

PERSI-bilities:

How to Research with ACPL's Periodical Source Index

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PERSI (the Periodical Source Index) is a catalog of historical and genealogical society periodicals from across the globe, indexed mainly by subject. Created by staff members of the Allen County Public Library and made available for free through a partnership with Find My Past, this resource should definitely be a part of any reasonably exhaustive research.

A Brief History of PERSI

Allen County Public Library (ACPL) holds the largest collection of English-language genealogical and historical society journals, containing over 8,000 titles. PERSI began as a print publication in 1986 by the staff at ACPL, published as a sixteen-volume set covering the years 1847-1985, and then annually. It was also available on microfiche at the Family History Library and on CD-ROM from Ancestry for a brief time. In 1997, the same year the last print annual was available, Ancestry made PERSI available as an online database. It is no longer available at Ancestry but there is a version that is current through 2009 available at Heritage Quest. The most current PERSI is now accessible for free through Findmypast and contains over 2.7 million fully-searchable entries.

Tour of PERSI on Findmypast

Since 2013, Findmypast (FMP) has been partnering with ACPL to provide an enhanced search experience for PERSI. FMP has been attaching digitized images of the periodicals to the index entries for direct online access to the articles. As you can imagine, this is a slow process, but definitely one that will benefit researchers around the globe. While PERSI will remain free to everyone, the digital images are only available to subscription-holders or pay-as-you-go users.¹ Through the "Society data initiative," a collaboration between FMP and the Federation of Genealogical Societies, partnerships are being developed to allow digitization of society journals, magazines, and newsletters for linking through PERSI for premium users. Additional details and benefits for societies forming these partnerships will be explored later.

1. "Pay as you go" works on a credit system, rather than a subscription payment for unlimited access. Records cost between 5 and 60 credits to view. Once purchased records can be viewed unlimited times.

The screenshot shows the Find My Past website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the logo, a family tree icon, a search icon, and links for '1939 Register', 'My records', 'Blog', and 'Help'. There are also buttons for 'Subscribe' and 'Sign in / Register'. Below the navigation bar, there are three search filters: 'Who' (Last name, name variants), 'Where' (optional, Enter a location, e.g. Wells, Indiana, USA), and 'What else?' (optional, Keyword). A 'Search' button is located to the right of these filters. Below the search filters, there is a section titled 'Choose from our collections' with radio buttons for 'British newspapers', 'Irish newspapers', 'PERiodical Source Index' (selected), and 'US & World newspapers'. To the left of the main content area, there is a 'Narrow your search results' section with filters for 'Database Title', 'Last Names', 'Country', 'State', and 'County', each with a 'Show filters' button. The main content area features a large banner for the 'PERiodical Source Index' with a green arrow pointing to it. The banner includes a historical newspaper clipping titled 'THE SCOTT FAMILY' and a quote from D. Joshua Taylor, Lead Genealogist at findmypast: 'A rich, exclusive collection of the world's best family history periodicals'. Below the banner, there are two links: 'What is the PERiodical Source Index (PERSI)?' and 'How do I get copies of the full articles?'.





To access PERSI from the home page of FMP, click on "Search" then choose "Newspapers & periodicals." On the left side of the screen are four options, the third being "PERiodical Source Index." Once that option is selected, the search functions will be restricted to the PERSI database. Information on how to use PERSI or obtain copies of the articles will also appear. Across the top of the screen are the input boxes for "Who," "Where," and "What else?" (keyword searching). Along the left side of the screen are additional filtering options to help focus your search by title, name, location, subject, and publisher. You can opt to include or exclude how-to articles.

