

Beginning Genealogy Step 3: Locate a Useful Source

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In the MGS Beginning Genealogy Course, we encourage students to work through five steps:

1. Write down and organize what you know,
2. Decide what you want to learn,
3. Locate a useful source,
4. Learn from the source, and
5. Use what you learned.

This is the third of three columns on Step 3. The first column inventoried the essential genealogy sources

for beginners—census records, vital records, church and cemetery records, immigration records, and naturalization records—and described how to locate original and published versions of these records. The second focused on top websites for beginners. This one shows you which essential source might contain the genealogical information you are looking for. Here is a short guide matching common research topics with answers from essential genealogical sources.

Essential Genealogical Sources

Research Topic	Census Records	Vital Records	Church and Cemetery Records	Immigration Records	Naturalization Records
Birth	After 1850, federal census records provide age. 1900 census provides month and year of birth.	Birth records usually provide date and place of birth. Death records may provide the same information or just show age at death.	Baptismal records may provide birth dates. Confirmation or burial records may show age. Cemetery records may provide ages. Cemetery markers often provide birth dates and ages.	Pre-1820 records rarely indicate age, but you can sometimes infer this information. Post-1820 passenger lists indicate age and country of origin. From the early 1920s, look for specific birthplace information.	Pre-1906 records vary by locality but often include age and country of birth. Post-1906 records include date and place of birth.
Marriage	The 1850-1880 federal censuses indicate if a marriage occurred within the year; censuses after 1880 include marital status. The 1900 census shows years married, 1910 years in present marriage, and 1930 age at first marriage.	Marriage records usually provide date and place of marriage. Death records after about 1900 may include marital status or name of spouse.	Burial records and cemetery markers may include spouse's name or length of marriage.	Post-1891 passenger lists indicate marital status.	Post-1906 records show marital status and spouse's name. Later records include date and place of marriage.

Essential Genealogical Sources

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Residence	Census records tell where a family lived. Infer earlier residences from birthplace and age of family members.	Birth, marriage or death records may report residence information.	Marriage and burial records may list residences. Cemetery records may list lot owner addresses.	Post-1891 records indicate last residence and destination within the U.S.	Pre-1906 records should show at least a county of residence. Post-1906 records ask for addresses.
Occupation and employment	1820 and 1840 censuses recorded industries within households but not which individuals worked. After 1850, federal censuses list occupation.	Birth records may list father's occupation. Marriage records after about 1895 and death records from about 1880 often include occupation.	Church records may list occupations; look for occupation indicators in account books. Cemetery markers may have indications of occupation.	Post-1820, passenger lists may include occupation; from 1883, all do.	Post-1906 records list occupation. Pre-1906 records may do so.
Death	Deaths within the year may be reported in mortality schedules (1850-1885 and 1900—Minnesota only). Check marital status of spouse after 1880.	Marriage records may show death dates for previous spouses. Death records are obvious choices.	Burial records, cemetery records, and cemetery markers are obvious choices.	Passenger lists may indicate names of passengers who died at sea.	--
Burial	--	Death records may indicate place of burial.	Burial records, cemetery records, and cemetery markers.	--	--

These five basic types of genealogical sources are only a few of the places where you can find answers to these common genealogical questions. Military records, newspapers, and probates are obvious next steps, but many other record types can provide important clues.

FamilySearch's Research Wiki provides an extensive printable selection table for the United States records in which you can find information on the above research topics, as well as many others, at (https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/United_States_Record_Selection_Table). The table links to other

portions of the wiki where you can find more information about the records listed. FamilySearch also offers a downloadable handout called *Records and the Information They Contain* at (https://www.familysearch.org/learn/getting_started_step_3).

Lois welcomes questions or suggestions for future topics! Contact her at LoisMackin@aol.com.