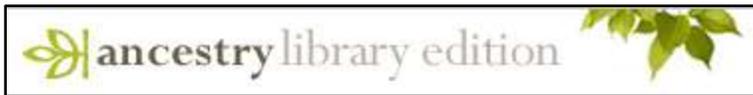


# Introduction to Ancestry.com

Ancestry.com is an online database of genealogical resources such as census records, marriage licenses, and local history books. The library's subscription allows free access to all of these resources from within

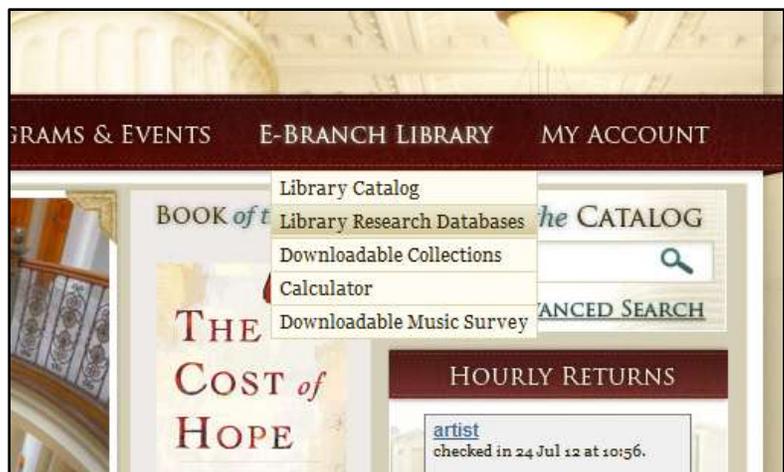


the library. Ancestry also offers personal subscriptions, which include various tools for organizing and presenting one's information that aren't included in the library version. Consequently, if you access Ancestry through someone's personal subscription, things may look a bit different, but all the resources you're used to from the library version will still be there.

## Accessing Library Databases

All of the library's online databases are available on either Internet or catalog computers in the library. Unlike other library databases, Ancestry cannot be accessed from home.

To access databases on one of the library's Internet computers, start by going to the library's homepage ([www.dubuque.lib.ia.us](http://www.dubuque.lib.ia.us)). Find the dark red menu ribbon near the top of the page and hover



your mouse over the words **E-Branch Library** to open a popup menu. In this menu, select **Library Research Databases**. This will take you to a list of all the library's databases. For this class, we want to select **Ancestry**. Click the link underneath the database name and a new tab or window will open to take you to Ancestry.

To access databases on one of the library's catalog computers, find the light blue tabs at the top of the screen. Click on the tab labeled

**Online**

**Databases.** This will take you to the same list of databases you'd find on the library's Internet computers. Find **Ancestry** and click the link underneath the database name.

The screenshot shows the Carnegie-Stout Public Library website. At the top, there are navigation tabs: ADULT SERVICES, TEEN ZONE, KIDS ZONE, PROGRAMS & EVENTS, E-BRANCH LIBRARY, and MY ACCOUNT. The E-BRANCH LIBRARY tab is highlighted. Below the navigation, there is a search bar and a list of databases. A callout box highlights the Ancestry.com database with the following text:

<p><b>Ancestry.com</b>  <b>ONLY IN THE LIBRARY</b>          Link: <a href="http://Ancestry.com">Ancestry.com</a></p>	<p>Genealogy database with access to U.S. Federal Census records, passenger lists, birth, death, marriage and military records and more.</p>
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**Getting Started with Ancestry**

