

Chapter 3: *Finding Your Ancestors in Civil and Church Records*

Using the FamilySearch Catalog to Find the Locality of Your Ancestor's Residence

The FamilySearch Catalog (FSC) place search enables you to locate records the Family History Library has collected from various localities. In the United States, records have been recorded on the town, county, state, and national levels. The following chart shows what types of records were kept on which level.

Jurisdictions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local records (cities, towns)—church records, city directories, newspaper files, cemetery records, public school information, and funeral home notices• County records—birth, marriage, and death records, deeds/mortgages, tax and voters' lists, naturalizations, wills/probates, church records, and court records• State or provincial records—censuses, military service files, naturalization records, and birth, marriage and death records• National records—military pension records, census enumerations, immigration lists, and federal court records

In most foreign countries the basic religious record-keeping unit was the parish. Each parish included the inhabitants of villages and towns in its jurisdiction that attended Sunday worship services. Priests of the parish kept church books called parish registers, in which they recorded christenings, marriages, burials, and other details relating to members of their congregation. Many ancestors lived in rural areas or small villages in which no parish church existed. They traveled to a nearby town to have children christened or marriages solemnized in the parish church there.

Civil jurisdictions that recorded biographical information in the past were manor courts, probate and clerical districts, civil registration districts, archdeaconries, and bishoprics. In Denmark, for example, a peasant's land rental was filed with the lord of an estate or with district officials. In Germany, wills, land records, and similar documents were filed with a town or district clerk or a notary. To comply with laws requiring registration of births, marriages, and deaths, people went to the vital records registrar in their town. If their community had no registrar, individuals went to a nearby town whose registrar had jurisdiction for their village.

When using the FamilySearch Catalog to find civil records from an ancestor's hometown, refer to a gazetteer. A gazetteer is a geographical dictionary that describes the jurisdictions that kept records about the people in a given community. Gazetteers can be found in public libraries and college libraries.

Many FamilySearch Centers have microfiche or microfilm copies of gazetteers for some countries. To find gazetteers for a specific country use the FamilySearch Catalog: go to "Place Search," look under the name of the country and the topic "Gazetteers." If the name of the parish town or civil registrar's office with jurisdiction over an ancestor's village can be found in a gazetteer, it is possible to find microfilmed church or civil records in the Family History Library that describe ancestral families. Enter the name of the parish town—as well as the residence of ancestors—into the parish or town search of the FamilySearch Catalog. If no records are found under the parish town's name, a letter to the parish office should produce copies of forebears' christening, marriage, and burial records. The same procedure works to find vital and other records for people who lived in communities that had no registrar. Write to the town listed in the gazetteer as the seat of the registrar of vital records if no records for the town appear in the FamilySearch Catalog.

Information in a Gazetteer

- Describes the county in which the city or town is located.
- Identifies jurisdictions of courts and vital records' offices.
- Lists congregations/churches in the larger cities.
- Lists canals, mountain ranges, rivers, natural barriers to migration, and transportation networks.

Note: If you are looking at records from the 1840s, a gazetteer printed in 1847 may prove more valuable than one printed in the twentieth century.

Correspondence in the United States and Other Countries

Before beginning correspondence, check and double check the holdings of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City by selecting the Catalog tab at FamilySearch.org (also on classic.familysearch.org, on FamilySearch DOS, or on microfiche). After you have reviewed the massive collection and identified missing information within the collection, begin correspondence. Addresses are easy to find. Consult *The Genealogist's Address Book* (Bentley 1998) for a start. You will also find that many federal, state, and local government agencies as well as churches have Internet home pages. The book *World of Learning* (Europa Publications 1997) contains addresses of archives and libraries in all the countries of the world.

Modern research by correspondence may be made by telephone, FAX, or e-mail. A phone call to a mortuary or sexton's office to ascertain the records that exist and whether employees can help with specific requests will speed up your family history research.

Just as certain courtesies are appropriate for telephone or FAX communication, courtesies also apply to written letters. For example, enclose two or three international postal reply coupons when writing to a library or individual in a foreign country. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) with your correspondence within the United States.

