

# Southern Research Part II: Proving Relationships with Vital Records

Webinar Handout  
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## History of Vital Records in the U.S.

Vital records (birth and death certificates) were mandated by the state in the early 1900s. However, some counties and some cities kept birth and death records earlier than the state mandated. Each state is different on what early birth and death records were kept.

## Where Are Birth and Death Records?

They could be in multiple places. The birth and death records, since they were mandated, are held at the state level. Also copies may be in state libraries, state archives, and state historical societies.

Some counties kept records before the state mandate. You may find birth and death records in the county Register of Deeds Office, the county archives, the county libraries, or county historical societies.

Some cities kept records before the state mandate. You may find city records in the city or the county, in local city libraries. They may also have copies at the state level as well.

Independent city records could be at the city or county courthouse.

Every state is different. Vital records may be found in multiple places within a state. Review your state's vital records on *FamilySearch*.

(Example: [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/North\\_Carolina\\_Vital\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/North_Carolina_Vital_Records))

If you still need help locating records, call a state or county historical society or archive. They know where everything is! The *FamilySearch* Wiki has links in the state to archives and libraries.

## Where to Start: Online Records

*FamilySearch*, Ancestry, Findmypast, and MyHeritage have contracts with record repositories and may have acquired different records. Make sure to check all the sites to see what birth, marriage, and death records they may have on their site.

*FamilySearch* centers and *FamilySearch* library affiliates have a contract that allows more records to be viewed than on your home *FamilySearch* subscription. You can find a center or library affiliate close to you where you will also have access to view records on Ancestry, Findmypast and MyHeritage.

Before searching records, review the county boundaries for where your ancestor lived. The boundaries may have changed many times during an ancestor's lifetime. This means your ancestor's records may be held in multiple counties.

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## **FamilySearch Wiki**

Here's where you can learn more about vital records, access links to records, and learn about additional resources like substitute records when vital records are unavailable.

### **United States Vital Records:**

[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United\\_States\\_Vital\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Vital_Records)

Scroll down to "Vital Records of Each State." Click on the link for vital records of the state you're interested in researching. Read everything!

Review the state Wiki Topics in the box on the right hand side of the page: Beginning Research, Record Types, the state Background, etc.



The image shows a sidebar menu titled "Virginia Wiki Topics" with a blue header and the state seal of Virginia. The menu is organized into several sections:

- Beginning Research**
  - Guided Research
  - Research Strategies
  - Record Finder
- Record Types**
  - Adoption
  - Bible Records
  - Biography
  - Cemeteries
  - Census
  - Church Records
  - Colonial Records
  - Correctional Institutions
  - Court Records
  - Crime & Punishment
  - Directories
  - Education
  - Emigration & Immigration
  - Genealogies
  - Land & Property
  - Medical Records
  - Military Records
  - Naturalization & Citizenship
  - Newspapers
  - Obituaries
  - Occupation & Business Records
  - Online Genealogy Records
  - Probate Records
  - Public Records
  - Social Organizations
  - School Records
  - Taxation
  - Vital Records
  - Voter Records
- Virginia Background**
  - Biography
  - Church History
  - Further Reading
  - Gazetteers
  - History
  - Law & Legislation
  - Maps
  - Migration
  - Periodicals
- Cultural Groups**
  - African Americans
  - Indigenous People
  - Cultural groups
  - Swedish Americans
- Local Research Resources**
  - Archives & Libraries
  - Societies
  - Local FamilySearch Center:®

Make sure to find local archives and libraries in your state and county.

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## **Where to Find Records on FamilySearch**

Here are two BYU Family History Library webinars on YouTube that help explain where to find records on *FamilySearch* in "Records," "Catalog," and "Images."

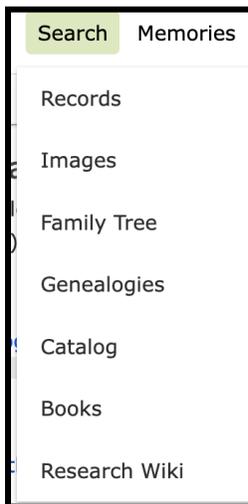
“Where are all the Records on the *FamilySearch* Website?” by James and Ann Tanner  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A69-QwZAr14> Time 12:17.

For the longer version with more explanation, see “Where are all the Records on the *FamilySearch* Website?” by James Tanner  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzPQggyk-bl> Time 58:42

## FamilySearch Catalog

The FS Catalog is a guide to records, books, periodicals, family histories, etc. Many of these records, books, etc. can be searched online. Here’s how you get to it.

Step 1: On the main page of *FamilySearch*, click on “Search.”



Step 2: A drop-down menu appears. Click on “Catalog.”

