



*Puerto Rican
Genealogy Group*
Instructor: Sylvia
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Looking for Ancestors in Historical Puerto Rican Newspapers

Lesson 5: What's Not Online and Planning On-Site Research

Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Difficulty: Intermediate

Prerequisites: Lessons 1 through 4

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify categories of Puerto Rican newspaper holdings that are not yet digitized
2. Name the major Puerto Rican institutions that hold newspaper collections for in-person research

3. Prepare a research visit plan using your online search results to narrow your scope
 4. Draft a contact email to a Puerto Rican archive or library
 5. Describe a brief paid-platform option for cases where free platforms are exhausted
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Section 1: What Has Not Been Digitized

The five free platforms covered in this course represent a significant portion of Puerto Rican newspaper history. But they do not represent all of it. Large categories of Puerto Rican newspaper content remain available only in person.

What Is Still Offline or Incomplete

- **Many 20th-century issues of smaller regional and municipal papers:** Community newspapers from towns outside San Juan and Ponce are often not digitized, or only partial runs are available online.
- **ICP (Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña) hemeroteca holdings:** The ICP maintains a physical newspaper archive that is only partially digitized. Many titles and runs held at the ICP do not appear on any free online platform.
- **Municipal archive collections:** Most Puerto Rican municipal archives have not digitized their newspaper holdings. Local papers covering specific towns may only survive in a single physical copy.
- **Later 20th-century content:** The *El Mundo* archive ends in 1990. Many post-1990 newspapers are not archived in genealogically useful form.

Research implication: If your digital searches have been thorough and you have not found what you expected, the record may exist but may not be digitized. Exhausting online options is not the same as exhausting all options.

Section 2: Key Institutions for In-Person Newspaper Research

Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP)

The ICP's hemeroteca (newspaper reading room) in San Juan holds the most extensive physical collection of Puerto Rican periodicals. The ICP holds titles, dates, and runs not available anywhere online.

Before visiting, contact the ICP to confirm current access procedures, hours, and any restrictions on what can be photographed or photocopied.

ICP website: <https://www.icp.pr.gov/>

Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR)

The General Archive of Puerto Rico holds government records, notarial records, and some newspaper-related holdings. For genealogical research involving legal notices, property transactions, and official documents that corroborate newspaper findings, the AGPR is the primary in-person destination.

AGPR website: <https://www.coleccionesicp.pr.gov/agpr>

University of Puerto Rico Libraries

UPR's main campus at Río Piedras has library collections that include physical newspapers, periodicals, and rare holdings. The Colección Puertorriqueña at the UPR Río Piedras library is particularly valuable for materials with limited or no digital access.

UPR Libraries: <https://www.upr.edu/en/academics/libraries/>

Biblioteca Nacional de Puerto Rico

The Puerto Rico State Library (Biblioteca Nacional) holds newspaper and periodical collections with reference services. It is worth contacting before an in-person visit to determine what is available for a specific municipality or time period.

Section 3: How to Prepare Before You Visit

An unplanned in-person research visit wastes time. The goal of online research is to narrow your scope before you arrive, so that every hour in a reading room is focused.

Before You Go

1. **Identify the gaps.** Review your Newspaper Search Log (WS-01). What time periods, newspaper titles, or municipalities were not covered by your online searches? These are the targets for your in-person visit.
2. **Identify which institution holds what you need.** Contact the ICP, AGPR, or UPR library by email before visiting to ask whether they hold the specific titles, dates, and municipalities you are looking for.
3. **Prepare name and question lists.** Write out every surname variant you are searching for, every municipality of interest, and every research question you want to answer. Bring this list with you.
4. **Bring your research log.** Your Newspaper Search Log documents what you have already checked online. Sharing this with a reference librarian or archivist helps them direct you to materials you have not yet seen.

5. **Plan for images.** Most archives permit photography with a smartphone or camera. Bring your device fully charged, a charger or battery pack, and storage capacity. Ask about policies before photographing.

