

VITAL RECORDS for the VITAL EVENTS of OUR LIVES

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Always document your sources!!!!

Primary source for immediate event, made at time of event

Secondary source for past events may not be reliable, so use them as clues...or with collaborating additional sources if things don't add up.

Birth certificate: possible information is name; birth date & place; mother's name; father's name when known

May have: mother's age, # of previous births & # living siblings; father's age and occupation; parents' residence at time of birth

US: county or state vital records. Use Handy Book for Genealogists to determine availability.

Immediate or extended family members? Ask for copy of certificates in the family.

Internet *may* have birth information

Marriage certificate: current names of the couple, date & place of marriage, name of officiator, witnesses

Application may have parents of bride & groom, bride & groom's ages, birth place &/or current residence, number of previous marriages if a multiple marriage, etc. *This is usually the first type of record that you can find.* Marriages are considered public records, whereas birth and death are not. Get application & returned certificate if possible.

Divorce records: while not as "socially acceptable" in previous generations, divorces records are considered public records. Before "no fault" divorces, they may provide juicy look at private lives of the divorcing couple.

Typical causes: infidelity, desertion, non-support, cruelty.

Death certificate: name of deceased at time of death, place & date of death, primary cause of death. May have parents' names, birth date & place, Dr.'s name, contributory factors in death, next of kin (informant), cemetery or other disposition of body, funeral home. Accuracy depends on informant. (Take a group sheet with you to the mortuary if you are next of kin.) Douglas co: 50 years since death accessible without question.

ALWAYS document your source in your permanent records. Write on the back of your copy, where you got the information/certificate, **and** put the information into your genealogy program.

Get a copy of all documents if you can. (Some hold future clues which you may not recognize when you first see them.)

Hint: get good with a digital camera and you can save money on copies, or use a hand held scanner to transfer records to your home computer. You do *not* need certified copies for genealogical purposes.

Order from county courthouse or state vital records. Town records may give same information for early New England. Check www.familysearch.org They are nearing completion of digitizing the microfilms. If you run into not being able to open a file, the W. Dale Clark library is a FHL affiliate and you should be able to view the documents there.

Courthouse research in person. Their job is NOT to provide us with family records. Be aware of state laws regarding release of information. All courthouse research not the same, as smaller counties may be more user friendly to the researcher than more populous counties.

Marriage records usually start earlier than birth or death records. Handy Book for Genealogists will give information on when records started in the state, when county was formed, what the parent county is. Available at libraries or FHC. (Copy the pages for your counties)

Most US birth & death records do not start on consistent basis until some time after 1900. ..often not until 10-15 years later.

Alternate source for older vital records, especially marriage records: LDS Family History Center microfilms.

In foreign countries, look for civil registration records or language equivalent of that term.

Because of identity theft, it is often harder to get copies of birth/death records, especially modern ones.

SUBSTITUTES FOR VITAL RECORDS AND THINGS TO LOOK FOR

All substitute types are not available for all people & places. Look for all possibilities if you can't find one.

Know your family's religion & know the churches in the area they lived.

Know when that religion typically baptized/christened new members.

Infant baptisms: Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopalian/Church of England, Presbyterian/Church of Scotland, etc.

Older baptisms: Baptists, Latter-Day Saints, Brethren, etc.

Infant baptisms: record in the christening slot on group sheets/computer programs, can substitute for an actual birth record, because typically the child was only few days/weeks old.

Older baptisms will add individual color to an ancestor's story, but usually limited value for birth date & place depending on the Church. (Quaker records baptize adults, but have birth records.)

Marriages: may not give as much information as marriage license application. It may give witnesses who are often clues to other family members.

Delayed birth certificate: Must have affidavits from people present at birth/or knowledge of birth (Dr., parent, older sibling, neighbors, grandparents)

Check with vital records offices in area of birth.

Census records: give an approximate age. Exception: 1900 census (1901 in Canada & Gr. Britain) gives month & year of birth. Age may vary from decade to decade. (Note census date.) Mortality schedules done 1850-1900.

School records: difficult to access due to privacy laws. If class lists are available, figure an approximate age based on year in school. May not be accurate, especially in rural communities.

Newspapers: may give birth announcement with parent's name & gender of child, death notices, marriage notices.

Hint: read the gossip columns. Notorious for misspellings, not being wholly accurate.

Marriage: May give listing of marriage licenses that were issued, clue for when marriage may have taken place.

May give an article on the marriage or engagement, possibly picture in more recent times. Hint: again, check out the gossip columns.

Divorces: asked, granted, cancelled may show up in newspapers

Deaths: Obits vary with size of newspaper and time period. Often were paid for by the line, so poorer families may have had smaller (or NO) obits. If unusual or violent death—or socially prominent individual, may have story more than one day. Hint: Also, look for Cards of Thanks. (Be a good ancestor: Do a rough draft of what you want in YOUR obit.)

Note article, the name, date, and place of newspaper publication & page number reporting information, & where you found the copy of the newspaper in your records. Hint: write the same information on items you clip from current newspapers or they are next to useless for documentation.

Probate records: indicate that death of an individual has occurred. May give names of family members as constituted (including married names of daughters) when will was written. Look for date will was written and date will was proved to get a time frame for death. May be available on microfilm.

Microfilmed records: many available from LDS Family History Centers. Many vital records, church records, probate, etc. from all over the world (unfortunately—not ALL records for all countries)

Newspapers: check state historical societies. Many will do interlibrary loan for small fee.

Hint: when doing microfilm, look for everyone with surnames of interest who lived in the area at the time, not just one individual's immediate family. By extracting everyone's information, you will save time and money later.

You can put the pieces together later as you would do a jigsaw puzzle.

Social Security Death Index: can give birth date (secondary), and date of death, place last death benefit was sent. SS applications available from the government for \$27. (Death certificates usually cheaper.)

Cemeteries: tombstones, sexton records. Look for family plots.

Grave markers may indicate values of family in selection of funerary art, beliefs, wealth.

(Hint: take your cemetery kit, especially to older rural cemeteries.)

Funeral homes: list of next of kin (who paid for funeral), disposition of the body, memorial cards, possibly death certificate, copy of obit

Funeral books: look at lists of people attending funeral. Some will probably be relatives.

Military records, pension applications, WWI & II draft cards.

ALWAYS, ALWAYS DOCUMENT YOUR SOURCES!