A screenshot of the search filters section. It includes a "Search by:" section with tabs for "Place", "Surnames", "Titles", "Author", "Subjects", and "Keywords". Below this is a "Place" input field. The "Search for:" section has tabs for "Call Number" and "Film/Fiche/Image Group Number (DGS)". The "Availability" section has three radio button options: "Any" (selected), "Online", and "FamilySearch center". At the bottom are "Search" and "Reset" buttons.

Step 3: Search by “Place” starting from United States, state, to county.

Example: United States, North Carolina, Wake

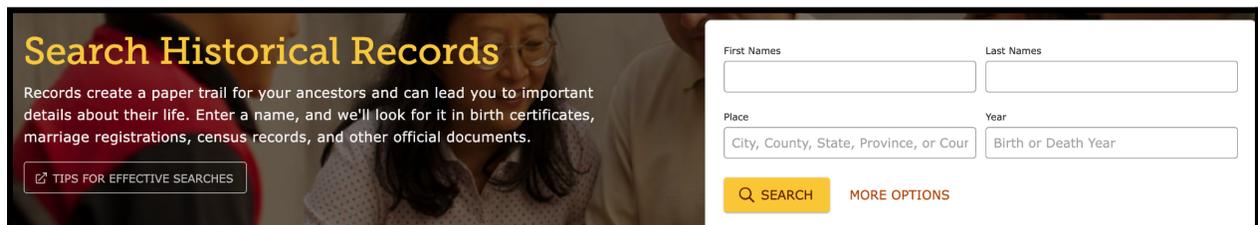
A green bar should appear with the “United States, North Carolina, Wake.” Click on it. Then click “search.” Then all the records FS has for that county will appear. Scroll down to Vital Records. Click on it.

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## FamilySearch “Records”

FamilySearch is continually receiving records. Most of their records have NOT been indexed, so there are a couple of places to look for unindexed records: “Records” is a place that has records in the process of being indexed. Some of them are indexed, some of them aren’t. To see if there are any indexed records for your ancestor in “Records” do the following:

Repeat step 1 by going to “search.” Instead of clicking on “Catalog,” click on “Records.” The following screen appears.



Put in the name, state, and the approximate year of birth. (You can also click on more options to add additional information). Then click “Search.” All the records will appear for someone with the name you entered. There may be multiple people with the same name living in the same state, at the same time as your ancestor, so analyze the records carefully.

If your ancestor moved during his/her lifetime, do a search again using a different location where your ancestor lived.

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## FamilySearch “Images”

“Images” is a collection of images (pictures) of documents. FamilySearch has only indexed about 20% of their record collections because they are collecting records daily. Because these records have not been indexed, you can not search by name. You search by “place.”

Repeat step 1 by going to “Search.” Instead of clicking on “Catalog,” click on “Images.”



Enter the location you want to search. In “Images” search from smallest jurisdiction to the largest: county, state, country.

Click “Search Image Groups.”

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## Other Places for Links to Vital Records

The USGENWEB Project [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org)

Cyndi's List [www.cyndislist.com/us/](http://www.cyndislist.com/us/)

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## Examples of birth, marriage, and death records

### Birth:

Birth record: Usually gives the name, sex, and birthdate and birthplace of the child; the names, birthplaces, and ages of the parents; occupation of father.

Birth indexes: A transcription of birth information taken from the original birth record.

Birth register: A book that contains information gathered by state or county officials that usually includes the name of the child, birthdate and birthplace, names of parents and parents' birthplaces.

Delayed Birth record: If no birth record was issued at the time of birth, a person could go to the county of their birth and file a delayed registration of birth. Proof of the birth was required: witnesses to the birth, family Bible, etc.

### Before the marriage:

Marriage Banns: Public announcement of intended marriage usually 3 weeks before a couple planned to marry, giving a chance for objections.

Marriage Bonds: Written guarantees or promises of payment, usually by a relative of the couple, to ensure that there was no reason to prevent the marriage.

Consent Papers: Consent of a parent or guardian when the bride or groom was underage, if required.

Marriage License: Replaced banns and bonds. Application to marry by the proper civil authorities, usually from town or county clerk.

### After the marriage:

Marriage Return: After a marriage was performed, the minister or official, returned the marriage information to the clerk who recorded it in the county or city marriage register.

Marriage Register: A book where the town or county clerk recorded a marriage. It included the marriage date, ages, place of birth, residence, parents of the married couple. Occupation and who performed the marriage was also included.

Marriage Certificate: Given to the couple after marriage by the individual who performed the ceremony, certifying that they were officially married.

**Death:**

Death record: A record that includes information about the deceased: name, age, birth date, birthplace, names of parents, and the informant, date and place of death, cause of death, etc.

Death Register: A book where the town or county clerk recorded a death. It included the name, color, age, sex, occupation, date of death, cause of death, place of death, residence, place of death, names of parents, and birthplace of parents.