

ELECTRONIC VERSIONS OF PERIODICALS

BY PATRICIA LAW HATCHER, CG, FASG

One of the problems for those of us doing research today is that periodicals were mailed only to those who subscribed (usually members of the society), possibly even before we were born. How do we “subscribe” at this late date?

Fortunately for us, several of the most valuable periodicals are now available in electronic versions. Some are on-line, while others are on CD-ROM. Even those of us lucky enough to have access to libraries with good periodical collections often find it a practical financial decision to subscribe to or purchase the electronic version of a periodical. There are two reasons for this. You can usually search all volumes at once for a name, which is a *lot* faster than pulling dozens and dozens of volumes from the shelf to check individual indexes. As a by-product of this, it is much more likely that you will check for collateral names as well, which may lead to a breakthrough or prevent an erroneous conclusion. If your library does not have a full run of a periodical, the subscription or purchase lets it offer the material to its patrons at a reasonable cost.

Most of these electronic versions are accessible for both PC and Mac and come in one or more of the following presentation formats:

- PDF text
- plain text
- PDF images
- other images

The way in which you find and access the desired page may vary. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages (often whether it is an advantage or a disadvantage depends on the specific information you seek). The access tools are either included or easily downloaded and are relatively easy to use. I suggest, however, that you plan on devoting a few minutes at the beginning to exploring the menus and options, which may save you time and missed data in the future.

It is also wise to consider—before you begin—the search options you should use. The text versions were converted from original pages that were scanned and then converted to text using OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software. When using a search option, therefore, you need to consider both how a name might have been given in the original *and* potential conversion errors. Often we already have a list of alternate spellings for surnames, but haven’t had a need to do the same for given names (Samuell, Saml, and Samll for Samuel, for example). Also explore the options for proximity searches and wildcards.

I recommend printing out the imaged version of the journal pages to keep in your files. That assures that your own notes don’t end up with, for example, an incorrect year of marriage when 1748 was OCR’d as 1746.

Most of the periodicals available in electronic versions are either recent publications of societies with active web-

sites and CD programs or one of those “venerable seniors” discussed in *IN PRAISE OF PERIODICALS*.

[In 2004, when this article was written, the following periodicals were available on CD-ROM. Since then, some of these have become available online, and many additional ones have done so.]

- *HeritageQuest Magazine*, 1985–1999
- *Avatanyu* [Jewish genealogy]. All back issues through 2002.
- *Mayflower Descendant*, Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants, through volume 34.
- *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. The CD-ROM of Jean D. Worden’s every-name index to the *Record* is invaluable.
- *The Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine*, Pennsylvania Genealogical Society, through volume 39.
- *Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society Quarterly*, Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society, through volume 24.
- *Maryland Genealogical Society Bulletin*, Maryland Genealogical Society, through volume 38.
- *The Virginia Genealogist*, privately published, through volume 27.
- *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal*, North Carolina Genealogical Society, through volume 25.
- Additionally, back issues of some local publications are becoming available, such as *Mercer County* [*New Jersey*] *Genealogical Quarterly*, through volume 6; *Prince George’s County, Maryland, Genealogical Society Bulletin*, through volume 30; *The Notebook*, Baltimore County [Maryland] Genealogical Society, through volume 18.
- Members of the New England Historic Genealogical Society can access many articles from recent issues of *New England Ancestors* magazine and its predecessor *NEXUS*, and from the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. [Additionally, their website has been adding issues of many scholarly journals.]
- *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, Virginia Genealogical Society. Available through volume 35 as Ancestry.com database “Virginia Genealogical Society Quarterly.”
- *William and Mary Quarterly*, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture (College of William and Mary and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation), available on-line through JSTOR.org, for which many universities have subscriptions. [The out-of-copyright issues are now available to anyone through JSTOR.]

We will surely see additional periodicals becoming available electronically in the future, giving us access to valuable source records and advice.