

# Unlocking Birth Records

Exploring Birth Dates and Alternate Sources

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## Why Birth Records?

Birth records are some of the first records sought for an ancestor. But why? Birth records connect generations and provide multiple clues to the makeup of the family unit and clues to pursue other family records.

Types of information potentially found on a birth record:

- Full name of child
- Names and ages of parents
- Birthplace of parents
- Marriage status of parents
- Address/location of family
- Occupation of parents
- # of siblings
- Birth order of siblings

## Types of Birth Records

When a couple had a new baby, they wanted to share the news! They also needed to register the birth with the local government or municipality. Before you begin your search for that birth record, determine exactly what records were required for the location (county, region or country) and the time period. Requirements did change over time.

### Civil Records

Civil birth records in the United States are official documents that record the details of an individual's birth and are typically managed at the county level. Access to these records may vary depending on individual state laws and privacy regulations, but they are often accessible through county clerk's offices, state archives, or online databases.

Birth certificates as we know them today are fairly “modern” records. Many states did not require birth certificates to be issued until the early 1900’s. You would not want to search for a birth certificate for an ancestor born in 1880.

Delayed birth certificates were often requested by individuals who were born before birth registration became mandatory or who lacked an official birth record for various reasons.

To obtain a delayed birth certificate, individuals typically needed to provide supporting evidence of their birth, such as affidavits from family members, baptismal records, school records, or census data. Once the necessary documentation was submitted and verified, the government authority would issue a delayed birth certificate. These types of birth certificates can be a gold mine for researchers since they contain information from additional family members.

## Religious Records

Religious birth records in the United States are documents maintained by religious institutions, such as churches or synagogues, to record the births within their congregations. Religious birth records typically contain details such as the child's name, date of birth, parents' names, and sometimes additional information such as godparents or sponsors.

Access to religious birth records varies depending on the policies of the religious institution and the availability of historical records. Researchers may need to contact individual churches or religious organizations directly to inquire about accessing their birth records.

## Family Records

Personal birth records kept by couples typically consist of documents or records created and maintained by the parents themselves to commemorate the birth of their child. These records served as personal keepsakes and should not be overlooked. They may include items such as:

- **Birth Announcements:** Couples often created birth announcements to share the news of their child's arrival with family, friends, and acquaintances. These announcements typically included the child's name, date of birth, and sometimes a photo or other personalized details.
- **Baby Books or Journals:** Many couples kept baby books or journals to document important milestones and memories throughout their child's early years. These books may include information about the child's birth, growth measurements, first words, and notable events.
- **Mementos:** Couples may have kept mementos or keepsakes from their child's birth, such as hospital wristbands, footprints, locks of hair, or other sentimental items.

# Alternate Sources for An Ancestor's Birth Date

A formal birth record may not be found for your ancestor, but you can deduce the birth year/date or at least narrow down the date by using other records.

## **The Family Bible**

The Family Bible holds a wealth of valuable information beyond just birth dates, often containing records of marriages, deaths, and family events handwritten by generations of ancestors. While locating the Family Bible can pose a challenge, reaching out to both close and distant relatives can uncover hidden treasures within family collections.

Moreover, exploring state and local archives' family collections may lead to the discovery of Family Bibles that have been preserved as historical artifacts, offering invaluable insights into your family's heritage.

## **Census Records**

Census records can provide a person's age, birth year and/or birth month. The pre-1850 U. S. census records indicate an age range for the enumerated individuals. Despite the limitations of pre-1850 census records, the age ranges provided offer valuable clues for narrowing down birth years and corroborating information found in other historical documents.

## **Death Records**

An ancestor's date of birth can often be found in their death records. A death certificate records the birth date and age. The mortality schedules of the 1850 - 1880 U. S. census records provide an ancestor's age from which the birth year can be inferred. Obituaries and even a gravestone can provide a birth date and/or year.

## **Immigration/Citizenship Records**

In addition to important information on an ancestor's country of origin, immigration and citizenship records can serve as valuable sources for determining their date of birth. While the primary purpose of these records is to document the individual's immigration journey and naturalization process, they often include details such as the individual's age at the time of immigration or naturalization, which can be used to calculate their approximate birth year or even pinpoint their exact date of birth in some cases.

## **Newspapers**

Delving into newspapers can unveil a treasure trove of information related to birth records, including birth announcements, baptismal announcements, death announcements, and obituaries. These announcements, often published shortly after significant life events, provide valuable insights into the lives of individuals and their families.

Birth announcements celebrate the arrival of a newborn, typically including details such as the baby's name, birth date, and proud parents' names. Similarly, baptismal announcements may

shed light on religious affiliations and cultural traditions, offering additional context to the birth event. Furthermore, death announcements and obituaries may contain biographical details, including the deceased's birth date and place

## How To Analyze a Birth Record

Finding an ancestor's birth record and date of birth is only the first step in the process. Analyzing that birth record for ALL the clues is crucial.

- **Review the Basics:** Start by examining the basic information provided in the birth record, including the individual's full name, date and place of birth, and the names of their parents.
- **Identify Parents' Names and Information:** In addition to the parents' names, note other details about both parents including age, place of birth, address and occupations.
- **Note Sibling Information:** Information on the number of siblings and birth order may be indicated.
- **Note Extra Markings or Notes:** Sometimes notations and/or corrections may be noted on the birth record. Be sure to analyze each for possible additional clues.