

Wanted! Dead or Alive: Researching Criminal Ancestors

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Types of Records:

- Newspapers
- Census Records
- Jail Registers
- Prison Records
- Court Records
- Execution Records

Newspapers

- Chronicling America U.S. Newspaper Directory 1690-Present - <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/titles/>
 - Contact the libraries and other repositories with the newspaper editions you're looking for
- Elephind - <https://elephind.com/>
- GenealogyBank.com (\$)
- Google News Archive - <https://news.google.com/newspapers>
- Historic American Newspapers - <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/> (1789-1963)
- Newspapers.com (\$)

Census Records

- Review the name of facility on top of page.
 - Tip: Not all persons listed as "inmate" are in jail or prison. They may be living in another type of facility such as an orphanage or asylum house.

Jail Registers



American Ancestors
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

- Most common record for local and county jails
- Information typically includes name, age, sex, date of arrest, charges. Additional details may include information related to court records, sentence (if convicted), occupation, residence, nationality, birth date, parents' names.
- ArchiveGrid - www.archivegrid.com
- FamilySearch.org - use keyword "jail registers" in the catalogue and narrow down by location
- Local and state historical societies

Prison Records

- U.S. Penitentiary Records, 1875-1963 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/uspen/>
- Prison Records at the National Archives - <https://www.archives.gov/research/prisons>
- Examples of specific prison records:
 - Alcatraz Inmate Lists - <http://www.notfrisco2.com/alcatraz/inmates/index.html>
 - Atlanta Federal Penitentiary Case Files - <https://www.archives.gov/atlanta/finding-aids/atlanta-penitentiary>
 - Idaho Penitentiary (1864-1947) - <https://history.idaho.gov/collections/old-idaho-penitentiary-inmates-catalog/>
 - Massachusetts State Prison Inmate Case Files (1910-1941) - <http://chc.library.umass.edu/state-archives/2017/04/18/inmate-case-files-massachusetts-state-prison/>
 - Tennessee State Penitentiary (1831-1850) - <https://sos.tn.gov/products/tsla/inmates-tennessee-state-penitentiary-1831-1850>

Court Records

- Typically kept at the state or county level
- FamilySearch.org - use the "Court Records" category under the location you're researching
- United States Court Records - https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Court_Records
- Tip: Not all court records are online. Contact the courthouse regarding any records that are not digitized and ask for copies/lookups.

Execution Records

- Death Penalty Information Center Execution Database - <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions/execution-database>
- Research Governor files in the state where someone was convicted
 - Ex. Texas Digital Archive has execution case files 1970-2014 - <https://tsl.access.preservica.com/tda/tx-gov-perry/execution-files/execution-cases/>

Online Resources

- Ancestor Hunt – Genealogical Prison Records & Jail Records - http://www.ancestorhunt.com/genealogical_prison_records.html
- Blacksheep Ancestors - <https://www.blacksheepancestors.com>
- Criminal Genealogy Facebook Group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/206093116681587/>
- Proceedings of the Old Bailey (London’s Criminal Court, 1674-1913) - <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/index.jsp>

Published Resources

Ron Arons, *Wanted! U.S. Criminal Records: Sources & Research Methodology*. (Oakland, CA: Criminal Research Press, 2009).

Derek Hinton, *The Criminal Records Manual: The Complete National Reference for the Legal Access and Use of Criminal Records*. (Tempe, AZ: Facts on Demand Press, 2004).

Edgar J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England: Criminal Justice and Due Process 1620-1692*. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

Diane Rapaport, *New England Court Records. A Research Guide for Genealogists and Historians*. (Burlington, MA: Quill Pen Press, 2006).

Stephen Wade, *Tracing Villains and Their Victims: A Guide to Criminal Ancestors for Family Historians*. (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Family History, 2017).