Keep your correspondence brief and direct. Include a family group record or pedigree chart showing your relationship to the ancestor and why the question of your ancestry is so important to you. Most frequently you will correspond with county officials responsible for courthouse collections of probates, deeds, and marriage records; sextons responsible for cemetery records; and state historical societies that preserve important historical and genealogical documents.

Correspondence Made Easy:

- Outlines published by the Family History Department for each of the states in the U. S. and many countries around the world contain helpful addresses and information about sources and where these sources are housed in archives and repositories throughout the world.
- When seeking vital statistics for your ancestry, check *The Handy Book for Genealogists* (Everton 2002), *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County & Town Sources* (Eichholz 1992) or *International Vital Records Handbook* (Kemp 2000), and *The Genealogist's Address Book* (Bentley 1998) found in the Center for Family History and Genealogy family history computer lab or in the BYU Harold B. Lee Library (HBLL).
- For genealogical societies in a specific geographic area search the *Directory of Genealogical Societies in the United States and Canada* (Meyer 1992) in the HBLL or *The Genealogist's Address Book* (Bentley 1998) in the computer lab or the HBLL.
- Review back issues of genealogical journals/publications relating to your geographical area of research. Many of these are in the periodical collection in the HBLL. The Periodical Source Index (PERSI), on CD, at HeritageQuest.com, or at Ancestry.com, will guide you to articles about your ancestors and the towns in which they lived. PERSI is available in the computer lab and the HBLL.
- Look for articles pertaining to your family surnames or the times and places your ancestors lived. Contact authors of the articles by writing the editor or publisher.
- Place advertisements and inquiries in genealogical periodicals. Search the ads from other persons. Copy names of persons whose ads relate to your research interests. Ads or articles several years old can still be valuable. Often the individual who placed the ad is willing to correspond. Two popular genealogical periodicals are *The Genealogical Helper* (Everton, 1947-1991) and *Heritage Quest*. They can be found in most public libraries. The latest issues of both magazines are available in the HBLL periodical reading room.
- Join genealogical societies located in ancestral towns, counties, or states.
- An advertisement in a society journal may lead to relatives who have a family Bible, old letters, photos, deeds, naturalization records, research files, etc.
- Write to libraries in the towns where ancestors lived for a listing of local and family history materials in their collections.
- Use RootsWeb on Ancestry.com. It is an online tool that allows researchers to see what

others have worked on, coordinate with each other, and collaborate on further research.

Vital Records

Vital Records are government records of births, marriages, and deaths.

Information in Vital Records

- Birth certificates—name, date, and place of birth, parents' names
- Marriage certificates—date and place of marriage, names and ages of bride and groom, places of residence, witnesses' names, and sometimes parents' names
- Death certificates—name of deceased, date and place of death, age, residence, cause of death, spouse, parents, occupation, date and place of burial, and sometimes date and place of birth

Traditionally, counties kept birth, marriage, and death records prior to about 1900. In the twentieth century, states have kept the birth, marriage, and death records. Many of the state and county vital records have been filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah. For United States vital records, check FamilySearch Catalog listings under "Vital Records." Vital records in most counties in the United States began in the nineteenth century; however, New England towns began keeping records in the seventeenth century. For vital records of foreign countries, check the FamilySearch Catalog under "Civil Registration." Civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths began in England and Wales in 1837, in France and western Germany in 1792, and in Scandinavia only recently. *The International Vital Records Handbook* (Kemp 2000) provides addresses of vital records offices in the United States and in many other countries.

There is always more information available in county courthouses than what has been filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah. If the vital records you are seeking have not been filmed, you may want to contact the Family History Library to see if the records are in their collection.

