

“The Big 4:” Comparing Ancestry, FamilySearch, Findmypast and MyHeritage”



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Core content on major genealogy websites: historical records, user-submitted trees/documentation and DNA profiles

Why you should know about all of the “Big 4” sites (even if you use one most often):

- All share overlapping content and some similar tools, but each site also offers unique content and tools.
- All continue to add new records, develop new tools and collect more user-submitted data.
- No single website has everything you’ll need or want as you build your tree over time.
- You may use as many sites as you can access and learn about. Free access may be available.

“The Big 4” At a Glance ¹				
	Ancestry	FamilySearch	Findmypast	MyHeritage
Total records*	19 billion (estimated to include historical records, names in trees and other user-submitted material, DNA profiles)	5.5 billion indexed names + 1.2 billion browse-only records + over 300,000 digital books + 1.1 billion names in trees	About 8 billion names in historical records and newspaper pages	Over 7 billion, including historical records, newspapers, and names in trees
Indexed historical records	About 11 billion (unconfirmed estimate)	About 5.5 billion	About 8 billion	Nearly 4 billion
Trees and names in trees	80 million trees with 8 billion names	One global family tree with 1.1 billion names from 3.4 million contributors	Not searchable	28 million trees with 2.1 billion names in MyHeritage trees + 3.2 billion from other sites
User-submitted photos, stories and other items	200 million+	14.2 million photos, 1.1 million stories, 690 million sources	Not searchable	316 million, 76 million of which are publicly searchable
DNA profiles	Over 2.5 million from over 30 markets ²	None	None	Unknown; DNA hosting added mid-2016
Registered site users	2.4 million paying subscribers	7.2 million	18 million	86 million
Annual subscriptions	\$198-298 USD	FREE	\$34.95-\$239.50 USD	\$110-250 USD

*All figures in this table except the subscription rates are approximate as of mid-Dec 2016.

Explore current geographic content (location, time period, record type) without paid subscription:

- Ancestry: Search > Card Catalog.
- FamilySearch: Search > Records > Browse All Published Collections
- Findmypast: Search > A-Z of Record Sets.
- MyHeritage: Research > Categories OR Records by Location

¹ Sources: www.ancestry.com/corporate/about-ancestry/company-facts, media.familysearch.org/company-facts, www.findmypast.com/content/company-information, blog.myheritage.com/media-kit. Additional information (including more updated and detailed data) was obtained from each company.

² See full list at <http://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2016/02/23/ancestrydna-now-offered-in-29-new-countries/>.

Google specific record types for a global search (search terms: locale, record type, date range (format: 1840..1860). Learn more at <http://lialouisecooke.com/genealogy-gems-videos/google-search-family-history-genealogy/>.

Automated hinting: All sites offer automated hints for possible records and/or tree matches. Must have a tree on site.

Site highlights: Features and collections available to top-tier subscribers

Comparisons are among these four sites only.

Ancestry

- Records for 80+ countries. Localized sites for U.S., Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Australia, Mexico, U.K.
- Strongest for U.S. content, claiming over 15 billion records. Unique U.S. collections: city directories, wills and probate, Social Security Applications and Claims Index, most complete collection of federal special census schedules and state/territorial censuses; church records (Quaker, Methodist, ELCA, Dutch Reformed and more).
- Flexible, powerful search interface allows nameless searches, wildcard characters, results with similar parameters (including name variants), and searches with exact dates, specific life events and relatives' names.
- Automated record hinting for 90% of records and for all tree profiles.
- Biggest site for DNA matching: over 2.5 million DNA profiles that are often linked to tree data, allowing genetic relatives to more easily identify common ancestors.
- Search results include records from 300+ offsite collections, among them Find A Grave and RootsWeb
- Member Connect feature: exchange messages with other members; receive alerts regarding changes on trees connected to yours; learn about other members interested in records featuring your ancestors.
- How-tos: Ancestry Support for getting started on the site (support.ancestry.com/s/gettingstarted); Community and Message Boards for chatting with users and accessing message boards specific to surname, location, etc (www.ancestry.com/cs/community); Blog for reading expert tips blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/); YouTube channel with educational videos: www.youtube.com/user/AncestryCom; Ancestry Academy for in-depth expert tips and online classes—requires an additional subscription (www.ancestry.com/academy/).
- Downsides: most expensive site, relatively few newspapers, companion desktop software Family Tree Maker not supported by Ancestry.
- Subscriptions: Monthly and 6-month packages for country-only OR world access. For U.S. customers: U.S.-only access: \$19.99/month or \$99 for 6 months; world access: \$34.99/month or \$149/6 months. “All access” multisite membership adds Newspapers.com, Fold3 and Ancestry Academy (educational classes): \$44.99/month or \$199 for six months. Subscribe at www.ancestry.com/cs/offers/subscribe.

