

# Using AmericanAncestors.org

Rhonda R. McClure, [rmclure@nehgs.org](mailto:rmclure@nehgs.org)

AmericanAncestors.org offers more than 480 searchable, digitized databases containing in excess of 1.4 billion searchable names. These databases include vital records, cemetery records, probate records, genealogies, and scholarly journals. You can get the most of your AmericanAncestors.org search using the tips and techniques below. Watch our Zoom demo on the new web site at:  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/zoom-demo-new-americanancestorsorg>.

## LOG IN

To access records from *all* databases on AmericanAncestors.org, you must be an NEHGS member, and you must be logged in.

To log in:

1. Go to **AmericanAncestors.org** and click "Log in" at the very top of the page.
2. Enter your username and password.
3. You can now search all databases and access results!

If you are not an NEHGS member, you can register for free as a Guest Member at <https://www.americanancestors.org/membership/guest-users> and access a *limited number of databases*.

## THREE WAYS TO SEARCH

There are three basic ways to search the databases on American Ancestors:

- Traditional advanced search
  - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/advanced-search>
  - All the results returned must match all of your search criteria
- **Database search**
  - Access a database-specific search page
  - The results with the best fit to your search criteria are returned, and sorted in order of relevance
- **Category search**
  - Access a category-specific search page.
  - The results with the best fit to your search criteria are returned, and sorted in order of relevance

## DATABASE SEARCH

The Database search pages are tuned to search a single database:

- Choose a database from our [A-Z Database](#) list (<https://www.americanancestors.org/browse-database>) by clicking the magnifying glass icon next to the database name.
- Only fields available for search in the chosen database will appear on the search form.

*Note: Be sure to read the Search Tips listed underneath the search form to gain information on any particularities of a given database.*

## CATEGORY SEARCH

Use Category Search when you are interested in a particular type of record, like vital or census records, and you want to search across all relevant databases.

To access our Category Search, go to the Advanced Search <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/advanced-search>. On the right hand side, click on the specific category under "Search by Category".

## JOURNAL SEARCHES

Scholarly journals and periodicals are important, yet often overlooked, resources.

AmericanAncestors.org offers thousands of searchable issues from a number of journals, including our own *New England Historic and Genealogical Register*, the *New York Genealogical & Biographical Record*, *The Mayflower Descendant*, and many others. Searching journals on our website is different than searching other records:

- Start on our category-specific search page: <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/category-search/98/journals-and-periodicals>
- Article titles can be searched using the keyword field.
- Some journals offer the "Article Title Only Filter" found toward the bottom of the screen. Check this box (found on the database search page for a particular journal) and each individual article will be returned once.
- When searching journals and other periodicals, the year you see in your search results refers to the publication year and **not** a year tied to the person you are searching for. Don't overlook these records because of that date!
- For more information, see our webinar: [How to Search Journals on AmericanAncestors.org \(https://youtu.be/-4jCupNiwaI\)](https://youtu.be/-4jCupNiwaI).

## WILDCARD SEARCHES

Wildcards used within your search terms can help broaden your results. In this context, a wildcard refers to a single character that can represent one or a series of unknown characters. They are especially helpful when searching for ancestors: consider how many times you have seen misspellings, transcription mistakes, and other inconsistencies in the records. *Note:* A wildcard can be used within the First Name, Last Name, and Keyword fields. Supported wildcards include the ? and \*

- ? - Represents any single character
  - Example: Hans?n returns Hansen and Hanson
- \* - Represents zero or more characters; best used for spelling variations or a series of unknown characters
  - Example: Wood\* returns Wood, Woods, Woodward, Woodbury, and others

## SAVING SEARCHES

AmericanAncestors.org allows you to save your favorite searches to your user profile for future use. By saving your repeat searches you can access them from any computer you use to log onto our web site; the search is re-executed each time you bring it up so corrections and additions we make to our database will be reflected in your search; and it saves you time and keeps your search parameters consistent.

To save a search, perform a search as you would normally. When you are happy with the search, click on the “Save Search” button at the top of the search results. If you wish to make refinements or changes after saving the search, you will have to save it again under a different name.

To find and re-execute your saved searches, on any search screen use the pull-down list, titled Saved Searches.

## FAVORITE DATABASES

You can also create a list of favorite or frequently used databases and search those as a group or individually. To create your list of favorite databases:

- 1) While viewing database records, you can include the database you are currently viewing by clicking the **Favorite** button at the top right of the display.
- 2) You can also save a favorite database while browsing databases by clicking on the star in the table.

**Note:** *If you no longer want a database in your favorites, simply click the star again.*

To use your favorite databases for search, go to the search screen and check the box “Favorite(s) only” near the middle of the form next to “Database”.

## VIEWING RECORDS

Once your search results are returned, click on the name in the record listing to be taken to the Record Display page. Click View Image to be taken directly to the image.

Viewer tools are at the upper-left corner of the window. These include: Download, Print; Zoom-in; Zoom-out, Restore Original View; and Full-Screen view.

To “pan” or move the image around in the image viewers, place your cursor over the image, click and hold your mouse button. Then drag the image around as you move your mouse or drag your finger across your touchpad.

On each image page you should be able to:

- Get help (lower right, underneath image)
- Write a comment (lower right, underneath image). If you find an error, have a question, or have other thoughts related to our databases, please let us know!
- View and copy the citation (button located directly underneath image).
- See the database description.
- Read search tips for this database.

## PRINTING AND SAVING RECORDS

To save or print a database image for your own records, use the Download and Print button at the upper left-hand corner of the image. This will open a new tab to print or save the current view of the image.

Note: For some databases, these files will be very large. To limit the image to that portion which appears in your browser view, check “Current View” before clicking Download or Print.

For journals or probate files you may want to print multiple pages at once. Use the Print Range button and enter the number of pages you want to print. You may also print to PDF if your browser supports it.

## ANNOTATIONS

When we receive documented evidence that a record is incorrect in the original source document that we have indexed you can see annotations. The field that was incorrect is highlighted in yellow on the record detail page and the corrected information is shown below that field. If you find an error you can use the Report Error button, or the Comment or Question box on the various search results pages.

## DATABASE NEWS

This blog provides updates whenever we add databases or enhance the search experience. You can use the web site or sign up for email notifications at <https://dbnews.americanancestors.org/>.

### Conclusion

There are a lot of different ways in which you can search AmericanAncestors.org. Many of the searches offer a broader list of search results. Some of the searches it is important to be careful how you use some of the fields. It is always a good idea to use a family that you know a lot about when first experimenting with databases so that the results are more understandable in that you would expect them to show up in certain databases and if they aren't then the search parameters may be the problem.

*Note: It is always best to start broad with searches and then refine them incrementally.*

Email [webmaster@nehgs.org](mailto:webmaster@nehgs.org) with any questions!