



## Yesterday's news: Today's history

BY SUSAN WEINBERG

**H**ISTORY BOOKS FRAME THE PAST through the lens of hindsight.

Newspapers give us news through a real-time lens. If we can suspend our knowledge of subsequent events, we too can step back in time and imagine the world through the eyes of that time.

In genealogical research, newspapers are useful in setting the stage, often defining the critical life events of an ancestor — births, marriages, and deaths are the anchor points of our lives and are often recorded in print. Obituaries will help you expand family trees and understand relationships. Marriage announcements will give you the names of parents for both spouses, although frequently female names get lost behind a Mrs. In addition to these events, newspapers can also paint a larger picture of the times themselves and the events that influenced your family's life.

So how do we search for such information? There are several ways we can research newspapers, some with accompanying cost and some free of charge. I typically begin with newspapers.com, which is a pay site with a broad range of newspapers but can be accessed on-site for free at Hennepin History Museum. The Minnesota Historical Society's Gale Library also has on-site access to newspapers.com and offers digital access to more than 400 newspapers within the Digital Newspaper Hub at mnhs.org/newspapers. The hub includes geographically and culturally diverse newspapers from across Minnesota, including many in foreign languages that represent the diverse populations of Minnesota.

If you lack the language facility, modern technology comes to your aid. Download the Google Translate app to your phone and indicate the language you wish to translate from. Available languages range from A to Z, Afrikaans to Zulu. Hover over the text and press the button titled Camera. Then wait until the



Courtesy Star Tribune Archives.

words transform into English. Press Send to Translate Home. It will input the words in the other language and then when you scroll down, you'll find the English translation. I've found this to be a useful tool in archives for documents with printed text as well as restaurant menus when traveling overseas.

Later issues may only be available on microfilm due to copyright restrictions.

Learn more about what is available at mnhs.org/library/learn/collections/newspapers. In addition to digital newspapers, the Gale Library at the Minnesota Historical Society has a wide range of Minnesota newspapers on microfilm. You may want to pay close attention to smaller community newspapers in areas where your family lived. These newspapers often present a more personal view than a larger publication. They may report on visitors to local residents. Perhaps you will stumble upon family members of whom you weren't aware.

So let's look at what you can find using these resources. Perhaps you have been

told that an ancestor was involved with the suffrage movement, and you want to learn more of her story. One dilemma you may face is that even with the theme of suffrage, the convention of the times was for women to go by their husband's name. Mrs. John Doe may be more likely to yield results than the given name of the woman, but be sure to search under both. When you search for a person, you may want to put quotes around the full name to narrow your search. A search on the word "suffrage" in Minnesota on newspapers.com yielded a listing of the leaders of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association and the 1915 Suffrage Club, a group of young businesswomen, and featured images of many of the leaders. Building from this article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (March 3, 1912, p. 22) you may search the specific organizations or people to learn more of their role over time. The article reminds us that efforts for suffrage long preceded the actual securing of the vote in 1919.

Do search for your family members, but also search for a family business or an organization with which your family member was involved. Then imagine yourself at their breakfast table as you join them, reading the paper and responding to the events of the day.

**Susan Weinberg** is a writer, artist, and genealogist, and frequently speaks on topics related to genealogy and artwork. She's president of the Minnesota Jewish Genealogical Society (MNJGS.org) and serves on the boards of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS.org) and the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM.org). She creates art in her studio in the California Building in Northeast Minneapolis. For more information, visit studio409art.com or her book site, wespokejewish.com.