FamilySearch

- EVERYTHING IS FREE.
- Global records content: strongest for U.S., Canada, U.K., Australia/N.Z. and Europe with unique and growing collections across South America, Asia, Africa. Content outside U.S./Canada is mostly unique.
- Prioritizes vital records, censuses and other traditionally strong genealogical records in online collections.
- Languages: Local home page and FamilySearch Wiki (see below) in Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish.³ Wiki also available in Swedish.
- Search interface allows nameless searches, results with similar parameters (including name variants), wildcard characters, searches with life events and relatives' names. Doesn't search on exact dates.
- Automated record hinting draws from all indexed historical records and user-submitted materials.
- Search results include historical records and user-submitted tree records included under Search > Genealogies. Search digitized books separately (under Search > Books). Potential tree profile matches in the global Family Tree appear when you upload a tree, add a new relative in Family Tree or search for duplicates of individual profiles.

³ See links to non-English language versions of the FamilySearch Wiki at https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/FamilySearch_Wiki:Non-English_versions_of_the_wiki.

- The tree-building system is different: users contribute to a single unified world tree rather than build individual trees. Uploading a tree requires the user to compare each ancestral profile to potentially matching profiles already in the system. All users may add to or change information on their ancestors, facilitating collaboration but also the ability for others to change what you submit. Privacy protections necessitate creation of placeholder records for living individuals by each user, which are merged and published upon that person's death. You can't download a GED of your family tree.
- FamilySearch Wiki: nearly 85,000 how-to and where-to-find articles with genealogical research education, advice and information about where to find records for 244 countries (familysearch.org/wiki). Uniquely links to collections on other sites and provides education for global regions outside current major commercial markets.
- Some search results point to online record content at partner sites, including Ancestry, BillionGraves, EllisIsland.org, Find A Grave, Findmypast, Fold3, MyHeritage.
- Online catalog points to offline content at the Family History Library.
- Downsides: Lack of digitized newspapers, inability to download a tree file. Some consider the world tree format to be a downside.
- Subscription options: Free. Create free user ID at www.familysearch.org.

Findmypast

- Strongest for U.K. and Ireland records; also offers country sites specific to Australia/N.Z., U.S.
- About 810 million indexed records and 150 million record images for England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales. Enormous collections of U.K. BMD to 1837 and parish records to 1500s; millions of newspaper pages dating to early 1700s; over 200 million names in England/Wales electoral registers, 1939 Register, unique Irish pre-1840s famine records.
- Growing coverage for U.S., Australia/N.Z. Hosts about 850 million U.S. records: unique strengths in county marriage records, PERSI (Periodical Source Index) with some digitized articles, newspaper collections back to 1600s (includes access to NewspaperArchive), immigration and naturalization records.
- Search results include records from BillionGraves.
- Search interface allows nameless searches, results with similar parameters (including name variants) and wildcard characters. Can search exact dates in some records collections and add relatives' names as keywords.
- Automated hinting currently taps BMD and most census records, matching on full names and birthdates.
- Users can build a family tree, make it public and share with others individually. Not currently possible to search others' trees or identify/connect with fellow researchers who have trees with common ancestors.
- How-tos: Findmypast Blog includes free how-to guides and webinars on beginner and major research topics; a Discoveries section with illustrative success stories; and descriptions of newest records (blog.findmypast.com/).
- Downsides: Fewer search features; no publicly searchable trees or member communication. Some would consider its deep geographic focus a strength and others a weakness.
- Subscription options: Starter package for U.S.: \$34.95 for a full year or \$9.95/month. Premium subscriptions: full access to all records for \$19.95 for one month or \$19.96/month for 12 months (charged as one payment of \$239.40); the latter includes access to the 1939 Register. Pay-per-view credits: \$10.95 for 60; \$37.95 for 300, or \$82.95 for 900. Credits expire after 90 days; each record view costs 5-60 credits. See all options at (www.findmypast.com/pay).

