Overlooked Records of Pioneer Utah and Surrounding Settlements

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Many records exist for Utah and surrounding settlements of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Many of these are easily accessible on FamilySearch.org and other family history websites. But there are other valuable records that are often overlooked, even those online. This handout presents and explains several of these records.

Note: There is a longer version of this handout available at http://bit.ly/RRHandout.

If you are attending RootsTech 2024 in person, consider these live sessions:

- "Say Cheese!: Photograph Collections from the Church History Library," Jeff Thompson.
- "Discover Your Family in Latter-day Saint History," Jeff Haddon.
- "Finding Ancestors in Latter-day Saint Ward and Branch Records," Lyn Rasmussen.

DISCOVERING ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Besides the records discussed in this handout, the FamilySearch Wiki article "Tracing Latter-day Saint Ancestors" is a great place to discover other overlooked records. It reviews different records available for researching ancestors who were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Go to wiki.familysearch.org. Enter the word [Tracing] in the search box (without the brackets) and click "Tracing Latter-day Saint Ancestors" in the dropdown list.

In addition to the information on the page, there are dozens of links to other pages, which are also specific to researching early members of the Church. One of the links is a large blue button that links to a rather lengthy table of online records.

MOUNTAIN WEST DIGITAL LIBRARY

The Mountain West Digital Library (MWDL) is not a source itself. Rather, it is a collaborative catalog, of sorts, and finds often overlooked sources at archives, libraries, and universities across the Mountain West. Initial members of MWDL included Brigham Young University, Southern Utah University, University of Utah, and Utah State University. Access the MWDL at https://mwdl.org/.

Search the MWDL as if you were searching a library catalog. It returns a list of matches gathered from all the participating institutions.

Unlike census records, where you are almost guaranteed success, the MWDL may not locate records for an ancestor. But you may find information about places your ancestor lived. You may be able to find your ancestor's family and associates. Sometimes, looking for a friend or

neighbor is how you find your own ancestor.

NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers are another overlooked source of information about early pioneers.

Coverage of dates and titles at the different newspaper sites vary. For example, *Chronicling America* has a rich Arizona collection. Visit https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

Online newspapers typically have full-text indexes that are just a bag of words. That is to say, every word is in the index, but the computer does not understand the words. The computer does not know names from dates from places from any other word.

Newspapers can be challenging to search not only because they have a bag-of-words index, but because the index was created using OCR. OCR stands for *Optical Character Recognition* and is the process where a computer tries to read the text in an image. There is an art to searching newspapers. Keep quoted phrases short and utilize wildcards to overcome OCR errors. Try quotation marks, switching name order, and including or excluding middle names.

Utah Digital Newspapers

One newspaper website of particular interest for early Utah newspapers is *Utah Digital Newspapers*: https://digitalnewspapers.org/.

Google Newspaper Archive

There was a Google project to digitize newspapers, but it was discontinued in 2011. Fortunately, the images scanned up to that point are still available in the Google Newspaper Archive. You may find issues of *The Deseret News* and *Church News* here that you cannot find elsewhere.

To search or browse the archive, start at https://news.google.com/newspapers. Enter search terms in either of the top boxes.

CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY

The growing online collections of the Church History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are often overlooked. To clarify things, there are two libraries next to temple square in Salt Lake City. Both represent departments of the Church. But each has its own library and its own website. One is the FamilySearch Library, operated by the Church Family History Department. The other is the Church History Library, operated by the Church History Department.

Church History Library Catalog

The Church History Library Catalog contains many records that are often overlooked. Go to Catalog.ChurchOfJesusChrist.org.

The pages in the catalog have an Ask Us option in the upper-right corner. Use it to ask questions and get additional information from the library staff.

Tips for searching the catalog:

- Use quotes around names. Try with and without middle names or initials. Repeat with last name first.
- Select View Digital to show only results that have been digitized.
- Search for people and places associated with your ancestor to learn more about their world. In the process perhaps you will find information specifically about them.