Family History Library
35 North West Temple Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84150
801-240-2331

Other Sources for Vital Record Information

- Cemetery and sexton's records
- Mortuary records
- Newspaper notices of birth, marriage, and death
- Emigration/immigration records
- Military records
- Headstones—use the following methods to preserve the information found on headstones:
 - Take a picture with your digital camera and avoid using zoom to reduce pixilation. If you have access to a photo editing program, such as Adobe Photoshop or Gimp, load your image and enhance it using the programs tools.
 - Make a gravestone rubbing—trace or rub the stone with leads (or dark shoe polish) on tracing paper. Using charcoal chalk on a white stone or white chalk on a dark stone can also “bring out” the inscription. Be sure to speak with the sexton first; many older headstones are quite fragile.
 - Squirt the stone with a 1:2 vinegar-water solution and wipe it clean with a soft cloth or knock off “barnacles” with a straw-bristled scrubbing brush.

Church Records

Ministers of various congregations recorded christenings (baptisms), marriages, burials, and other events in the lives of the people they served.

Dominant Religions in the United States

- Baptists and Episcopalians—North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Georgia
- Congregational—New England, Ohio, Midwest.
- Roman Catholics—New York City, Chicago, and Boston
- Methodists
- Quakers—Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New Jersey
- Lutherans—Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Washington

Dominant Religions in Europe

- Anglican (Church of England)—England
- Presbyterian (Church of Scotland)—Scotland and northern Ireland
- Catholic—Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Germany
- Lutheran—Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany
- Reformed Church—the Netherlands, parts of Germany, and Switzerland

Traditionally, church records were preserved in a safe or strongbox in the local church. Some of the records are still in the local churches. Write to the church your ancestors may have attended—or to a nearby church of the same denomination—to learn where needed records are today.

Information in Church Records

- Christenings—child’s name, parents’ names, godparents’/witnesses’ names, date of christening
- Marriages—date of marriage, names of bride and groom, and sometimes the names of parents
- Burials—date of burial, deceased’s name and age, and sometimes residence

Check the FamilySearch Catalog (FSC) under your locality of interest and the heading “Church Records” to see if the records you need have been filmed. Search “Parish and Vital Records Listings” (on printout and microfiche at the Family History Library or local LDS FamilySearch Center) to see if the records of interest have been extracted and processed for temple ordinances.

Searching On-Site Church Records

- Ask for absolutions (records of persons absolved for nonattendance at church, fornication, etc.)
- Ask to see pew rental and church account books
- Search confirmation registers (Confirmations may have taken place at any age. For example, Lutheran children were confirmed at age 14)
- Search lists of paupers
- Search arrival and removal records

Records of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Records of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are available on microfilm in the Family History Library and the Family and Church History Department (second floor, east wing of the Church Office Building) in Salt Lake City. These records include ward and branch records, patriarchal blessings, LDS census records, indexes, Church histories, temple books, and others. Besides these valuable records, check the Temple Index Bureau and the Family Group Records Collection (FGRC).

Temple Records Index Bureau

The Temple Index Bureau (TIB) is a 3 x 5-inch card index of endowments for both the living and the dead between 1842 through 1 January 1970. On 1 January 1970, the TIB was replaced with the International Genealogical Index (IGI). The TIB contains over 30 million index cards; they are on microfilm at the Harold B. Lee Library. Access to the TIB microfilms requires a temple recommend or

letter of recommendation from your current bishop.

Information on Temple Index Bureau Cards

- Name and gender of principal
- Birth date and birthplace (sometimes just the state or country of birth)
- Date of death
- Parents' names (sometimes father's year of birth)
- Marriage date
- Spouse's name
- Temple ordinance dates (information varies)
- Sometimes name of person who acted as proxy
- Name of temple, book and page numbers

During the 1900s, work was done for many individuals while they were still living, and even though they are now deceased, their names may not be included in the Ordinance Index or the International Genealogy Index. Your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents may be included in these names, and you can check the TIB to find their ordinance dates.

Family Group Records Collection

The Family Group Records Collection (FGRC) is a collection of family group records submitted to the Family History Library between 1942 and 1969. Microfilm copies of the Family Group Records Collection are available in the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and in the BYU Harold B. Lee Library. An asterisk (*) beside any name on the family group record refers to another submission found in the same collection. The FGRC consists of a Main Section and a Patron Section. There are over 8 million family group records in the Family Group Records Collection.