MyHeritage

- Global scope: claims geographic presence in all countries and most globally diverse trees⁴. Site in 42 languages; blog in Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish.
- Strong in Scandinavian records: Swedish household examination rolls (46 million); 1930 Denmark census; church records for Denmark and Finland. Has basic census and national-level BMD indexes for many countries.
- Search results include records from offsite sources, including BillionGraves, Chronicling America, Trove, and results from 3 billion+ tree profiles at MyHeritage, Geni.com, FamilySearch Family Tree, Wikitree and other tree sites.

⁴ See a global map of membership at <http://www.myheritage.com/FP/Company/myheritage-member-map2.php>.

- Powerful, flexible search technologies with claimed accuracy >95%. Searches automatically translate names across languages. This is the only site that includes unindexed digitized newspapers in automated hinting.
- Communicate with other tree creators; use SearchConnect to see other users' past searches for rare surnames.
- Each user has a family website with tree and other social networking tools: a customizable greeting; family calendar with custom events plus living relatives' birthdays/anniversaries and the ability to upload photos and tag them to people on your tree. Invite non-subscribing relatives to view and contribute content.
- MyHeritage supports free desktop software, Family Tree Builder, which lets you fully sync with trees on site
- How tos: Blog includes webinars, hints and tips, DNA, historical records, history categories (blog.myheritage.com)
- Downsides: Historical record content not as strong or unique as on other sites.
- Subscription options: Premium family website: \$100/year; enhanced tree-building and access to public user-submitted tree data. Data plan: \$119/year: access to historical records and record-matching technologies. Complete plan: Data + Premium Plus family website for \$250/year provides full access to site. Learn more at helpcenter.myheritage.com/Account-and-Subscriptions.

Free options for using subscription websites (Ancestry, Findmypast, MyHeritage)

1. Create a free guest account, with which you may:
 - Build, edit and share family tree(s). (MyHeritage limits tree size to 250 people and 500 MB of uploaded data.)
 - Access free record collections (search, view and attach to tree profiles). Find free records at:
 - Ancestry: search.ancestry.com/search/group/freeindexacom
 - Findmypast: www.findmypast.com/free
 - MyHeritage: www.myheritage.com/page/free-family-history
 - View DNA matches, when you have taken a DNA test there, at Ancestry and MyHeritage.
 - Learn from each site's free how-to tutorials (see descriptions under each website)
 - See automatically-generated hints for possible record/tree matches on the site, when you have a tree there. An appropriate subscription is generally required to view potentially matching records.
2. Use Library Editions for free at participating libraries
 - Free at Family History Centers around the world (find one at <https://familysearch.org/locations/>)
 - Some public libraries also subscribe to Library Editions
 - Library Edition services may be limited, including certain databases, tree-building functions and tools (including some member communication functions).
3. LDS partner access: Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may obtain free access to Ancestry, Findmypast and MyHeritage by using their LDS FamilySearch login at www.familysearch.org/partneraccess. (Create an LDS FamilySearch login with your membership record number at www.familysearch.org.)

Researching across multiple websites

- A .GED ("GEDCOM") is the universal family tree file type you can upload or download from genealogy websites and/or software to share elsewhere. (FamilySearch doesn't allow downloads of family tree files.)
- Building and maintaining a master family tree on your own software and computer keeps your intact tree in one location: organized, complete, secure and private. Build or upload working "branches" on genealogy websites. Learn more about creating a master family tree at <http://lialouisecooke.com/family-tree/>.