



# Finding Original Records: The Real Game of Hide and Seek

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Whenever possible a researcher needs to examine the original record. For this handout an original record is a document created at or near the time of the event. Using an abstract or an extract may not yield all the information from the original record. With today's technology many digital images of original records appear online. However, many records are not and may never be online. In those cases on-site research may be necessary to track down original documents.

## VITAL RECORDS

### Birth, Marriage, Death and Divorce

The keeping of vital records varies from one location to another. New England record keeping practices are much different from the Mid-Atlantic region. It is important a researcher learns the record keeping practices of the region where their relative lived.

The FamilySearch Research Wiki is a good source to discover when vital records began in various states. The FamilySearch Library Catalog and Ancestry are good sites to check for online records. For records not online local courthouses, state department of health, archives and state vital records office are where original documents are usually kept. One should check state and courthouse websites for the availability of records and how to obtain them.

## NATURALIZATION

Depending on when an individual became a citizen of the United States, his or her record could be found at the County, State or Federal Level. When using the FamilySearch Library Catalog all three levels need to be searched. The Declaration of Intent and the Petition for Naturalization can usually be obtained by the researcher. The actual certificate of Naturalization was usually presented to the naturalized citizen. Check Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.com and Fold3 for online records.

If the records are not online the place to start would be the county courthouse. Visit or contact the local courthouse where your ancestor lived. If the naturalization occurred after 1906 contact USCIS website to order the naturalization papers. <https://www.uscis.gov/>

## LAND and PROBATE

Land and probate should always be used when researching family lines. These records can be useful in making family connections and identifying family relationships. Usually kept at the county courthouse, land and probate can also be found online using the FamilySearch Library Catalog. If the land was purchased from the colony/state or proprietor check the state level. If the land was purchased from an individual check the county level.

Search the FamilySearch Research Wiki at the county level or contact the county courthouse for record availability if the records are not online. Some counties are storing their older records in off-site facilities. It is always a good idea to contact the courthouse before visiting to make sure the records you want to search are on site.

## CHURCH RECORDS

When vital records are not available church records can be used as a substitute. However, church records are difficult to find and depending on the denomination the record you seek may not exist. It is a good idea to read county histories and discover what religious denominations were in the locality where your relative lived.

Contact the Church itself to determine what records are available and will the Church allow you to look at the records. If the church no longer exists, contact the local historical and genealogical societies or denominational repositories. For a listing of these repositories check the FamilySearch Research Wiki.

## PASSENGER LISTS

Passenger arrival lists can be difficult to find. The US Government did not begin to record passenger arrivals until 1820 and earlier lists may be lost. Earlier lists may be found using Ancestry, the FamilySearch Library Catalog and state archives where your ancestor arrived. Later passenger arrivals may be difficult to locate because of name spelling variations or the documents were difficult to read in the indexing process. The best place to start your passenger hunt is with Ancestry.com.

- FamilySearch Historical Records Collection
  - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/>
- Ellis Island
  - <https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/>
- Castle Garden
  - <http://www.castlegarden.org/searcher.php>
- 1896 Canadian Border Crossings
  - Ancestry.com
  - FamilySearch Historical Records Collection
- Mexico Border Crossings
  - Ancestry.com
  - FamilySearch Historical Records Collection

## NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers are becoming more popular. However, many are not online so not easily accessible. Local libraries, societies and universities may have copies of newspapers on microfilm. Check their websites to see if their catalog is online for newspaper availability. In many cases the researcher will have to visit the repository

- newspaperarchive.com
  - <https://newspaperarchive.com/>
- news.google.com/newspapers
  - <https://news.google.com/newspapers>
- Newspapers.com
  - <https://www.newspapers.com/>

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