

Try These Four Family History Websites for Success “When Other Doors Are Closed!”

Dig deeper in your research to find hidden gems at these four free and often underused genealogy websites! Looking for unique ways to untangle your family history roots. These four “hidden gem” sites are the **National Archives**, the **Library of Congress**, **Library and Archives Canada** and the **Internet Archives**. Yes, these three (government-run sites) might be a tad opaque because of their bureaucratic origins, and all three feel like “the national’s attic.” The fourth, the **Internet Archive**, is an amazing volunteer-run, non-profit collection of everything from old TV shows to rare books. Since none of these sites are designed to make money, their designers didn’t have as strong an incentive to make them easy for users to find (and thus, buy) stuff. Once you get to know these sites as well as I have, I think you’ll agree that they really are “diamonds in the rough.”

The National Archives and Records Administration: <http://www.achives.gov>

When visiting this National Archives’ site, don’t expect to find a lot actual records there. Census, most passenger lists and early military records held by the archives best researched elsewhere. But that doesn’t mean there aren’t some gems here, ranging from WWII enlistment records to index of Russian, Italian and German arrivals in America. The catalog contains archival descriptions for 85 percent of the archives’ holdings – plus, most significantly, more than two million digitized copies. “Find” is the trick here, though. The handsome but minimalist main catalog search page at <catalog.archives.gov> offers a single blank to fill in-no tips, no options, no dropdown and no check marks. The National Archives holds millions of records-but you’ll have to dig deeper than the catalog search page to find them. Clicking on their Advanced Search brings up a screen full of options to help narrow your search results.

The Library of Congress: www.loc.gov

Much like the National Archives, the Library of Congress catalog includes a wide variety of material-not just books or physical, offline items. The Everything search at the top of the home page or the Quick Search at (<catalog.loc.gov) covers 17 million catalog records for books, serials, manuscript, maps, music, recordings, images and electronic resources. To fine-tune a search of the overall catalog, select Advanced Search or Keyword Search from the dropdown at the upper right of the catalog search pages. The Advanced Search gives you blanks to fill in with options for AND, OR and NOT, plus a dropdown for each where can select to search any terms, all terms or as a phrase.

Library and Archives Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/home.aspx>

This bilingual site (English and French) combines aspects of its southern neighbor’s National Archives and Library of Congress. The institution’s vast collection, compiled from Canada, includes some 20 million books and 30 million images – about 5 million gigabytes of data in total. A beta Collection Search page <https://www.bac->

lac.gc.ca/eng/collectionsearch/Pages/collectionsearch.aspx on the Library and Archives Canada site let you search multiple databased in some categories, including genealogy and images. Try it if you're striking out with other searches.

Internet Archive: <http://www.archive.org>

The Internet Archive is a web-only non-profit operation, with no physical "archive." Instead, the site has partnerships with more than 450 institutions. Its modest goals: "provide Universal Access to All Knowledge." The Internet Archive and its Wayback Machine preserve a variety of content: books, web pages, audio recordings, videos, television broadcasts and more. The original goal of the Internet Archive was to preserve the fleeting digital history of the Internet. You can search these 341 billion archives pages either using the main search field (select "Search achieved webs sites" from the dropdown) or the Wayback Machine box atop the home page. Alternatively, you can search the Wayback Machine for keywords. You'll get a list of this, many with thumbnails, found in archived sites; clicking on these bring you to the chart and calendar of past "snapshots." You can view or download most archived items in your results list simplify by clicking on them; others can be borrowed for a few week once you're registered for a free "virtual library card at <https://archive.org/account/login.createaccount.php>. You can also combine keywords with a URL in a search, though the results will be hit and miss.

Closing Comments

Yes, there will certainly will be times when you can't locate everything in your family history wish list! And when that happens, there are other sources to pursue. Don't despair because there are excellent resources such as these four websites featured in this posting. Give these four a try and play around a bit. Once you get to know these resources, you'll come to love them. I love having options when pursuing my family history challenges. When there are no options readily available, that can be even a more challenging moment to face!