

Using the Google for Genealogy

Presented by James L. Tanner

genealogyarizona@gmail.com
[Genealogy's Star](#)

Google is a real online gold mine of information and helpful applications for genealogists. I am always surprised at how few genealogists know about these valuable golden resources.

Google is a huge multinational corporation that obtains revenue from its advertising solutions and global Internet search solutions. It has an online index of websites and other content. It has automated search technology that helps people to obtain access to relevant information from a vast online index. Its trademarks include Google, YouTube, DoubleClick, DART, AdSense, AdWords, Gmail, I'm Feeling Lucky, PageRank, Blogger, orkut, Picasa, SketchUp and Postini. It is accessed through Google.com and 112 other international domains, such as Google.ba, Google.dm, Google.nr, Google.co.jp and Google.ca. The Google interface is available in 120 languages.

Major Google Products that are of significance to genealogists:¹

Google Search and Advanced Search

Use a variety of search techniques to find information fast. To find a specific phrase, put the phrase in quotes. The order of the search terms also makes a difference as to which items appear in the search results. Click on the Advanced Search link to get expanded options for searching with simple fill in the boxes search instructions. For an extensive explanation of all Google search techniques, see [Google Inside – Search](#).

Genealogical Application: Genealogists should use the search for each name and all the variations of each name in their family trees. Set a goal to search for every name and begin to gather all the information that is available on the Internet about your family. When searching for the names of ancestors, be sure and search on the name and all possible variations of the name.

iGoogle

A personalized Google homepage where your gadgets can reside and you can access information across the Web right on your Google startup page. Gadgets can be both fun and useful and there are thousands that can be downloaded for free. The main use I find for iGoogle is to have my Google Reader account available every time I log in to the computer.

Genealogical Application: Using iGoogle with the Google Reader will provide a way to “tame” the jungle of information coming in from blogs and websites around the Internet but cutting down on the time you spend searching for information. It will also help you to tap into the posts from your children and other family members.

Google Maps and Wikipedia

View the entire world down to street level photographs. Take virtual walks and drives on the screen. Google maps are especially useful to find places. If you have the name of a place then use Google to search in Wikipedia for the place name. Once you find the Wikipedia article, click on the coordinates appearing in the upper right-hand corner of the Wikipedia screen. This link takes you to

the GeoHack website, listing almost every place on the Internet the coordinate location appears. If you need to go further to find a more obscure location, then click on the GeoNames site and you will get a list of all of the places surrounding the place you initially searched.

Genealogical Application: Identifying and finding a location where your ancestors lived is a crucial step in their positive identification. Google is the first step in using the huge online mapping resources to aid in your research. Try searching for digitized maps in the general location of your ancestors and also add “historic” as a search term. You can also use Google Maps’ My places, to construct your own map of genealogically significant places or plan a research trip.

Google Earth and 360Cities.net

Google Maps help you find places, Google Earth helps you find out about places. In addition, you can find historical places on historical maps and then overlay the map onto Google Earth to see where the old map locations are on a current map. There is a wealth of information in Google Earth about the locations on the map. Turn on the overlays to see additional information. Be careful not to turn on too many overlays or you won’t be able to see the maps.

Genealogical Application: Use the huge selection of map overlays, including the [Rumsey Historical Maps](http://www.davidrumsey.com/) (<http://www.davidrumsey.com/>) to find the historic names of locations throughout the world. Use the [Panoramio](http://www.panoramio.com/) (<http://www.panoramio.com/>) pictures and [360Cities.net](http://www.360cities.net/) (<http://www.360cities.net/>) to “see” where your ancestors lived.

Google News and News Archive

News archive search provides an easy way to search and explore historical archives. In addition to helping you search, News archive search can automatically create timelines that show selected results from relevant time periods. Originally, Google was in the process of digitizing historic newspapers. However, they discontinued that project for a time, but it is now back. To search in a specific area or time period, you will need to do a search for a topic. From the results screen you will have the further option of searching the Archives for a custom date range. You will find most of the older articles in the New York Times. If you want a more extensive newspaper search try doing a Google search for digitized newspapers. Also, try the [Library of Congress’s Digital Collections](http://www.loc.gov/index.html#) (<http://www.loc.gov/index.html#>) Chronicling America Historic Newspapers.

Genealogical Application: Search the archives for information including obituaries, about your family members using the ancestor’s name. Do a further search on Google for “newspapers digitized” to see the huge resources available online.

Google Books connect to WorldCat.org and Archive.org

Google Books has the goal of digitizing every book ever printed in every language in the world. They are well on the way to achieving the goal. Google began digitizing books in 2002. In August of 2010, it was announced that Google intends to scan all known existing 129,864,880 books by the end of the decade, accounting to over 4 billion digital pages and 2 trillion words in total. A recent search on the word “genealogy” in Google books returned 8,490,000 results. You can search by full name, surname, or any other combination of words.