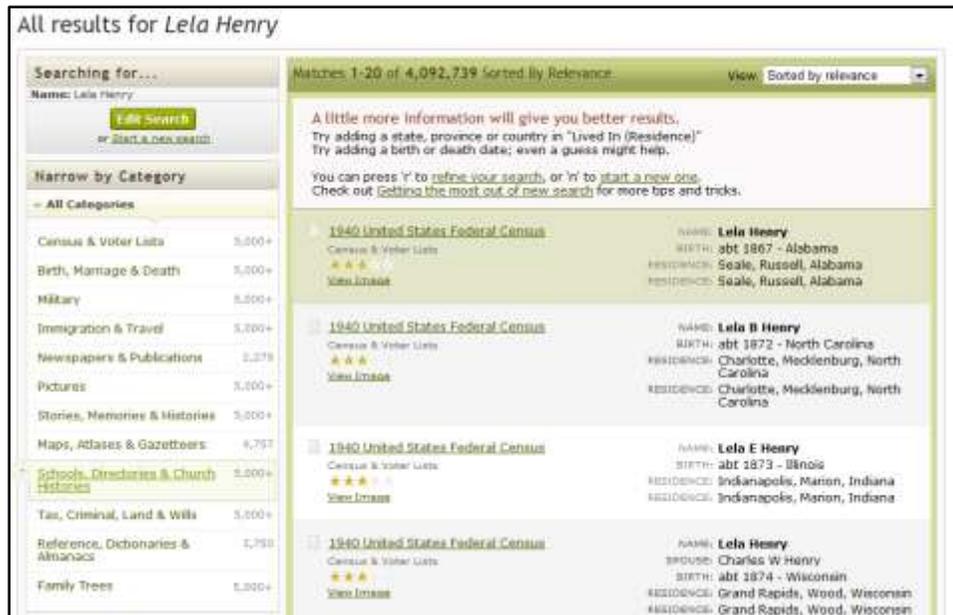
Whichever type of computer you're on, you should now be at the Ancestry home page. There's a search form right here that's a fine place to get started. This form searches all of Ancestry's resources with just a few search terms, so it will often return a lot of results. Many of these results may turn out not to be what you're looking for, but we can always get more specific later. I'm going to start by

entering my grandmother's name without any dates or location specified, just to see what I come up with. I enter her first and last names into the appropriate boxes and click the orange **Search** button.



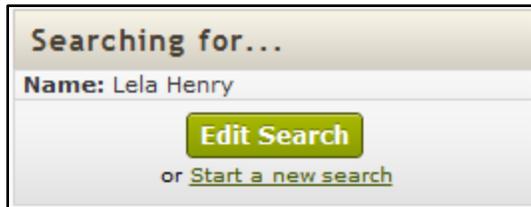
The next page gives us all of our search results separated by record type. It looks like my search gave me more results than I want to dig through (4,092,739 results, to be exact). Before we refine the search, however, let's look at the types of documents

Ancestry has found for us. First off, we've got lots and lots of census records. The United States Census is taken every ten years and (in theory)

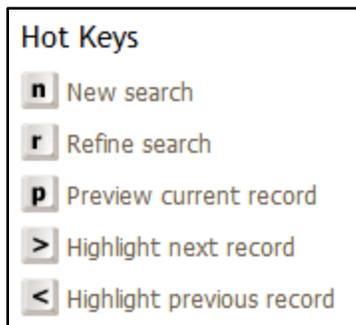


counts and records everyone in the country. Just after taking a census, the Census Bureau only releases numerical data. After 72 years have passed, they release detailed personal data. That's why Ancestry only has census data up to 1940. Ancestry also has some census data from specific states and other countries.

Looking down the rest of the page, we see things including a national obituary index (this only covers recent obituaries), national and state birth and death indexes, armed forces enlistment lists, and so on. Links along the left side of the page will allow us to narrow our search by category.



Because Ancestry has so many different documents, a search as broad as mine will usually return more results than you'll want to deal with (especially if you're looking for a

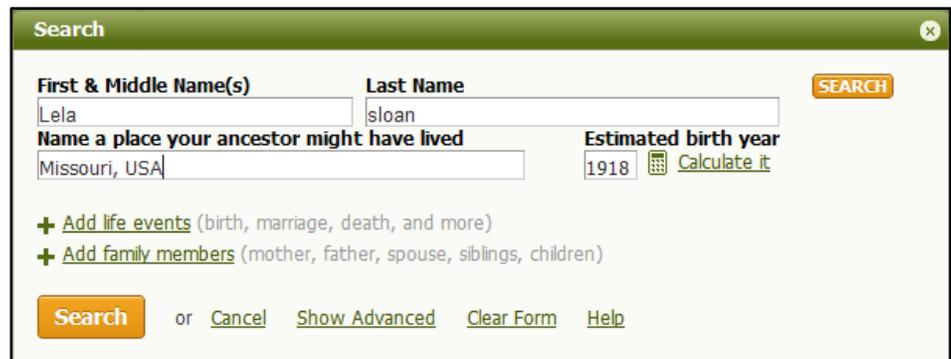


fairly common name like "Henry"). Luckily, Ancestry makes it easy to refine a search you're not happy with.

