USING ONLINE BOOKS IN FAMILY HISTORY

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Books are an essential source for family history research and there are vast numbers of online books available for you to access from your home computer.

Books may contain family stories or family trees, or copies of records such as baptisms, marriages and burials. Or they may contain photos of times past, places we cannot visit or people we never met. They may also provide historical information which helps us understand what life was like in a certain place and time. This information can help us identify the types of sources available for our research and where the sources might be found now.

Here are just some of the websites with online books that can be used in family history.

The **Internet Archive** (archive.org) is the one that I use most frequently. It is a non-profit library of digital resources. In addition to books it also has movies, software, music and websites. Access is free, but you do need to register for an account to access all the content.

Other websites:

Open Library is a project of the Internet Archive.

Project Gutenberg claims to be the oldest digital library but has a much smaller collection than the Internet Archive and focuses on literature.

Google books makes finding books easier, but most are not available to read.

The *Hathi Trust* is a partnership of academic and research institutions that provides digital books from libraries around the world. You can log in as a guest, or read books which are 'full-view'.

There are also geographical based websites, such as the Library of Congress for American research and the Digital Library of the Caribbean

Many libraries provide online access to books in their collections. The NSW State Library and the National Library of Australia, for example, provide access to books, collections and databases to researchers who hold a free library card.

 Tips for using online books:

Before you use the information you find in an online book, it is important to take time to analyse it so that you can make an informed decision about the accuracy of the information it provides.

Check whether the entire book has been uploaded or just extracts. If the book contains a Foreword or Introduction, take the time to read it.

Examine who authored the book. What were their qualifications? How informed were they about the subject? What sources did they rely on? Is there any indication about their perspectives on the

subject or potential biases? Have they written other books? How analytical and objective has the author been while presenting the information? What evidence is provided? How thorough was their research? How persuasive are their arguments? Is the book well organised and skillfully written? Have they provided source citations, captioned the photographs and included a reference list or a bibliography?

Who published the book? Do they have a good reputation? Are they known for publishing scholarly publications or is the target audience the general public?

When was it written and published? How does it fit into scholarly debate about the subject? Is the information still current or is it out of date or has it been refuted by subsequent work? Is there a later edition that may have additional information or corrected errors?

Citing online books

Use the standard book citation format, but add information about where and when you accessed it to clarify which version you used. Some people suggest adding the full URL but I prefer to use the URL for the main page of the website.

Example:

Oliver, Vere Langford (ed), *Caribbeana: Being Miscellaneous Papers Relating to the History, Genealogy, Topography and Antiquities of the British West Indies*, vol. 1, London England, Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, 1910, Internet Archive https://archive.org/ accessed 23 November 2021.

Generations Genealogy

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