

Vital Records

Building and Researching Your Family Tree, a Twelve Part Series

Prepared by Hannah Kubacak & Bill Buckner

What are Vital Records?

- The records that refer to critical events in a person's life.
 - Birth
 - Marriage
 - Death
 - Adoption*
 - Divorce*

Value of Vital Records for Research

- Good sources for primary information – names, dates, locations
- Good source for genealogical evidence – parents, occupations, witnesses, etc.

Research Strategies

- Work backwards. Start with most recent record and work towards earlier documents.
 - Death → Marriage → Birth
 - Clues from one document can help you find another.
- Evaluate the record.
 - Who was the source/information for the information?
 - What is primary information vs. secondary information?
- Think about how information is transcribed and indexed.
 - Handwriting and faded documents leads to transcription errors.
 - Some records are more complete than others.
 - Type of information asked for varies through time and location.

Creation of Vital Records

- Vital records began being recorded at different times based on location.
 - There are many gaps in early years of recording.
 - Churches may have recorded vital records prior to government records in some places.
 - Texas began birth and death certificates in 1903.
 - In the South, birth and deaths registrations began between 1899 and 1919.
 - New England states began statewide registration of births, marriages, and deaths between 1841 and 1897.
 - Mid-West Statewide registration of births and deaths began between 1880 and 1920.
 - REFERENCE:
 - *Ancestry's Red Book*
 - *Everton's Handybook for Genealogists*
- Recording is typically associated with Health Department.
- County records are sent to the state.

Access to Vital Records

- Laws regulating access vary by state.
 - Texas birth certificates are protected for 75 years.
 - Texas death certificates are protected for 25 years.
 - Who can access records during protected years is limited with proof of identification.
 - There are many gaps in early years of recording.
- Print (search the library catalog)
 - Books: records for early records (pre-1920) have commonly been transcribed or indexed in print form.
 - Periodicals: genealogy societies may have published indexes/abstracts in their publications.
- Online
 - Databases (i.e., FamilySearch, Ancestry, Fold3, FindMyPast, MyHeritage)
 - The FamilySearch Wiki provides links to online resources.
 - Joe Beine Collection provides links to online resources.
 - Some databases are FREE with library card at www.wacolibrary.org.
 - Digital Libraries
 - State Sources: Search [STATE health vital] → choose the “.gov” search result

Exceptions to the Rules

- Learn the history of the region where you are researching to learn more about what uncommon records may be available.
- Marriage records are the oldest vital records and are the most widely kept.
- Church marriage records pre-date civil registrations of marriages.
- Marriage license is not the only type of marriage record.
 - Intention or Bann – common before 1850 – show intention to marry
 - Marriage Bond – similar to Bann – groom fined if marriage not legal
 - Consent papers – parental consent if bride or groom is underage
 - Marriage record – actual recording of event – county/state record
 - Marriage application and license – permission to wed
 - Returns and registers – evidence that wedding happened
 - Marriage certificate – document kept by couple
- Delayed Birth Certificates
 - Completed later in life for births that happened prior to official birth certificates
 - Some Texas Delayed Birth Certificates can be found in the FamilySearch Collection: “Texas Births and Christenings, 1840-1981”
- Early Texas Birth Records
 - Births recorded in Texas between 1873-1876
 - Some parents would also list the names and birthdates of any previous children when registering a new birth. The earliest birth recorded with these records was from 1838.
 - McLennan County Archives has these records for McLennan County births 1873-1875.
 - Books in library for several other counties: *Early Texas Birth Records 1838-1878 v.1-2*

Genealogy Links

Databases

FamilySearch www.familysearch.org

Ancestry (\$) www.ancestry.com

Ancestry Library Edition (FREE with WMCL Library Card at the Waco McLennan County Library)

Resource Guides

Ancestry's Red Book wiki.rootsweb.com

Family Search Vital Records Wiki www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Vital_Records

Joe Beine Collection – Vital Records by State www.germanroots.com/vitalrecords.html

Joe Beine Collection – Online Searchable Death Indexes www.germanroots.com/deathrecords.html