

## **Finding Vital Records and Information**

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#### **Family Group Sheet Recommendations**

1. Fill out Name completely. Check the spelling. Convention - Ancestral Name all caps.
2. Fill out location completely, city, county, state, country or town, parish, country.
3. Date is to be listed as Day/Month/Year (Complete).
4. Document everything. Make your note so complete anyone could find your documentation.
5. The ! is important in PAF notes. If placed before a note it will include the note with the name at printing the record or sending a Gedcom file.

#### **Vital Records – records that provide information pertaining to your ancestor.**

**1. Family Records** - Search Family and learn family contacts. Often there is a distant cousin that may have some information pertaining to your family. Call around to your family. Someone may have some information you need. Send your relatives Family Groups sheet and Pedigrees to fill out to the best of their knowledge. The Internet is another great place to search. Go to Rootsweb or Genealogy.com. Search your surname and post a query. Provide as much information as possible - don't provide any information on living individuals.

**2. Family Bible** - Ask in your family if a Family Bible was kept and what information it may contain. Some Family Bible Records have been published. Check at the LDS Family History Catalog (FHL). Check city or county library where family resided or check the Internet. Search your web browser. Sites to check are Cyndi's List, Genealogy.com or Ancestry.com. The last two pages are a paid service.

**3. Published Family Research** – These, if they are done for your family name, are a great source. These books can provide vast amount of information on many generations. To check if your family name has been done check the FHL or your web browser.

**4. State Birth/Marriage/Death Records** – When each State began keeping vital records is variable. For example Nebraska has birth records starting in 1904, whereas Massachusetts birth records begin in 1841. Most States began keeping vital records around 1850. The availability of records may depend on State law. These records can be searched for and ordered from the State; charges vary. The best place to start is “Vital Records Information - United States”  
<http://www.vitalrec.com/>.

**5. Social Security Index** - There are many web sites that offer free and for fee searches of the Social Security Death index. Social Security numbers were introduced by the Social Security Act of 1935 and therefore is limited to the past 70 years. The death index contains a listing of most people who had a Social Security number and who are deceased, and whose death was reported to the Social Security Administration. If you find a person in the death index you will learn the date of birth and Social Security Number for that person. Other records potentially available from SSA include the Application for a Social Security Number (form SS-5) and information from the "claims folder" for past recipients of benefits. Internet check – Family Search, Ancestry.com, Cyndi's List.

**Federal Census Records** – The U.S. government took a census of those living within its borders every 10 years starting with 1790 to the last census in 2000. Census information is available from years 1790 to 1930. From 1790 to 1840 the census lists only the head of household with the spouse and number of children referred to by a check mark. The 1850 Census was the first census to record the family's names, age at time of census, and birth location. Each census has been indexed and been published in volumes of books. They are usually available in your local or county library. The 1890 Census records were burned and as a result many people use 1890 Veteran Index. This Index applies to those who ancestors fought in the Civil War for the Union. Confederates were not listed. The records are incomplete. The Soundex system is a method of indexing names in the 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 U.S. Censuses. Soundex can also aid genealogists by identifying spelling variations for a given surname. The Soundex uses the first letter of the surname then codes the sounds of the remaining consonants. Soundex calculators available via the web or Personal Ancestral File (PAF). For example Richmond – becomes R255. You can access census records via your local or county library, or the FHL films. The 1880 census is indexed and searchable at [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org). There are other nonprofit sites that may have a census listed online for the State they represent. Check at U.S. Census Online. It has a partial list of censuses available online broken down by State and County. Ancestry.com and Genealogy.com have the complete censuses indexed and images available online. These are paid services.

**7. State Census Records** - Independent of the Federal Census, often States took a census. These censuses were not done systematically and are often incomplete and may only represent a few counties or only a major city. To check what State Census records are available for each state check at <http://www.genealogy-mall.com/stcens.htm>. Information in them may vary according to State.

**8. County Histories** – County histories are invaluable. Many histories have been written about the early families that settled into a county. The histories often contain birth, marriage, death and ancestry and descendants of varying families when there is no other information available. Every history is different. Sometimes there are multiple histories. Oftentimes, there are biographical sketches written about prominent persons or businessmen. As valuable these histories are, they may be hard to find. The best locations to check are the FHL catalog at [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org) and check with the county or State library where your family is from. You can also check the USGenWeb at <http://www.usgenweb.org/>. Some counties for some States have excellent County Web pages and may provide the most common histories on line and may be searchable.