Sample Research Visit Plan

Item	Your Information
Institution	ICP Hemeroteca, San Juan
Target newspaper title(s)	[titles not available online]
Target date range	1865–1885
Target municipality	Rincón
Surnames to search	Bonet, Méndez, Valentín, Ramos
Research questions	Property holders in Rincón barrios pre-1885; esquila notices for Bonet or Méndez
What I have already checked online	[from WS-01]

Section 4: Contacting an Archive by Email

Puerto Rican archives and libraries receive many inquiries and respond more helpfully when a request is specific. Use this structure as a starting point for your email:

Subject: Genealogical Research Inquiry – [Surname], [Municipality], [Date Range]

Dear [Archive Name] Reference Staff,

I am conducting genealogical research on a Puerto Rican family from [municipality]. I am hoping you can help me determine whether your institution holds newspaper holdings relevant to my research.

I am specifically looking for:

- Newspaper title(s): [titles]
- Date range: [years]
- Municipality or barrio: [place]
- Type of notice: [vital notices, legal notices, obituaries, etc.]

I have already searched the following online platforms without finding what I need: [list from WS-01].

Could you tell me whether your institution holds these materials, what the access procedures are, and whether advance scheduling is required?

Thank you for your assistance.

[Your name and contact information]

Section 5: A Brief Note on Paid Platforms

This course has focused entirely on free resources. If you have exhausted the free platforms and have not found what you need, the following paid or subscription-based platforms hold Puerto Rican content:

- **Newspapers.com** (subscription): Holds the *Gazeta de Puerto Rico*, 1836–1902.
- **GenealogyBank** (subscription): Claims approximately 95% exclusive content not available elsewhere; holds some Puerto Rican marriage records with biographical detail.
- **Latin American Newsstream via ProQuest** (library subscription): Full-text access to 41 Puerto Rican newspapers. Many public library cards and university library cards provide free access to ProQuest databases; check with your local library before subscribing.
- **Eastview Global Press Archive** (institutional subscription): Holds *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial*; access through university or academic libraries.

Research tip: Before paying for any subscription service, check whether your public library or a nearby university library provides free access to the same database. Most major genealogy subscription databases are available through at least some library systems.

Section 6: Wrapping Up the Course

You have now covered the full cycle of Puerto Rican newspaper research:

- **Why** newspapers matter and what they contain (Lesson 1)
- **How** to search the most important free platform, Chronicling America, including slavery-related records (Lesson 2)
- **Where** to search beyond Chronicling America, using Puerto Rico's own digital portals (Lesson 3)
- **How** to make your searches more effective and how to interpret what you find (Lesson 4)
- **What** to do when digital resources are exhausted (this lesson)

What You Can Now Do

1. Search five free platforms for Puerto Rican newspaper content
 2. Apply name variation and date range strategies to improve results
 3. Extract genealogical data from legal notices, vital announcements, and obituaries
 4. Document your searches using the Newspaper Search Log and Esquela Extraction Form
 5. Plan an in-person research visit to Puerto Rican archives
 6. Identify when free resources are exhausted and what paid options exist
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Reflection Questions

1. You have searched Chronicling America, ADNPR, dLOC, and the El Mundo archive for an ancestor from a small town in western Puerto Rico with no results. What is your next step, and which institution would you contact first?
 2. You are planning a research trip to Puerto Rico and have one half-day for newspaper research. How would you use your Newspaper Search Log (WS-01) to decide which institution to visit and what to focus on?
 3. Your public library provides access to ProQuest databases. How does this change the calculus of “free vs. paid” platforms for your Puerto Rican newspaper research?
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Thank You for Taking This Course

Newspaper research opens a part of Puerto Rican family history that most researchers never reach. The records are there – in the official pronouncements of a colonial government, in the daily notices of a community press, in the esquelas that families published when someone they loved died. Learning to find and read these sources is one of the most significant skills you can add to your genealogical practice.

If this course helped you find an ancestor in a historical newspaper, share your story with the Puerto Rican Genealogy Group. Every discovery is a contribution to what our community knows about where we come from.

Puerto Rican Genealogy Group: <https://puertoricangenealogy.org>

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