

How to Obtain Death Certificates

Birth, **Death**, Marriage and Divorce records are considered "Vital Records." These documents are usually **not** found online! Congress created the National Board of Health in 1879 which began to publish health statistics. Uniformity of registration was the goal and by 1919 the last states adopted a state-wide birth and death registration. Standard forms have been used since 1933.

Vital records can verify dates, places and family names. Remember, the "facts" from these documents are only as accurate as the informant who provided the information. Collect additional records for evidence verification and additional clues.

Vital records are usually held at the state (Department of Health, Archives) and/or county (courthouse) levels. The print and online resources listed, are immensely helpful in determining which records are available, where they are currently being held and how to request these documents. There is usually a charge for each death certificate requested (even if it isn't found)! Costs may range from \$7.00-\$15.00 each or even up to \$36.00 in Canada!



www.findagrave.com

Jim Tipton, founder, has created a web site with famous and not-so-famous grave sites. There have been over 100,000 contributors to this database.

Resources



Social Security Death Index (SSDI)

For death records occurring after 1962 through May 2004 over 73,044,509 names!

<http://ssdi.rootsweb.com>

Obituary Daily Times (1998-2004)

<http://obits.rootsweb.com>

Searchable Death Indexes and Records

www.deathindexes.com

www.vitalrec.com

Cemetery and Tombstone Transcriptions and Death and Burial Registers

www.interment.net

www.king.igs.net/~bdmlhm/cemeteries.html

Funeral Net

An online obituary, funeral home, cemetery resource since 1996, though not inclusive.

www.funeralnet.com

Cyndi's List

www.cyndislist.com/cemetery.html

PRINT



Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy, Val Greenwood

Genealogist's Address Book, Elizabeth Bentley

The HandyBook for Genealogists, Everton Publishers

International Vital Records Handbook, Thomas Kemp

Ancestry's RedBook American State, County & Town Sources

Your Guide to Cemetery Research, Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

REST IN PEACE

Locating Graves,
Cemeteries and
their associated
records.



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Funeral Home Records



Funeral home records are often over-looked when researching family history.

It is the funeral director's responsibility for initiating and filing the death certificate and placing obituaries in the news media. The accuracy of the information given is only as reliable as the person who provided it. The record keeping practices are not very consistent among funeral homes. Often records over 10 years old are in storage, out of order or even destroyed. If they are kept, they are generally alphabetical by year. Records from homes long out of business, are often donated to local historical societies.

The most important aspect to remember about gaining access to these records is that they are private records and there is no obligation to allow you to see them! It is not a good idea to show up at the funeral home demanding to see their records! It is best to write to the manager of the home and ask for information on a specific individual. Enclose a SASE and offer to pay for copies.

Cemetery Index

Many local cemeteries are indexed by volunteer members of local historical/genealogical societies. The Algonquin Library has the indexes to McHenry & Kane County, Illinois cemeteries. Check the FHC Library catalogs for other published county cemetery indexes or microfilm. Some are even online through Rootsweb and Cyndi's List.

Mortality Schedules

These schedules represent data collected on deaths from persons who died 1 year *prior* to taking the census itself (usually starting on June 1). Keep in mind that only 60% of the actual deaths were recorded for the given census years 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880. The 1890 & 1900 schedules were destroyed and the rest are scattered about! They can be helpful in tracing genetic symptoms and diseases as well as family history. Try searching surnames on the mortality index at Ancestry Plus for an abbreviated content. To locate some, but not all, of the original mortality (non-population) census schedules, a state by state chart is listed in [The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy](#).

Most of these films are available through the National Archives and local Family History Center Libraries and the DAR Library.

Church Records

Family Bibles and church records are similar to vital records because they record births (christenings or baptisms), deaths (burials) and marriages (ceremonies and banns), though in a different way. Other types of records may include confirmations, membership, vestry minutes or excommunications depending upon the church.



American church records are unique in that the U.S has a complete separation of church and state. Generally New England and northern colonial states have much wider use of their records than elsewhere in the country.

A *partial list* of church record depositories in states *east* of the Mississippi is listed in the above mentioned book .



Obituaries

If you know the date of death, finding an obituary can often provide cause of death, birth place and date, occupation, church affiliation, living and deceased relatives. Many libraries, genealogical and historical societies keep obituary card files, clipped from newspapers. If you do not know the date of death, it will be difficult to search newspapers unless an index is provided. Some online newspapers have searchable indexes and archives that may give you the headline but then request payment for the entire article. Check your local library to see if the newspaper you need is on microfilm and able to be borrowed. There are some "historical newspaper" databases available at other libraries, i.e., New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times.

Wills & Probate

Wills and probate records can reveal detailed genealogical information that may show how the estate was divided. Specific relationships, time periods and the existence of other records can provide context to an ancestor's life. Generally, wills are filed in the county where they were probated and the courts have custody of the records. Some exceptions are, New Jersey, Delaware, North & South Carolina where older records are being transferred to archives and libraries. The LDS Family History Center Library is actively microfilming many, though not all, probate records that are available in state archives. Some probate records are published and available in book form. Most wills are indexed alphabetically and if you find the right jurisdiction they are easily searched.