

Ancestor Timeline Worksheet

Build a life story from old newspapers

Use this worksheet to organize newspaper finds into a clear ancestor timeline. Start with the death year, work backward, and let each clipping point you toward the next search.

The method

1. Start with the death year and work backward.
2. Search name variations, initials, and nicknames.
3. Search family members separately.
4. Widen to county and regional papers.
5. Let each clipping tell you what to search next.

1. Start here

Ancestor name: _____

Birth year: _____

Death year: _____

Main town/county: _____

State: _____

Known relatives to search: _____

Known addresses/places: _____

Key date range: _____

2. Clipping types to look for

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Obituaries | ☐ Church news |
| ☐ Death notices | ☐ Business advertisements |
| ☐ Funeral reports | ☐ Land or legal notices |
| ☐ Marriage notices | ☐ Probate notices |
| ☐ Birth announcements | ☐ Political appointments |
| ☐ Social columns | ☐ School or graduation notices |
| ☐ Family gathering mentions | ☐ Travel items |
| ☐ Letters to the editor | ☐ "Years Ago" columns |

3. First search plan

Search this name first: _____

Also try these name variations: _____

Search these relatives: _____

Search these newspapers or places: _____



Tip: Even a one-sentence clipping can add a date, a relationship, a place, or a clue that changes the whole story.

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Record each clipping and follow the clues

Arrange your newspaper finds in chronological order. For each clipping, write down what it revealed and what it tells you to search next.

4. Timeline log

Date	Publication	Clipping type	What it revealed	What to search next
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

5. What to record from each clipping

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Publication name and date | ☐ Occupation or role |
| ☐ Every personal name mentioned | ☐ Church, school, or organization |
| ☐ Every place name mentioned | ☐ Address or property clue |
| ☐ Record type | ☐ New dates to follow |
| ☐ New relationship clues | ☐ Words or phrases worth searching again |

6. Timeline summary

Most important clue I found: _____

New people to search: _____

New places to search: _____

Best next search: _____

What this timeline now tells me about this ancestor:



Tip: The last item matters most. Every clipping should suggest another name, place, date, or newspaper to search.