

THREE CENTS REWARD—Absented himself from the Subscriber, an indentured apprentice to the Smithing Business, by the name of **LEWIS PERA**, about twenty years of age. Persons are hereby cautioned against trusting him on account of his bad character.

RICHARD STILLMAN

LEITRIM—NEW YORK.

Information Wanted.

MAKAWAO, December 16th, 1880.

ANON, Honolulu:

—Relying on your well-known kindness, I request your assistance in aiding me to find my family.

In Albany, New York, one of a family of whom I last time I heard from them, was about the age of 15 years, as I can tell, relying on memory alone. I have written a letter from my father; since then, I have not heard from them, either brothers, sisters, or children.

My father was called William, a school teacher, and was deaf and dumb; as was also my mother. My name was Frances, and who was living in Albany the last time I heard from them. My name was John W. Gennett; he was a Frenchman, and lived in Albany at the time I last heard from them.

My father was called William, a school teacher, and was deaf and dumb; as was also my mother. My name was Frances, and who was living in Albany the last time I heard from them.

My father was called William, a school teacher, and was deaf and dumb; as was also my mother. My name was Frances, and who was living in Albany the last time I heard from them.

HISTORICAL ADVERTISING

Missing, For Sale, Wanted & More

Gain Insights Into Your Ancestors' Lives

Real Estate for Sale.

THE subscribers, about to dissolve their Copartnership offer for sale about one hundred acres of land in the Town of Portland and County of Cumberland, consisting of Mowing, Tillage, Pasturing and Woodland, with a good barn on it, and an excellent well of Water, which will be sold whole or in part as will best suit the purchasers.

—ALSO—

A Farm in Lewntown, in the County of Lincoln, formerly known by the name of the Garcelon farm, containing one hundred and fifty acres—about thirty acres of the above is woodland, one hundred and twenty under wood, with a handsome young Orchard.

Wanted of

th, Lanark. Age now 40 years, heavy build, single. Any information will be appreciated.

IGAN, 303

Tools

20 acres of best mowing lies of wood and timber; pasture; apples, pears and grapes for own use. 1½-story cottage in extra good condition, 9 rooms, 14x40; sugar orchard, 75 bushes up 20 head of cattle; 1 pair of horses, tobacco barn, 1½ acres of land, 4½ miles to village; ½-mile to school; 1 mile to post office and electric cars. Will include 6 cows, and all the necessary farming tools.

Thomas Jay Kemp

HISTORICAL ADVERTISING

Missing, For Sale, Wanted & More

Gain Insights Into Your Ancestors' Lives

Thomas Jay Kemp



© Copyright 2018, GenealogyBank

© 2018 NewsBank
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

GenealogyBank, a division of NewsBank, inc.
5801 Pelican Bay Boulevard, Suite 600
Naples, Florida 34108
www.GenealogyBank.com

(866) 641-3297

About GenealogyBank

GenealogyBank is a leading online genealogical resource from NewsBank, Inc. Genealogybank's exclusive newspaper archive features over 7,000+ small town and big city historical newspapers across the U.S. from 1690 to present day to help you discover and document your family story. You'll find births, marriages, engagement notices, hometown news, obituaries and much more! Search today and get a glimpse into the triumphs, troubles and everyday experiences of your American ancestors.

NewsBank, Inc. has been one of the world's premier information providers for more than 35 years. Through partnerships with the American Antiquarian Society, Wisconsin Historical Society and more than 3,000 publishers, NewsBank is uniquely qualified to offer some of the most comprehensive genealogical information available – and to provide new content regularly.

About the Author

Thomas Jay Kemp is the Director of Genealogy Products at GenealogyBank. Tom is an internationally known librarian and archivist. He is the author of over 45 genealogy books and hundreds of articles about genealogy and family history. Tom previously served as the Chair of the National Council of Library & Information Associations (Washington, D.C.) and as Library Director of both the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. He began his career in 1963 as the Assistant to the Librarian in the Genealogy & Local History Room at the Ferguson Library (Stamford, Connecticut).



Advertisements

WHEN GENEALOGISTS search newspapers for family history information, they often think of such notices as obituaries and birth announcements. There is another type of notice routinely published in newspapers, however, that genealogists should include in their searches: advertisements.