You can either click the green **Edit Search** button at the top left of the page or just press "R" on the keyboard (there's a short list of other hotkeys on the left side of

the page). I'm going to change a few things here and try to find some record of my grandmother before she got married. At this point, I'll be able to search more effectively if I already have some information. I went and found my grandmother's obituary in the library's online database of Telegraph Herald articles published

since 1995. So, I know that she was born Lela Sloan in 1918 in Missouri and change my search terms accordingly.





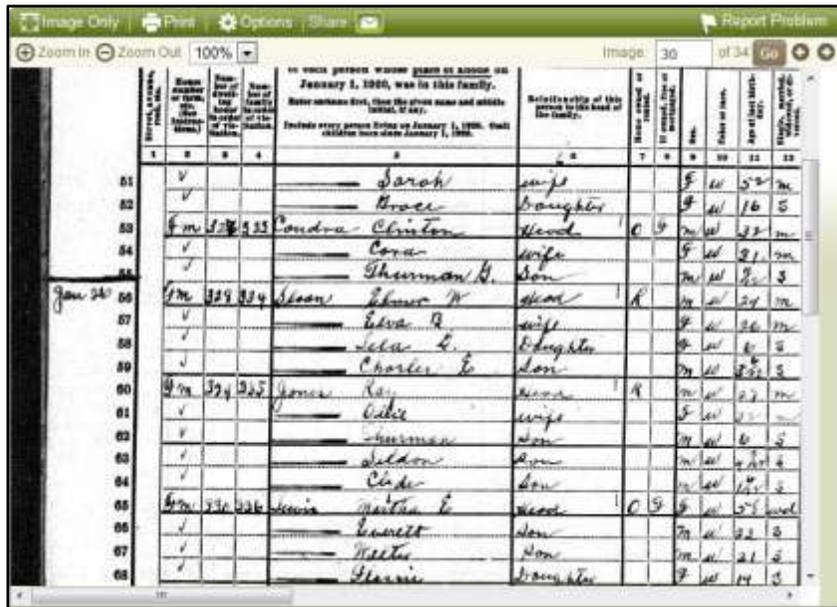
My added details have weeded out a lot of results. I may still have false hits, but I'm on my way toward the right track. The first result is from the 1920 census and is somewhat promising. This Lela Sloan was born in

Missouri and while the birth year shown is 1914 an error could have been made either in filling out the census form or in transcribing it into the Ancestry database. All of Ancestry's handwritten forms have been transcribed into their database, meaning someone looked at the original form and typed out their best guess as to what it said, so errors aren't unheard of.



For each item in your list of results you can click the name of the source to go to a page with more details about your result. So for this first result we could click on **1920 United States Federal Census** (notice that those words are colored and underlined to let you know they're a link). Alternatively, we

could just point our mouse at the link without clicking on it. When we do so, a preview window appears. This gives us nearly all the information we would have gotten from clicking on the link and is a lot faster and easier.



If I want to look at the original census form for this other Lela Sloan, to be completely certain that this isn't the one I want, I can click on **View Image** underneath the link to the detail page. Ancestry will load a page that shows us the

scanned census form and has a few tools for viewing it. We can zoom in or out, print or save the image, email the picture to someone, and even flip from page to page within the census results to look at all the residents of a particular area. My eyes certainly aren't good enough to read this form at this size, so I'll zoom in and look for the Sloans. Once we're zoomed in far enough to read the form it becomes clear how some names or dates might have been misread. However, while these names are somewhat difficult to read I'm still pretty certain they're not the names I'm looking for. I can either continue trying to come up with new ways to search for my grandmother or I can accept the possibility that she was missed in the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses. While the census is supposed to count everyone, some people are always missed.

## Focused Searches

As we continue searching, we have a few options beyond just using the general search form on the Ancestry homepage. If we limit our search to a specific type of historical record we can get more specific results. To select a type of record, move your mouse over the **Search** button at the top of the screen. A menu will appear with a list of options: **Census & Voter Lists**; **Birth, Marriage, & Death**; **Military**; **Immigration & Travel**; **Newspapers & Periodicals**; and **Card Catalog**. Each of the first five options will take us to a form we can use to search for the corresponding types of records. **Card Catalog** will take you to a list of all the records Ancestry holds so that you may choose a specific record to search.



