ancestry will also display the exact number of records matched under the collection chosen.
  - Before opening up any of the records from the search results page, try hovering over the hyperlinked text (usually the record title). This gives you a preview window of the record details and can save you the time of opening a new page and returning back to search when it's determined irrelevant.

Sample Record Page

Arthur T Timmeck
in the 1940 United States Federal Census

Name: Arthur T Timmeck
Age: 28
Estimated birth year: abt 1912
Gender: Male
Race: White
Birthplace: Michigan
Marital Status: Single
Relation to Head of House: Son

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w Map
ars Avenue
itehall, Muskegon, Michigan
me House

cker

th School, 4th year

Hours Worked Week Prior to Census: 40
Class of Worker: Wage or salary worker in private work
Weeks Worked in 1939: 52
Income: 1100
Income Other Sources: Yes
Neighbors: View others on page
Household Members:

Name	Age
Louis T Timmeck	69
Mary J Timmeck	66
Arthur T Timmeck	28

Send Your Find Home!

Enter your email address and we will send you a link to your personalized Discovery Page where you can view and download all of the great fin...

SEND DOCU...

We value your pr...

View print...

NATIONAL ARCHIVES — Pro... National Archives and Records Administration

Suggested Records ❓

☐ Michigan, Marriage Records, 1867-1952
Arthur Timmick

☐ 1930 United States Federal Census
Arthur W Timmick

☐ U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current
Arthur W Timmick

☐ 1920 United States Federal Census
Arthur Timmrick

> **Be sure to verify that the information represented on the record page has been accurately transcribed from the source material by clicking the "view" button when the image is available.**

> **A "Suggested Records" panel may pop up to indicate that Ancestry has identified additional records that closely match all the information contained within this record.**

> **You can navigate to other family members by clicking on a name in the household member section.**

Searching the Card Catalog

- The card catalog is the home of all the databases that make up Ancestry Library Edition. Currently, there are over 10,000 unique databases. It is a great tool for more in-depth, albeit advanced, browsing of records. Each collection has source information, as well.
- From the Card Catalog, users may select a specific collection of records to conduct their search in. It is useful for viewing international records, the vast array of public family trees created by Ancestry users, yearbook collections, and more.
- You may sort and filter the listing of all record collections by Popularity, Database Title, Date Update/Added, and Record Count, or through the limiters on the left side of the screen that narrow by collection subject, location, dates covered, and languages.
- Once you have chosen a relevant database, you will input search terms very similarly to what we have already done with the basic search engine.

Ancestry Resources

1. **Message Boards**
   a. The message boards provide **paid subscribers** with a forum on which to post general queries. Library users, however, can search the discussion boards to explore previous posts, in the off chance that someone has already conducted genealogical research relating to your family.
   b. You can search by content, specific topic, or browse the boards manually for posts. Boards are not limited to research questions regarding individuals; there are boards for questions related to Ancestry sponsored research resources, genealogy software, and general tips and tricks.

2. **Learning Center**
   a. Ancestry has set up a very user-friendly page of resources that can assist genealogists in their research. The Learning Center provides search tips for researching multiple different records, information on DNA testing, and more. If you hit a roadblock in your research, it is worth checking out the Learning Center for help.
   b. The Maps section of the Learning Center is an overlooked resource that has a wealth of resources compiled in the form of research guides, designed to help users conduct more informed genealogical research at a state and regional level. They currently only have pages set up for the United States.

3. **Charts and Forms**
   a. Ancestry Library edition also provides its users with downloadable charts and forms for research—blank forms to fill in with the information you cull from your research. Ancestry has its own version of a pedigree chart if you need another. You can obtain other useful forms here like research calendars, research extracts, correspondence records and more.
   b. There are also blank forms for each year of the US Census, spanning from 1790-1940, that users can print out and fill in for themselves for clearer, legible record keeping. Also available are UK and Canadian census sheets.

4. **RootsWeb Wiki** https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/Main_Page
   a. The RootsWeb Wiki is a free to use, publicly editable open genealogic resource, designed to provide a more thorough family history education to researchers. This wiki was absorbed by Ancestry when they purchased the RootsWPeb brand.
   b. The easiest way to browse the Wiki is through the subject links in the top right of the page. From there, one can read more in-depth about census records, methods of state and county research, or visit its exhaustive list of known historical societies and archives.