Advertisements are a valuable source of family information. Our ancestors advertised their shops, trades, items for sale, missing items such as lost horses, and rewards offered for runaway servants or slaves. Advertisements like these take us beyond the names, dates, and other basic facts of our ancestors and give us a sense of the lives they experienced.

The visual nature of advertisements can have an impact on family history researchers that the dates and facts found in other records do not convey. Newspaper advertisements provide genealogists with unique information that they just will not find in any other contemporary records.

Let's examine five types of newspaper advertisements (missing friends or family, missing items, real estate, runaway indentured servants, and runaway slaves) to see what family history details we can learn, and what insights we can gain into our ancestors' lives.

Missing Friends or Family

It was common in the 18th and 19th Centuries for newspapers to carry "Information wanted" advertisements from people searching for lost friends or

Advertisements

relatives. In the case of missing merchant seamen (since they worked on ships coming from and going to ports all over the world), people searching for them would often place ads in newspapers published near shipping ports and “seaman homes.”

Here is an example, printed by *The Friend* (Honolulu, Hawaii) on 1 February 1878, page 13:

Information Wanted.

Respecting JAMES MARSTON, of Hampton, New Hampshire, absent from home about 25 years, and between fifty and sixty years of age. He has sailed in the ships *Montezuma*, *William Thompson* and *Roman*. He is known to have been several times mate of a ship. He is known to have sailed in ships out of New Bedford. One of the masters' name under whose command he sailed was Allen. Any information will be gladly received by Rev Mr Butler of New Bedford, Mrs J C Hardy of Havenhill, Mass, (box 298) or by the editor of the FRIEND.

From this ad we learn several things about James Marston:

- He was from Hampton, New Hampshire
- He left home about 25 years ago (around 1853)
- He was between the ages of 50 and 60
- He sailed on the ships *Montezuma*, *William Thompson* and *Roman*
- He had been the mate on several ships, and once sailed out of New Bedford, Massachusetts
- He once sailed under a Master Allen
- The names of two other people associated with him: Rev. Mr. Butler of New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Mrs. J. C. Hardy of Havenhill, Massachusetts

There's something else this ad brings to our attention. If you were looking for your ancestor James Marston, and you knew he was born in the 1820s in Hampton, New Hampshire, you might concentrate on searching only New Hampshire or New England newspapers. But a wider search of newspapers from across the country would produce this important advertisement providing details about his life and career—even though it was printed in a Hawaiian newspaper.

This is a good tip when doing your family history research: if the geographically-limited, narrow search you first tried turned up few or zero results, expand the area of your search—notes about your ancestors may have been printed in

Advertisements

newspapers you would never have thought of or expected. Occasionally you find an "Information wanted" advertisement that is written by a sailor who has lost touch with his family, as in this example printed by *The Friend* (Honolulu, Hawaii) on 1 March 1872, page 21:

Information Wanted.

MAKAWAO, December 16th, 1871.

REV. S. C. DANON, Honolulu :
DEAR SIR.—Relying on your well-known kindness, I have ventured to request your assistance in aiding me to find some traces of my family.

I was born in Albany, New York, one of a family of eight children ; the last time I heard from them, was about thirty years ago, as far as I can tell, relying on memory alone ; at which time I had a letter from my father ; since then, I have had no reliable information of them, either brothers, sisters, or parents. My oldest brother was called William, a cabinet-maker by trade, and was deaf and dumb ; as was also my youngest sister, whose name was Frances, and who was in the New York Deaf and Dumb Asylum the last time I heard of her. My father's name was John W. Gennett ; he was keeping a grocery store in Albany, a naturalized Frenchman, and was sexton of the only Catholic Church in Albany at the time of my leaving home ; which position he had filled from my childhood.

My mother's maiden name was Johanna Henny or Hennie ; Scotch by birth, and a native of Nova Scotia ; but I expect they are both dead. Our family names, were Cornelis, William, Peter (myself), John, Edward, Frances, Charles, and Henry ; the last I heard of any of them except Frances, was, that they were all in Albany City.

Yours very respectfully, **PETER GENNETT.**

N. B—*Albany Argus* and *Evening Journal*, published in Albany, will please insert the above advertisement three times, and send their bills to Rooms of American Seaman's Friend Society, 80 Wall Street, New York City.