**9. City Directories** – These are like phone books only there are no phone numbers as these were before phones. The directory will list the head of household and the address that they lived at in the city. These directories do not list vital record information but can be helpful if the same house passes from generation to generation. Relatives of families usually lived in close proximity to each other. This may be helpful if your family has unusual surname. Internet- the best to start is [www.distantcousin.com](http://www.distantcousin.com).

**10. Tax Records** – Tax records have been recorded since the beginnings of America. Tax records do not include any vital record information but may be important for learning the location of your progenitor, his occupation and real estate that was owned. The records usually only contains a few lines of information. The information may provide some lineage information, as often after the death of the head of household, the oldest son was responsible for the taxes. Early American tax information oftentimes has been published in books. Internet – search on county and State for court records.

**11. Court Records** - Court records are not just about criminals. Some of the most underutilized records available to genealogists, court records can provide details about births, marriages, deaths, possessions, and more. Court records cover a wide range of topics, including land ownership, divorce, adoption, taxes, and naturalization. In general, the court nearest your ancestor's place of residence is the best place to begin your genealogical search.

**Probate records** - Probate records can be an excellent source of genealogical information. Probate records are created at the time of an individual's death, and are meant to establish the legality of a will. In probate records, you can find the will, which will tell you what types of assets the deceased had. They also often list the names of survivors, and their relationship to the deceased. An estate is "testate" when a legal will is in existence and "intestate" when there is no will or the will is not legal. The court must approve any will before it can be probated, and if it does not gain such approval, it becomes intestate. The maker of the will usually names one or more executors to carry out its provisions, but if one is not named, or the executor died before the testator did, then the court appoints an administrator. Check the local library or courthouse. Check FHL catalog. Internet - check the State and county where the probate was issued for what probate records are available.

**12. Land records** - Land Records are valuable for genealogical research. They provide evidence of places where our ancestor lived and for how long, when he moved into or out of a locality, at least the given name of his wife, and sometimes a surprising amount of detailed information about him. American land records are often an overlooked resource. Not every family historian initially understands their importance, assuming they are just dry descriptions of the acreage of the land. They are that, however, there can be found some interesting tidbits tucked away in those dusty deeds. Search the county library in which your ancestor resided. Check the local library or courthouse. Check with the FHL catalog for listings. Internet - check the State and county where the probate was issued for what probate records are available.

**13. Church Records** - Church records are a bounty of information including birth, marriage, death, baptism, confirmation, etc. Almost all churches from the earliest days of organized religion have kept records. For many countries, the Churches were the “keepers” of the records, particularly if there is a state recognized church. In many cases these church records are a very complete and excellent sources of information. Many early American church records have been published in books and may be available on the Internet. Check at the county or city library for information. Check the FHL catalog for U.S. and International church records.

**14. Military Records** - There are three types of records included under the general term of Military Records. These are the Service Record, Pension Record and the Bounty-Land Record. The more recent the war, the more complete the records. Refer to the URL list or search the Internet for the war of interest and the availability of records.

#### **Service Record**

If your ancestor served in a military unit (company or regiment), you should be able to find him on muster (attendance) rolls, which will give his name, date and place of enlistment and muster. Some records may show his age, physical description, marital status, occupation, or the place of birth or residence.

#### **Pension Record**

The federal government and some state governments granted pensions to officers, disabled veterans, needy veterans, widows or orphans of veterans and veterans who served a certain length of time. Pension records usually contain more genealogical information than service records. However, not all of our veteran ancestors applied for or received a pension.

#### **Bounty-Land Record**

The federal government offered land to those who would serve in the military during the Revolutionary War; for example: the Western Reserve of Ohio. The veteran or their heirs could claim the land. These land records may show where your ancestor migrated to after the War.

**15. Newspapers** – Newspaper articles obviously report have the news stories of the day – some of which your ancestor may have been involved. Newspapers may list vital record information including birth, marriage and particularly obituaries. Other possibilities are land sales, anniversaries, death of city founders, biographical sketches of government officials. The list is endless. A newspaper article can be a priceless genealogical tool. The downside is searching through them. Many newspapers are available on microfiche. Check with the library or with the newspaper of your ancestor's town of residence. Very few newspapers are searchable via the Internet. Check with Ancestry.com for availability.

