



## What are Vital Records?

**Records** of life events kept under governmental authority, including **birth certificates**, marriage licenses (or marriage **certificates**), and death **certificates**(Wikipedia). Genealogists usually add divorce records to this list.

## Uses of Vital Records:

- "Skeleton" upon which to build a family tree
- Place ancestors in a time and place
- Allow determination of errors
- Assist with sorting out people with same name
- Lead to further research possibilities
- Lineage societies

## Some Record Types May Contain Information on Multiple Vital Records:

- Church (baptisms, confirmations (indirect), marriages, deaths)
- Newspaper
- Cemetery
  - <https://www.findagrave.com/>
  - <https://billiongraves.com/>Use a mirror to read stones with poor legibility – NOT shaving cream or chalk
- Sextant Records
- Diaries
- Bible
- Histories
- Passports
- School records/yearbooks
- Military Records – draft, pension
- Obituary Compilations – WEB SITE
- Compilations (ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, FindMyPast)

### **Some Records Record Births Only:**

- Birth Certificates
- Delayed Birth Certificate
- Public Recording of Births
- Social Security Applications
- Tax Lists (indirect)
- Naturalization

### **Some Records Record Only Marriages:**

- Civil Registers (intentions, application, marriage bonds, consent forms, license, returns & registers, certificates)
- Marriage Banns
- Census (indirect 1850-1870, etc.)

### **Divorces are Largely in Court Records:**

### **Some Records Focus on Deaths:**

- Death Certificates (also birth)  
Missouri (50 year moratorium)  
<https://s1.sos.mo.gov/records/Archives/ArchivesMvc/DeathCertificates>  
Cause of death codes  
<http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/>
- Mortality Schedules  
<https://s1.sos.mo.gov/records/archives/archivesdb/census/>

#### Accessing Missouri Mortality Schedule images.

1. Visit the link.
2. Scroll down to "Census Records Search."
  - a. Fill in your ancestor's name. This can just be a surname, or you can use "Starts with," "Contains," or "Ends with"
  - b. Select the county if you know it, or leave this field blank if you want to broaden the search.
  - c. Select "Mortality Schedules" in the Series field
  - d. Census year should be 1850, 1860, 1870, or 1880—the years the Mortality Schedules were prepared. You can leave it blank as well.
  - e. There are fields for "Gender," "Race," and "Age" if you are doing statistical work.
  - f. Click "search"
3. If you have results in "Search Results," click on "View Details"
4. Scroll down to the bottom of the screen, and click on "View Images"
5. You should have an image of the original!
  - Probate/Will records (indirect, usually)
  - Funeral Home Records (including funeral cards)
  - Social Security Death Index

### **Analysis of Vital Records:**

- Do not accept information in vital records at face value
- Who was the informant?
- Is there different handwriting and why?
- Do the dates of the document and of the event differ?
- What information is missing?
- Are there any codes used, and what do they mean?
- Does the information conform to the laws of the time?

### **Final Suggestions:**

- Learn the jurisdiction's laws and record locations
- Analyze information
- Consider who provided the information
- Find the original source
- Is a date range or approximation useful?
- Use online trees for clues

## **Resources**

### **Reclaim the Records (<https://www.reclaimtherecords.org/>) - Missouri**

Births, 1920-2015: <https://www.missouribirthindex.com/>

Deaths, 1968-2015: <https://www.missourideathindex.com/>

### **Genealogy Articles, Tips and Research Guides by Joe Beine**

Selected State Records (including Vital Records): <https://www.genealogybranches.com/states.html>

### **Ancestry U.S. Vital Records Information:**

<https://www.ancestrycdn.com/support/us/2016/11/usvitalrecordsandalternatives.pdf>

### **FamilySearch U. S. Vital Records Class Handout:**

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/U.S. Vital Records Class Handout](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/U.S._Vital_Records_Class_Handout)

### **FamilySearch Vital Records Wiki:**

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United States Vital Records](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Vital_Records)

**Where to Write for Vital Records:** <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm>

### **YouTube Videos**

Shilega, Jeanette. "NCGS Beginner's Series: Vital Records." Niagara County Genealogical Society; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzkhpnzNaH0>, 2020.

Knox, Connie. "Vital Records: (Where to Find Birth, Marriage, Death and Divorce Records for Genealogy)." *Genealogy TV*; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5NT3-zvRhs>, 2018.

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. "Genealogy & Local History: Finding Local Vital Records Online." Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2-yc0vsVMA>, 2020.

Lisson, Lisa. "8 Alternatives to Vital Records." Are You My Cousin?;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDsZBiAxlzg>, 2019.

There are numerous great videos by subscription in the Legacy Family Tree Webinars Library.

### **Further Reading**

Cerny, Johni, "Vital Records," pp. 603-649 in Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, Chapter 13. Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2006.

Greenwood, Val D., "Vital Records," pp. 279-313 in *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, Chapter 13. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2017.

Kemp, Thomas Jay. *International Vital Records Handbook: 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2017. [Application forms and ordering information]

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation, and Source Usage*. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2015.

Sheffey, Brian. *Practical Genealogy: 50 Simple Steps to Research Your Diverse Family History*. (Step 15, Explore Marriage Records, Step 16, Examine Vital Records), pp. 50-56. Emeryville, California: Rockridge Press, 2020.