Look how much family history information is contained in this one ad:

- Sailor looking for his family: Peter Gennett
- His birthplace: Albany, New York
- Last time he was in touch with his family: about 30 years ago (around 1841)
- Father's name: John W. Gennett
- Father's history: kept a grocery store in Albany, was a naturalized Frenchman, and was a long-time sexton of the only Catholic Church in Albany at the time Peter left home

Advertisements

- Mother's maiden name: Johanna Henry (or Hennie)
- Mother's history: Scottish heritage; she was a native of Nova Scotia
- Family: eight children
- Children (in chronological order): Cornelia, William, Peter, John, Edward, Frances, Charles and Henry
- Places of residence: all (except for Frances, who was institutionalized) were living in Albany the last Peter knew
- Brother William's history: a cabinet maker who was deaf
- Sister Frances's history: was in the "New York Deaf and Dumb Asylum" the last time Peter heard of her

That's a tremendous amount of family information to help guide your future searches for this family.

Immigrant families from Europe were surprised at the vastness of America. Wanting to get in touch with friends or family members, they took out advertisements in ethnic and distant newspapers in hopes that their published notices would come to the attention of the person they sought. Here's an example of this, printed by *The Irish World* (New York, New York) on 3 December 1904, page 8:



LEITRIM-NEW YORK.

REILLY.—Information wanted of Patrick Reilly, who left Carrickallen, Ireland, thirteen years ago, and was heard of last five years ago. He was a motorman on a street car in New York City. His mother's name was Hagan; sisters' names, Bridget and Mary; brother's name, Edward. Any information of him will be received thankfully by his brother, **EDWARD REILLY**, General Delivery, Butte City, Mont.

UNITED STATES.

O'MEALY.—Information wanted of John O'Mealy, who left New York May, 1873, and has never been seen or heard from since. He is supposed to have gone to Texas. He is five feet nine inches, medium complexion, brown hair, blue eyes. Any account of him will be thankfully received by his sister **MAGGIE**, now Mrs. **M. COONAN**, 624 Greenwich street, New York.

CANADA-UNITED STATES.

MURPHY.—Information wanted of Sarah Ann Murphy, who left Perth, Lanark Co., Ontario, Canada, in 1872 or 1873. Age now if living, about 46. Dark hair and eyes, heavy set. Heard she went to Almonte, Ontario. Any information of her, or heirs if living, will be thankfully received by **W. E. McGWIGAN**, 303 High St., Salem, Oregon.

Advertisements

As this example demonstrates, genealogists can learn a lot from these ads. They provide names, physical descriptions, places of residence, and personal details.

The ads in this example show something else, too. It is often very difficult to locate the exact townlands or counties for Irish American ancestors, but these ads provide that vital information. Newspapers are usually the only source of this information published in America.

Notice that the header for each individual ad calls out the key information: surname of the missing person, and the locations where the person lived and may have gone to:

Reilly (Leitrim—New York)

- Patrick reilly left Carrickallen, Ireland, 13 years ago (about 1891)
- He was last heard from 5 years ago (about 1899)
- He was a motorman on a street car in New York City
- His mother's maiden name: Hagan
- Sisters' names: Bridget and Mary
- Brother's name: Edward, who lives in Butte, Montana (he placed the ad)

Notice that the header for this ad is "Leitrim—New York." Carrickallen (Carrigallen) is in County Leitrim, Ireland.

O'Mealy (United States)

- John O'Mealy left New York in May 1873 and has not been seen or heard from since
- He was supposed to have gone to Texas
- He is five feet nine inches tall, with medium complexion, brown hair, and blue eyes
- Sister's name: Maggie, now Mrs. M. Coonan
- Sister's address: 624 Greenwich Street, New York

Murphy (Canada—United States)

- Sarah Ann Murphy left Perth, Lanark County, Ontario, Canada, in 1872 or 1873
- She would now (1904) be about 46 years old
- She has dark hair and eyes, and is heavy-set
- She might be in Almonte, Ontario
- Sought by: W. E. McGwigan of 305 High Street, Salem, Oregon

Advertisements

In this last example the ad was placed by a person in Salem, Oregon, seeking information about an Irish-Canadian person—neither one of the parties lived in New York City where *The Irish World* newspaper was published—another reminder of the importance of expanding the area of your search, because notices about your ancestors may have been printed in newspapers you would never have thought of or expected.

