



Norway: Reading the Records

Anka Schjerven Magee, BS, AG

Haslama@familysearch.org

Gothic Handwriting is a collective designation for a specific type of writing within the Latin alphabet. The writing style started during the 900's. Variations of the Gothic handwriting dominated the handwriting in Scandinavia during 1600-1800. It was found in Scandinavia, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, and places where the Scandinavians and Germans settled i.e. parts of the Russian empire.

In order to be able to read the script you need to become familiar with the letters. It is also a good idea to study the style and preferences of the particular scribe in your parish records.

The church was the record keeping jurisdiction and the priest the main record keeper. In earlier times monks or paid scribes would keep the records. For our purposes the scribes would be the local priest.

Most priests have their own style. Even though the priests learned the same basics, they end up with very specific handwriting, often very different from the priest who served before him and the priest who followed him! As you read through the records you will learn to recognize his letters, patterns, and format. Is the name of the child/ groom/bride underlined or written in the margins? Are the names written in the Roman style of handwriting and the text in Gothic script? Is the name written larger? Is the occupation or residence written before the father's name, or after? (... and, as you become familiar and comfortable with his writing he dies and another priest takes over the books, and you have to start over again 😊)

You will learn to isolate the letters to figure out long, difficult words, to compare letters, names, and places.

Words could be spelled different ways, even in the same documents. The word "had" could be spelled: *hadde, havde, hafde, haffuede, ect.* There was no standardized spelling. The record keepers recorded the words/names the way they heard them!

They spelled phonetically!

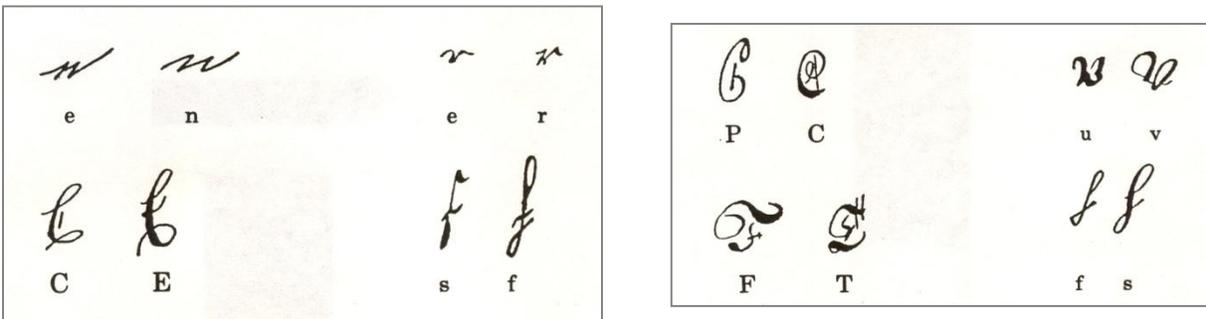
Think phonetically. It is helpful to sound out the words. In order to do that, of course, you need to have an understanding of the letters and how they are pronounced.

As part of learning to *read* the records it is also very important to learn how to *write* the letters; to get a feel for the movement of the pen. How are the records formed, do the lines slope? Look for words you know to help you identify the record type; words like fødde, døbte, trolovede, copulerede, døde, begravede etc.

Study the alphabet! Write down the letters, write them carefully! When you know how the strokes move it will be easier to differentiate the letters in difficult entries.

- Look at the letters; do the letters extend *high above* the line: **b, d, k, l, t**; *above and below* the lines: **g, j, p, q, x, y, z**. Are the letters on the line: **a, o, m, n, u, c, e, i, r, v, w**? High *above and below*: **f, h, s**. Some letters look very much alike!

Norway has three additional letters in its alphabet: æ, ø, and å. These letters all appear at the end of the alphabet. (In earlier gazetteers the “å” was “aa”, and was then to be found at the beginning of the alphabet).



There are interchangeable letters like “f” and “v”; and “i” and “j”.

- Å and AA: “Hågen- Haagen”; “gård- gaard”
- I and J; F and V; C and K
- U could be used for V: “Suen- Sven”

There were interchangeable names as well: Johan, Jon, Jan, and Johannes; Per, Pehr, Petter; Ole, Ola, Olaves, Olaus, Oluf, Olof; Anne, Ane, Ann, Anna, Sissel, Sidsel, Zidsel, etc.

- There will be abbreviations: Faddr., Fad., Mod., chr., Sal., Hsm., Inh., Pig.,
- Find the same person in a different type of record. Search all records that would be applicable for your particular person. Some records include more information than others! The possible records could include: birth/christening, introductions,

confirmation, engagement, marriage, death/burial, vaccination, absolutions, moving in/out, census, probate records, and tax record.

- The dates could be listed as Latin feast days:



You will have to use a “Feast day calendar” to convert the dates into “regular dates”. Months and some of the days of the week are very similar to the English, and remember that most dates are written date over month! 4/10 47 is 4 October 1947, not Apr 10 1947.

The Gothic Script was considered the writing of the learned. The priest was the learned man in the parish, and the records were kept by the church; the record keeping jurisdiction. The parish priest or his warden/ clerk were responsible for keeping the records accurate. In more recent years (started 1812-1814), a copy of the records were kept by the priest *and* the clerk. They would meet at the end of the year to go over their records and update, or correct them. If you are not able to find your ancestor in the records you should check the back of the book to see if it was inserted later due to omission earlier in the year. The two records were kept in different houses to make sure at least one copy was safe, especially in cases of fires which have been known to destroy many parish records. The two men could also have very different handwriting, so if the priest records are difficult to read try the clerk’s copy 😊