**16. Cemetery Records/Gravestones** – These two important pieces of genealogical information are often as mistaken as the same data, they are not. The records consist of a listing, usually maintained by the cemetery, the church or the local court house, of those is buried there. These records may or may not be an accurate accounting of those is buried, as the early burials may not have been recorded. Commonly the party responsible for keeping the records will have a map of the burial plots. Search the county or city cemeteries near where your ancestor last resided. Write or call the cemetery (church, courthouse) for cemetery record; some may require a fee. If you have difficulty finding a gravestone while at location, ask if there is a burial plot map. The name assigned to the burial plot and the names of those actually in the plot may not match. Keep in mind some cemetery records may have more information that what is published on the gravestone.

**Gravestones** – The marker usually placed at the burial site to provide information about the person buried. Gravestones can be made of anything, but limestone was very popular in the early days because it was easy to inscribe the information. Now, most gravestones are etched into granite. The information inscribed on the gravestone can be as different as the individual, but the majority will include some genealogical information for the researcher. There are many volunteers that record censuses of gravestones for old pioneer cemeteries. These graveyard censuses are also usually published in books or posted on the Internet.

**Ship Record or Lists** – Sometimes you may be fortunate enough to find your ancestors on a ship list or what is often referred to as a passenger list. Often the information provided is sparse; often only the person's name and age at the time of passage are recorded. Some passenger records will include their place of origin and their destination. Little information may be gained by finding your ancestor on a ship's passenger list but it brings them to life to know the ship on which they spent months immigrating to America. The best place to search for these records are on at [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) and [www.Genealogy.com](http://www.Genealogy.com). Both are paid searches. Check also with the FHC.

**Immigration/Naturalization Records** – After your ancestor immigrated to America, they had to apply for naturalization. Often only the name, the date of naturalization and the former nationality of the person are recorded. Although you may only glean a small amount of genealogical information from your ancestor's naturalization card, it brings them to life.

**Family Genealogy Internet Sites** – Many families use the Internet to post their genealogies. These family genealogy web sites are as varied as the families that post them to the web. The information they contain may or may not be helpful. Many people use web site templates such as those provided by MyFamily.com. The family genealogy sites may be difficult to find, as the people who created the site often do not know how to increase their ranking by search engines. Try searching with a variety of search engines, as they do not all carry the same page lists. Be patient and look past the first pages of listed sites. You may find the family connection you needed.

**LDS Ancestral File** – The LDS Ancestral File is a compilation of genealogies submitted to the LDS Church. You can search for information at [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org). It is a great resource and may help to know where to look next and can help you build genealogies quickly, but remember that the information provided to Ancestral File was compiled by a vast collection of different people. Bottom line – just because the information is in Ancestral File does not mean the information is correct. It is your responsibility to double check the data pertaining to any name that you plan to submit to the Temple.

**LDS IGI** – The IGI (International Geological Index) has replaced the TIB (Temple Index Bureau) and is a collection of ordinance work performed for deceased persons from the Restoration of the Church to the present day. It is a collection from all the temples around the world. Once a patron submits a name to a temple the information goes into the IGI. The IGI is a great genealogical resource, but it too, has errors and it is the responsibility of the person submitting a name to the Temple to check the information against vital records. After you have obtained information on a person, and it is accurate as the records allow, and before submitting

the name for performance of temple ordinances, check the name against the IGI with all its spelling variations to ensure the work has not been completed previously. The IGI is available at [www.FamilySearch.org](http://www.FamilySearch.org). If you have not yet done so, you will need to contact your ward clerk to obtain your confirmation date and your membership number to have access to the temple dates. You can also access this information at your local Family History Library on their computer or on microfiche.

**World Family Tree** – The World Family Tree is a compilation of genealogies submitted by an ever growing number of people and families. You may wish to submit your family information.

**Professional Genealogist** – When you don't have access to the records, when you have searched for years and can't seem to make any headway, or maybe you just want the work done quickly, you may need to hire a professional genealogist. You can find professional genealogists via the Internet. Be sure to check their credentials. Be sure to check with what information they can obtain before you proceed. The going rate per hour can be anywhere from \$25 - \$40 an hour for their service. Copies, travel and such may be extra. They are very professional and should respond to your request promptly. If you need help in securing a professional genealogist, I may have few suggestions.