Let's click on **Census & Voter Lists** and have a look at that page (all five categories are similar enough that we'll only look specifically at this one). The search box here is much more detailed than what we had on the homepage. We can include birth year and location, past residences, family member names, and a few other things. Any information we enter here will be used to

A screenshot of the detailed search form for 'Census & Voter Lists'. The form is titled 'Search' and has a 'Clear Form Show Advanced' link at the top right. It contains several sections: 'Name' with fields for 'First & Middle Name(s)' and 'Last Name'; 'Event' with fields for 'Year' and 'Location' for 'Birth', 'Lived In', and 'Any Event'; 'Family Member' with a dropdown menu, 'First Name', 'Last Name', and 'Remove' buttons, and a '+ Add family members (mother, father, spouse, siblings, children)' link; 'More' with a 'Keyword' field and a note 'e.g. pilot or "Flying Tigers"'; and 'Gender' and 'Race/Nationality' dropdown menus. A 'Search' button is at the bottom.

search all of the censuses and voter lists Ancestry holds. Throughout Ancestry, your search form will change to reflect the data included in the types of records you're searching in. Generally, the more specific you are about which record or records you want to look at the more specific Ancestry will let you be about what you search for. Whatever your search form includes, you can fill out as much or as little of it as you want. Search results will always match the format we saw with our first search.

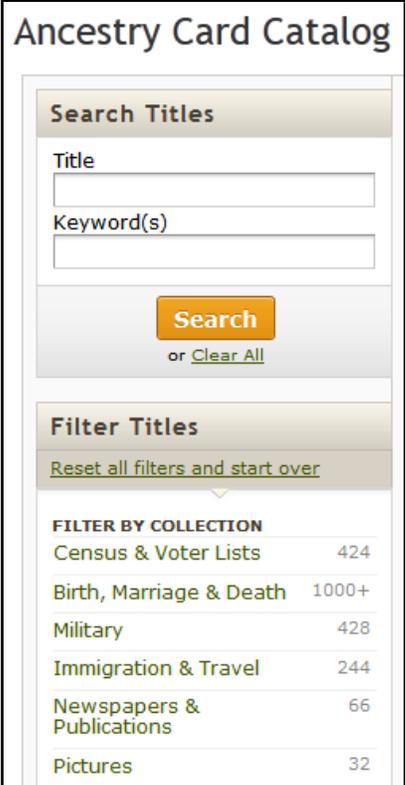
We can further narrow our search using the links on the right side of the page. The items labeled **Narrow by Category** are still groups of records but are more specific than simply all censuses. For example **U.S. Federal Census Collection** would let us search all U.S. federal censuses while **1800s Censuses** would let us



The screenshot shows a search interface with two main sections. The top section is titled "Narrow by Category" and contains a list of links: "U.S. Federal Census Collection", "UK Census Collection", "Canadian Census Collection", "1700s Censuses", "1800s Censuses", and "1900s Censuses". The bottom section is titled "Featured data collections" and contains three links: "1940 United States Federal Census" with a green "UPDATED" badge, "Australian Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980", and "U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940". At the bottom of the featured collections section is a green button that says "View all in Card Catalog".

search all the censuses recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The items labeled **Featured data collections** are more specific still. For example, **1940 United States Federal Census** will search only that record. The items under **Featured data collections** will change periodically as Ancestry changes its mind about what to promote.

If we want to search within a specific record that isn't among the featured collections we can select a record by mousing over **Search** and then selecting **Card Catalog**. This gives us a list of all the different records Ancestry holds, which is over 8,000 different historical documents. Such a long list isn't very easy to browse through. Luckily, we have a couple options. We can search the list using either the record's title or keywords. Alternately, we can filter the list by record type, location, date, and language. These filters can be used separately or together so we could use them to see all the censuses or all the censuses from Canada in the 1890s in French.



**Ancestry Card Catalog**

**Search Titles**

Title

Keyword(s)

**Search**  
or [Clear All](#)

**Filter Titles**

[Reset all filters and start over](#)

**FILTER BY COLLECTION**

Census & Voter Lists	424
Birth, Marriage & Death	1000+
Military	428
Immigration & Travel	244
Newspapers & Publications	66
Pictures	32

These filters can make quick work of paring down Ancestry's list. Once you've found the record you want, click its name to go to a search page. From that point things will work just like the other searches we've done.

## Going Forward

Ultimately, Ancestry offers too many resources and search options for us to cover them all in this class. However, they are organized in a consistent and logical manner. Hopefully, this introduction to the site will make you comfortable enough with it to try some searches continue experimenting and learning. Be aware that Ancestry, like any webpage, is likely to change over time. Tweaks to the website will make things work a little differently than you're used to. However, they're unlikely to change anything so drastically that you can't figure out the new system with just a little patience and confidence.