Missing Items

People regularly advertised for missing items and farm animals, and these ads really give us a sense of the lives of our ancestors. This example was printed by the *Gazette* (Portland, Maine) on 22 July 1799, page 2:



Strayed or Stolen,
FROM a pasture near Capt. Joseph
Stockbridge's, in Freeport, a black MARE, with
a white face, and two white hind feet,—about 15 years
old, trots all. Whoever will secure or return said beast
to the subscriber, shall be rewarded for the same by
WILLIAM GARCELON.
Freeport, July 10, 1799.

This is a short advertisement and a simple matter, but it provides a glimpse into the life of William Garcelon: he once owned a black mare, with a white face and two white hind feet, about 15 years old, which was either stolen or strayed from a pasture near Captain Joseph Stockbridge's in Freeport, Maine. That's a little detail about your ancestor's life that you would probably not find anywhere else.

While there are no surviving images of William Garcelon's missing mare, it is interesting to imagine just what that horse might have looked like—as the inserted photograph suggests.

Advertisements

Real estate

Real estate advertisements can provide boundaries and descriptions of property our ancestors once owned, and sometimes background details that can provide a glimpse into their lives.

For example, let's look at this real estate advertisement printed by the *Gazette* (Portland, Maine) on 25 February 1811, page 4:

Real Estate for Sale.

THE subscribers, about to dissolve their Copartnership offer for sale about one hundred acres of land in the Town of Portland and County of Cumberland, consisting of Mowing, Tillage, Pasturing and Woodland, with a good barn on it, and an excellent well of Water, which will be sold whole or in part as will best suit the purchasers.

— ALSO —

A Farm in Lewistown, in the County of Lincoln, formerly known by the name of the Garcelon farm, containing one hundred and fifty acres—about thirty acres of the above is woodland, one hundred and twenty under improvement, with a handsome young Orchard on it, a two story house very pleasantly situated an excellent well of water, two barns, and out houses.

— ALSO —

Twenty seven Lots of Land lying in the Towns of Waterford and Norway, in the County of Oxford, six of the above are good timber lots lying on Crooked River, the above will be sold on good terms for the Purchasers by

WILLIAM & BARNARD DOUGLAS,
of Portland. Feb. 11. (1811.)

As we read this ad we are struck that the buying and selling of land has gone on for centuries, an aspect of our ancestors' world that was as common 300 years ago as it is today. In this example, the real estate firm of "William & Barnard Douglas" of Portland, Maine, is placing an ad to sell three properties in the greater Portland area.

The first section States that the sellers are "about to dissolve their copartnership." It is interesting to imagine how our ancestors entered into and dissolved partnerships just as people would today. The partners are selling 100 acres of land in Portland, Maine, suitable for "mowing, tillage, pasturing and woodland, with a good barn on it, and an excellent well of water." This ad was published 200 years ago, yet it reads like copy that could have been published today.

Advertisements

The second section tells us that the “Garcelon farm” is for sale in Lewistown (Lewiston), Lincoln County, Maine. it gives a terrific description: “two-story house very pleasantly situated, an excellent well of water, two barns and outhouses,” all located on 150 acres of land: about 30 acres of woodland and 120 acres “under improvement.” The property includes a “handsome young orchard.” Wow—you can almost picture this property.

And here’s an interesting speculation: is the Garcelon farm that is being sold in Lewiston, Maine, in 1811 related in some way to William Garcelon, who was advertising in the same newspaper for his stolen or strayed horse in Freeport, Maine, in 1799? After all, the centers of the two towns are only 20 miles apart. This is a potential family history clue that deserves further research.

Here’s another real estate advertisement, published 105 years after the one we just looked at, yet remarkably similar. This ad was printed by the *Springfield Republican* (Massachusetts) on 21 May 1916, page 19:

Price \$6500 for 86-Acre Farm, Stock and Tools

48 acres of best mowing lies out-of-doors; 20 acres of wood and timber; balance is pasture; apples, pears and grapes enough for own use. 1½-story cottage house, extra good condition, 9 rooms; barn, 25x40; sugar orchard, 75 buckets, barn tie up 20 head of cattle; 1 pair of horses, henhouse, tobacco barn, 1½ acres, ice-house; 4½ miles to village; ½-mile to church, ½-mile to schools; 1 mile to depot and electric cars. Will include 1 registered Guernsey bull, 40 hens, pigs, 6 cows, and all the necessary farming tools.

Advertisements


If any of these ads describes property your ancestor once bought or sold, you have learned something about their personal history that you wouldn't find in an obituary or marriage notice.

