

Vital Records

What are vital records?

Vital records document major life events including birth, marriage, divorce, and death. These records are created by a local authority, such as a government or church.

How do I find vital records?

The implementation of record-keeping laws varied by time and location, so there is no single place to search for or request records. Use resources like the [Family Search Research Wiki](#) to search for a location (county or state) and see when various records were kept. Visit familysearch.org, then click on **Search** and **Research Wiki** to get started.



Birth Certificate (Connecticut, 1933)

Types of Vital Records

Birth Records

Birth records may be the most difficult vital record to track down. Privacy laws may prevent you from requesting a copy, or a record may have never been created.

- Birth Certificates
- Birth Registers
- Delayed Birth Certificates

Marriage Records

Marriages are one of the earliest vital events documented by local authorities. Due to the public nature of marriage (and divorce), these records are fairly accessible.

- Banns and Intentions
- Bonds
- Applications and Licenses
- Certificates
- Returns and Registers
- Contracts and Consent Forms

Death Records

Search for death records before birth or marriage records. They are more recent and often contain birth and marriage details.

- Death Certificates
- Death Registers
- Cemetery and Church Records
- Probate Records
- Census Mortality Schedule
- Newspapers
- Social Security Death Index

Note: This is a list of common record types. Don't expect to find each one for every ancestor!

Vital Records

Supplemental Records

Don't despair if you struggle to locate a vital record. Other records can provide details related to an ancestor's major life events.

Birth

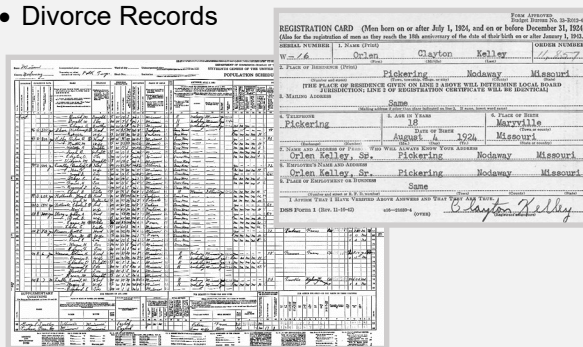
- Census Records
- Military Records
- Newspapers
- Diaries
- Family Bibles
- Tax Records (males)
- Naturalization Records
- Baptismal Records
- Yearbooks
- Passports
- Marriage Records
- Divorce Records

Marriage

- Census Records
- Military Records
- Newspapers
- Diaries
- Family Bibles
- Divorce Records

Death

- Census Records
- Military Records
- Newspapers
- Diaries
- Family Bibles



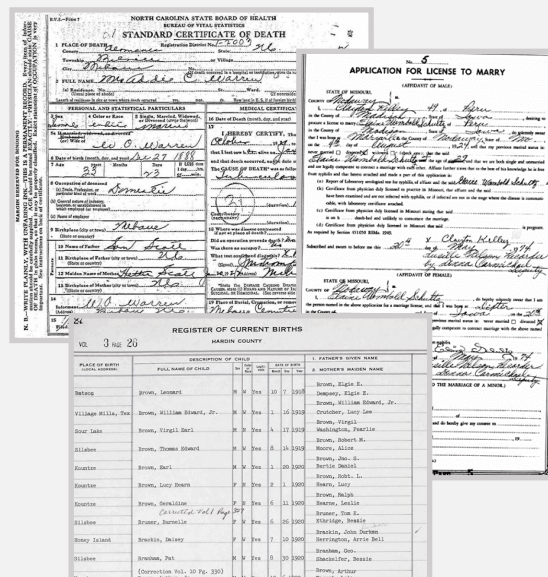
Vital Record Resources

- [Pikes Peak Library District Databases and resources](#)
- [FamilySearch Research Wiki](#) United States vital records
- [Find A Grave](#) and [Billion Graves](#) Search cemetery gravestones
- [Where to Write for Vital Records](#) Request records by state
- [Online Searchable Death Indexes and Records](#) Find online death records
- [International Classification of Diseases](#) Look up death codes
- [Cyndi's List](#) Vital records websites by state
- [Chronicling America](#) Historic American newspapers
- [Atlas of Historical County Boundaries](#) Boundary changes over time

Further Considerations

Keep these tips in mind as you research:

- Do you understand the record-keeping laws for the time/place?
- Can you find more than one record?
- Who was the informant?
- What does the handwriting look like?
- Was the record created near the time of the event?
- Is information missing or left blank?
- Who are the witnesses/signatures/family members?
- Did you read the whole record?
- Is a date range or year possibly the best you can find (for now)?
- Does lack of a record mean your ancestor wasn't there?
- Did the land borders (counties, states, countries) change?
- Is the record online?
- ... but many are! Check free places before paying fees



"Vital Records" by Pikes Peak Library District is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Creator: Cara Ramsey, PPLD Regional History & Genealogy

Last revised date: 7/5/2022