



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

Tim Bingaman, AG®, Research Specialist  
bingamantd@familysearch.org

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 an 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. Also, 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 record could be found at the County, State or Federal Level. All three levels need to be searched. The Declaration of Intent and the Petition for Naturalization can usually be obtained by the researcher. The actually certificate of Naturalization was usually presented to the naturalized citizen. Check Ancestry, FamilySearch and Fold3 for online records.

If the records are not online visit or contact the local courthouse where your ancestor lived. Also, the USCIS website can help you obtain naturalization records after 1906.

## **PASSENGER LISTS**

1820: US Government began to record who was coming into the country by ship

- Ancestry.com
- FamilySearch Historical Records Collection
- Ellis Island
  - <http://libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger>
- Castle Garden
  - <http://www.castlegarden.org/>
- 1896 Canadian Border Crossings
  - Ancestry.com
  - FamilySearch Historical Records Collection
- Mexico Border Crossings
  - Ancestry.com
  - FamilySearch Historical Records Collection

## **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. Also, search historical and genealogical societies.

## **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](http://newspaperarchive.com)
- [news.google.com/newspapers](http://news.google.com/newspapers)
- [Newspapers.com](http://Newspapers.com)