Books can be viewed online in three different formats, Full View or Read where you can search and read the entire book, Preview where you can see portions of the book and Snippet view where you can see selected passages of the book.

Google books will give you a connection to where the book can be purchased or you can connect directly to WorldCat.org and Archive.org for additional ways of either seeing the book or finding a copy in a library.

Genealogical Application: Google Books and WorldCat.org are two of the resources I find most useful for finding information about any genealogical topic. You may be surprised to find a surname book about one of your ancestors. As with the basic Google search, it is a good idea to search out every name in your database for possible information in published books.

Blogger

There are millions of Blogs. Use Google Reader to subscribe and see headlines from the blogs on your iGoogle page. Use Blog Search to look for specific information. Set up your own blog in minutes. [Geneabloggers](http://www.geneabloggers.com/genealogy-blogs/) (<http://www.geneabloggers.com/genealogy-blogs/>) lists over 2,000 genealogy blogs.

Genealogical Application: I find many genealogists are entirely unaware of the huge number of blogs that are dedicated to family history and genealogy. Searching in the blogs may not only give you a lot of information about your family you did not know, but it may also provide you with valuable contacts to family members and family organizations.

Gmail and Google Talk

Free E-mail account. Email and its related method, texting, have become the default methods of contacting people in the digital age. If you are not using email to its fullest capabilities you are losing a valuable resource. You can also talk over the computer to relatives for free using Google Talk.

Genealogical Application: Staying in contact with family members on a regular basis. Organizing and maintaining a family organization and hundreds of other uses. To be fair, there are hundreds of different email applications, but Google has one of the most popular.

Picasa

One of the best photo organizing software products available and it's free. Picasa has some basic tools for editing photos but primarily does a really good job of organizing all of the photos on your computer. The program will automatically go out and find all of the images on your entire computer and then organizes them by date. You can use the program to rename the photos, add notes and information and organize the photos into files.

Genealogical Application: If you have any photos on your computer, you need this program. Picasa will also enable you to tag photos with the names of all the people that you know. You can then search for photos based on the people in the photograph.

Google Language Tools including Translate and Translated Searches

A new way of translating, Google Translate compares your input with the target through an exhaustive search. It will translate whole Web pages at a time. Look for Translated Searches in Google's More Search Tools on a results page. The translations provided are not of literary quality and in all cases cannot be relied upon for adequate communication, but they are good enough to give a researcher an idea of the content of a page in another language.

Genealogical Application: I know you have been waiting to do a web search in Klingon, but Google actually supports 149 different languages even if some of them are really strange like Klingon, Elmer Fudd and Pirate. Think about doing a search in your target language by typing in the search terms in English and have the program automatically translate all the pages you find! When trying to read other language documents, you can use Translate to look up terms and phrases or to translate entire web pages.

Google Reader

See Blogs above. Google Reader is one of class of programs called aggregators, feed aggregators or RSS reader. These programs let you bookmark pages and will then notify you of any changes or updates to the web page you have bookmarked through a process called really simple syndication or RSS. Google Reader reduces the time it takes to check a variety of websites or blogs for updates.

Genealogical Application: A real time-saver for keeping up with the online genealogical community.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar provides a simple way to broadly search for scholarly literature. From one place, you can search across many disciplines and sources: peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts and articles, from academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories, universities and other scholarly organizations. Google Scholar helps you identify the most relevant research across the world of scholarly research.

Genealogical Application: Some of these Google applications have such a broad use that it is difficult to identify a specific use for the program, but the idea is so useful that you need to be aware that the program exists.

Google+

One of the newest Google programs, Google+ is a social networking site that has taken the genealogical community by storm. Within days of its introduction, Google+ had a huge number of genealogists linked together online and the number has continued to go up every day.

Genealogical Application: Google+ has become the go-to place for genealogists.

YouTube

YouTube is not just about weird home videos, there are thousands of genealogy related videos, including a huge selection of Genealogy Gems and FamilySearch videos.

Genealogical Application: Do a search under the term “genealogy” for relevant videos. You will very likely be amazed at the resources. All of the major genealogy organizations and repositories seem to have YouTube channels. Try searching for FamilySearch, Ancestry.com, the Library of Congress and other relevant topics.

¹ This is not nearly a list of all of the Google Apps you may find useful). For a list of all the Google Products see [Everything Google/Products](http://www.google.com/intl/en/about/products/index.html). (<http://www.google.com/intl/en/about/products/index.html>)