

Family history research — online libraries ...

by Andrew Matheson

We probably all started our family history searches with long periods in a library — looking up books and journals, peering at microfilm readers, making copious notes and thrashing the photocopier.

I certainly did, though even before covid lockdowns made library visits impossible I was doing more of my researching and reading online.

Covid lockdowns stimulated libraries and other institutions to make more of their collections available to everyone at any time, and not only to those who can trek into town during opening hours. This is really convenient.

But there is also another type of library — one that never had a physical presence and was always intended to be available online. These are now growing at an amazing rate, and are generally available to all for no cost.

Just as with physical libraries, in online libraries you might discover valuable material about areas or periods you're researching that helps bring alive the environment your relatives lived in. You might even find information about distant relatives.

As with any library, precise searching is the key to success. Browsing is also fun and might lead to a serendipitous discovery, but it is needle-in-a-haystack stuff. For example, searching just for 'Matheson' in the Internet Archive produces more than 300,000 results: books about and by Mathesons, Clan Matheson Society documents, court cases, family histories, oral histories and more.



In researching this article I even found information about relatives that I'd never seen before. I knew that my grandfather's second cousin Alexander (Alex) Matheson had emigrated from Scotland to Alaska, where he was a prominent miner and businessman in the town of Flat during the 1930s.

In the Internet Archive I found a 1997 survey of historic buildings in what is now a ghost town, which includes many buildings associated with Alex and his North American Dredging Company.



Figure 52. The Matheson House, 1993.
The view is looking northwest.

Internet Archive

The [Internet Archive](#) perhaps the most well-known digital library, and is one of the world's largest. It contains more than 40 million books and texts, and over 4,000 new ones are being added every day. That's every day.

You can download complete books published before 1925, and borrow many modern ones through the archive's [Open Library](#) service. The Internet Archive also contains audio and video recordings and images.

HathiTrust

The [HathiTrust](#) is another large digital library, with more than 18 million digitised books and other publications.

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FamilySearch library

The genealogy service FamilySearch has embraced digitisation of its specialist [library](#), and now holds more than 500,000 books. Not all can be viewed online, which is a bit frustrating.

Google Books

This [Google service](#) originally aimed to digitise all the world's published books, but ran into copyright disputes and progress has slowed. Some books out of copyright are available in full, but others display only a preview or nothing at all.

Journals

For journals [JSTOR](#) has long been the premier digital library. Full access requires a subscription, which you may have access to through an institution such as a school, university or library. There is still free content, such as older articles and newer articles that are designated open-access.

JSTOR has recently improved access by allowing people with a personal account to read up to 100 articles free per month.

Jardine Matheson & Company: The Role of External Organization in a Nineteenth-Century Trading Firm

CAROL MATHESON CONNELL

Jardine Matheson & Company, a Hong Kong conglomerate founded in 1832, has survived political upheaval and global and regional economic crises, transforming itself several times. From their beginnings in the commission business, William Jardine and James Matheson developed a reputation for sound financial management that furthered their trading relationships and supported their firm's expansion from agency house to managing agent to investment house between 1832 and 1885. Fundamental to Jardine Matheson's success was the strategic decision to eschew speculation and to concentrate on building a pattern of relationships within and outside the business that would foster the flow of information, the knowledge with which to interpret it, the ability to influence others, and a reputation for probity that would attract and retain trading partners.

Library services

By joining your local library you can get access to online libraries it subscribes to. This might include international newspaper collections such as The Times of London, the New York Times, or research libraries such as ProQuest.

A valuable tool

Online libraries bring millions of books, magazines and other material from around the world right into your home. Smart searching is needed, but many gems await.