CHL Catalog: Ward Records

One way to learn more about your ancestor is to learn more about their ward. Early ward records often contain more than just forms. The ward records help you learn the context of your ancestor's life. You might find your ancestor's name, but you might not. Not all names in ward records can be found by searching the catalog. Instead, search for the ward name.

The "Record of Members" collection is an overlooked source. Search for "Record of Members Collection" and click "Record of members collection, 1836-1970." Select the desired letter of the alphabet. Select the range of wards encompassing the desired ward and scroll until you find it.

A message above the ward name states, "Please sign in to determine access." Sign in. The message changes to "Request Digital Access." Click it and fill out the request form.

After several days you will receive an email notification that you have been granted access. If you are notified that downloading is unavailable, do not circumvent the restriction using screen captures. Instead, transcribe the records. Remember to include citation information.

For more information, see Lyn Rasmussen's 2024 RootsTech session, "Finding Ancestors in Latter-day Saint Ward and Branch Records."

CHL Catalog: Journal History of the Church

The Journal History of the Church is another overlooked source available through the catalog. It contains daily entries arranged chronologically. Many entries consist of newspaper clippings, but entries might also include transcriptions and extracts from other sources.

Online availability to the journal history varies by date.

- 1830-1913: Online.
- 1914-1923: Online. Requires permission.
- 1924-2008: Available in person at the Church History Library.
- 1830-1989: Images of index cards are available online.

There is no digital index, but images of the card index are online.

With the Digital option checked, search the catalog for ["Journal History of the Church"]. (Include the quotes, but do not type the brackets. They indicate what to type.) The Journal History is the result titled "Historical Department journal history of the Church, 1830-2008." The index is titled "Journal History index, 1830-1939."

The index is divided into two date ranges, 1830-1972 and 1973-1989. Click the date range of interest. Then expand the name range containing the person, place, or subject of interest. Click the item of interest and click "Open in Viewer."

Use successive guesses to find cards. Remember, the index covers until 1989, but only journal entries to 1913 are readily accessible online. When you find a card of interest, make note of the journal year, date, and page number (if noted).

Once you have the journal date, return to the catalog and click on the Journal History. Navigate to the right date range and click "Open in Viewer." Browse to the journal entry.

CHL Catalog: Article Index

The Church History Library catalog has an article index. "The Article Index is a database of articles…related to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members found in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. The Church History Library holds some of these periodicals; some are held at other institutions. Click the title to open the summary page

to view information about this content including details on how to locate or access it."[*]

Catalog entries for the Article Index are interspersed with regular entries. If you wish to limit search results to just Article Index entries, check the Article Index checkbox under Record Type in the filters on the left.

Click a result to see the information about the article. For many articles available online, the Church History Library has provided a link to it. Before you click the link, make a note of the citation information, such as date and page number, as this information may be necessary after clicking the link. Some articles may be available elsewhere in the catalog itself, such as articles in *The Improvement Era*. Just because there is no link to an article does not mean the article cannot be found online. However, it may be necessary to find a physical copy of the periodical.

JOSEPH SMITH PAPERS

The Joseph Smith papers project includes short biographies of people mentioned in the papers. The biographies provide a rich collection of sources.

Go to JosephSmithPapers.org and search for the person's name. Begin typing and the website drops down a list of suggested matches. Click your ancestor's name.

Each biography contains a reference for each fact. Click the little page icon with the reference number to see the citation. Some sources are in the Joseph Smith Papers themselves and references contain links to the source documents. Some biographies cite the patriarchal blessing index. Patriarchal blessings are another overlooked source for birth information. Descendants can request copies of their ancestors' blessings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, remember the FamilySearch Wiki, the Mountain West Digital Library, newspapers, the Church History Library catalog in general, and in particular: ward records, the Journal History of the Church, and the article index. Biographies exist for those mentioned in the Joseph Smith papers.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

For references and suggested readings, see the long handout at http://bit.ly/RRHandout.

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[*] Church History Catalog, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (https://catalog .churchofjesuschrist.org/search/_simple/%22raymond+a+george%22?lang=eng), click "What is the Article Index."