Runaway Indentured Servants

Indentured servants were bound by a form of employment contract in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Parents today pay to enroll their children in trade schools or private schools to get them the skills they need for life. Two hundred years ago there were no trade schools, and so families often indentured their children to skilled artisans as a means of getting them a practical education in a trade. These contracts usually required that the youth be trained working in the skill for a set period of time, giving both the student and the "trainer" the benefit of that labor. Some people rebelled at these work contracts and simply ran away.

When that happened, the employer would often take out an ad in an attempt to find the runaway and recover his or her services, as well as a means of heaping public shame on them.

Here's an example, printed by the *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) on 22 June 1842, page 3:



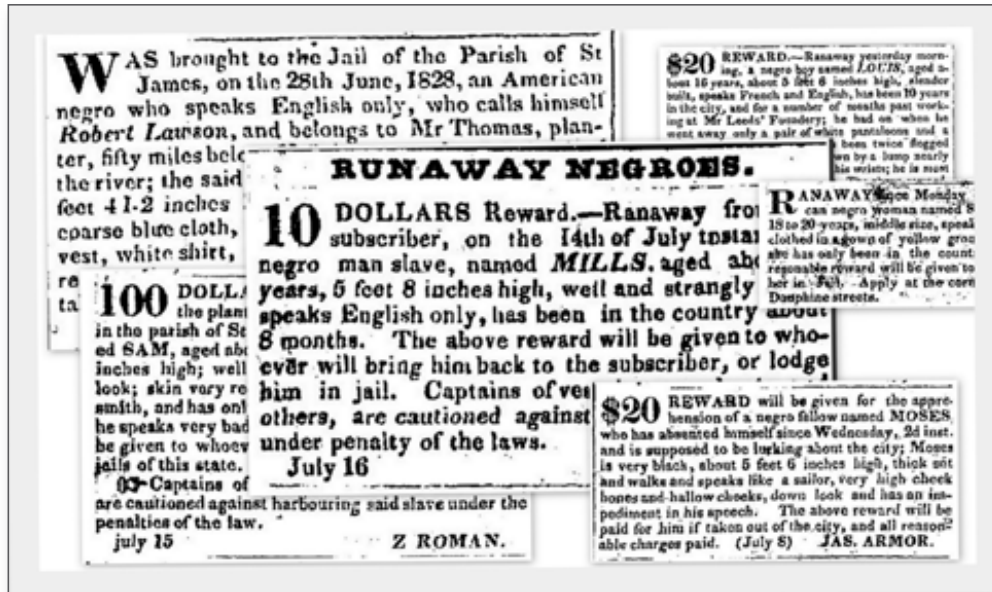
THREE CENTS REWARD — Absented himself from the Subscriber, an indentured apprentice to the Smithing Business, by the name of **LEWIS PERA**, about twenty years of age. All persons are hereby cautioned against trusting him on my account.

RICHARD STILLMAN

In this example, 20-year-old Lewis Pera ran away from his indenture contract to learn blacksmithing from Richard Stillman, who offered a three cent reward for his return. Whether your ancestor was the tradesman or the indentured servant being trained, this ad shines a light on an incident in his life. And if your ancestor was Lewis Pera, you'd certainly want to continue searching to discover if he was ever apprehended, where did he run to, and did he ever make a career as a blacksmith?

Runaway Slaves

Slavery is a shameful part of America's past. However, at a time when human beings were bought and sold as property, running an ad to recover a runaway slave was an accepted practice. The grim realities of slavery are readily apparent in these old newspaper advertisements, such as these examples printed on the front page of the *New Orleans Argus* (Louisiana) on 21 July 1828:



Ads like these routinely appeared in newspapers. They usually give the physical description of the slave, the owner's name and place of residence, and other details. If your ancestor was a master or a slave, these ads may provide you with family history details and clues hard to find elsewhere.

Advertisements—an Often Untapped Resource for Genealogists

As these examples show, advertisements are another reason why newspapers are such a rich resource for genealogists—especially a newspaper collection as extensive as GenealogyBank's, with its more than 7,000 newspapers covering 300 years of American history ([click here](#) to see the complete title list). Gripping and insightful, advertising is a reflection of life in the United States since its earliest days as British colonies. Genealogists will find family information in newspaper advertisements that they cannot find anywhere else.

Advertisements