Obtaining Copies

Once you have located an item of interest in PERSI, your next step is to obtain a copy. The following are five methods researchers can use:

1. Find My Past digital images – FMP has been working with publishers of the indexed journals to obtain permission for digitization. This is a slow process but as new images are processed, they are uploaded and added to the database. Only FMP subscription holders or pay-as-you-go members can access the images.² Indexed

2. See FindMyPast.com for more information on subscription types and fees.

Article Title	Periodical Title	Year	
Henry Russell-Mary Mitchell, m.1842, MA	Friend / Friends Intelligencer	1842	 
Sarah S. Mitchell, 1818-46, OH	Friend / Friends Intelligencer	1846	 
Nahum Mitchell biography, MA	New England Historical and Genealogical Register	1847	
Mitchell arms, Eng.	Saint James's Magazine and Heraldic and Historical Register / Saint James's Magazine And	1849	

entries with images available are indicated with a camera icon.

In order to obtain copies when the item you are seeking has not been digitized, choose one of the remaining four methods.

2. Contact the publisher – From the PERSI entry, you can see the title of the periodical, the publisher, and their address. You can contact the publisher directly, seeking a copy of the article or journal. This can be especially effective with local genealogical and historical societies. Many are quite happy to make a copy or provide a journal for low or no cost. (Please send the society a donation if their services were beneficial to you.)
3. ACPL ordering system – From the FMP website, there is a link to the ACPL “Article Request Form.” According to the form, the charge is \$7.50 for each order form (which allows up to six articles to be requested), pre-paid, plus .20 per page for photo copy fees, which will be billed to you upon completion. This form is to be sent by postal mail only, they do not accept requests by phone, fax or email. The wait time is estimated to be 6-8 weeks for each request sent.
4. Hire a professional – One of my favorite methods of obtaining any record is to hire a colleague. Use the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) website (www.apgen.org) to find researchers in the particular geographic areas where a particular journal was published, or near ACPL. Many times libraries are understaffed which may explain why a wait time of 6–8 weeks may be expected. Hiring a professional will usually expedite the process and get the items to you sooner.
5. Visit ACPL or other library – Seeing the journals for yourself might be the most satisfying method. All of the periodicals indexed in PERSI are held at the ACPL. You may be able to locate copies of them in other repositories closer to home as well. The PERSI entry lists some of the repositories that hold the journals. You can also utilize WorldCat (worldcat.org) to locate any additional repositories holding particular publications.

Mini Case Studies

Articles from local genealogical and historical societies are excellent sources for providing not only obscure record transcriptions that you perhaps didn't know existed, but they can provide a lot of great social history to paint the picture of our ancestors' experiences. The following examples will be presented:

- Alton, Illinois Civil War prison diary
- Wilkes County, North Carolina Confederate soldiers' experiences
- British Home Children in Canada

Getting Your Society Involved

- Societies maintain the copyright on their publications that have been digitized.
- Organizations requiring digitization receive that service at no cost to the society.
- The publisher is given a copy of their entire collection after the digitization process and can use the digital copy on their own website, in partnership with a public library, or other non-profit entities.
- FindMyPast links back to the organization to encourage their customers to engage with the society directly.
- Each society has the opportunity of receiving a consistent revenue stream, based on the traffic their publication brings to FindMyPast.
- Contact persi@findmypast.com for more information regarding partnering with PERSI digitization.

Resources for Further Study

1. "Full list of United States records: PERSI," *Find My Past* (www.findmypast.com/articles/world-records/full-list-of-united-states-records/newspapers-and-periodicals/periodical-source-index : accessed 20 January 2018).
2. "Periodical Source Index (PERSI)," *FamilySearch Wiki* ([familysearch.org/wiki/en/Periodical_Source_Index_\(PERSI\)](http://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Periodical_Source_Index_(PERSI)) : accessed 20 January 2018).
3. Philibert-Ortega, Gena. "Using PERSI to Find Your Ancestor," *Internet Genealogy*, April/May 2012, p. 13.
4. Taplin, Cari. "PERSIbilities: Better Research with the Allen County Public Library's Periodical Source Index," *Association of Professional Genealogists Quarterly*, March 2017, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, p. 21-24.
5. Taylor, D. Joshua. "The World's Periodicals in Your Hands: PERSI and Beyond," National Genealogical Society, *Crossroads of America: Program Syllabus* (Arlington, Virginia: NGS, 2015), 137-140.