

Mind the Gap: Finding Ancestors Between the Censuses

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Genealogical research often begins with census records due to their ease of access and rich detail. However, gaps between census years are large and some census records no longer exist which can cause or contribute to brick walls. Non-census records cover a wide range of documents that can provide a wealth of information for a genealogist and help break down those brick walls.

Cemetery Records

- Information typically found: names, birth/death dates, epitaphs
- Where to locate: Cemetery offices, archives and historical societies, online databases

Church Records

- Information typically found: names, dates, family relations, church and community involvement
- Where to locate: Church archives, diocesan offices, online collections

City Directories

- Information typically found: names, residences, occupations, employers, family information, business ownership, churches and religious organizations, clubs and community groups, educational institutions, government and civic information
- Where to locate: local libraries, historical societies, and online archives

County Histories

- Information typically found: biographical information, family histories, local events and traditions, local government and political information, schools and educational institutions, churches and religious organizations, military history
- Where to locate: local libraries, historical societies, and online archives

Court Records

- Information typically found: names, dates, locations, ages, marriages, divorces, probate, guardianship and custody, lawsuits, property disputes, criminal cases, witness testimonies, depositions, financial information, judgments and settlements, public notices, naturalization records, adoption records
- Where to locate: local courthouses, historical societies, state archives, and online databases

Funeral Home Records

- Information typically found: name of deceased, date and place of birth and death, age, service details and arrangements, family information, cemetery details, obituaries and death notices, billing records and service contracts, personal preferences, and memorial contributions
- Where to locate: funeral homes or local archives

Immigration and Naturalization Records

- Information typically found: immigration documents, and naturalization papers
- Where to locate: national archives and online databases

Land and Property Records

- Information typically found: names, residences, economic status, property details and values, family connections and heirs, ownership, and land transactions
- Where to locate: local county courthouses and land registries

Maps

- Information typically found: historical borders and boundaries, location of ancestral homes, migration routes, division of land, names of property owners
- Where to locate: local libraries, historical societies, and online archives

Military Records

- Information typically found: names, residences, occupations, employers, family information, age and date of birth, naturalization status, religion
- Where to locate: national archives and military repositories

Newspapers and Periodicals

- Information typically found: family events, community involvement, historical context, local events, visitors, community news, legal notices, business ads, weather reports, military and war news, personal notices and advertisements
- Where to locate: Local libraries, online databases

Passports and Passenger Lists

- Information typically found: names, ages, genders, occupations, immigration details, port of departure and arrival, ship name, country of origin, citizenship status, family connections, addresses of relatives or close connections, intended destination, employment information, travel information, health and conduct
- Where to locate: national archives, regional and state archives, online databases, local historical societies, digital archives

Probate Records

- Information typically found: family relationships, maiden and married names, inventory of possessions, debts and credits, business interests, legal information, community relationships, date and place of death, and property ownership
- Where to locate: local court records or archives

School Records

- Information typically found: names, birth dates, addresses, photographs, parent or guardian names, emergency contacts, enrollment lists, academic records, extracurricular activity records, graduation information, behavioral and health records, historical and contextual information, community connections, yearbooks, and alumni directories
- Where to locate: school archives and local libraries

Tax Records and Lists

- Information typically found: names, residence, location changes, property ownership, economic status, property details and values, family connections and heirs
- Where to locate: local courthouses and archives

Vital Records

- Information typically found: names, dates, places, family members, information about personal connections
- Where to locate: Local government offices, state archives, online databases

Voter Registration Lists

- Information typically found: names, addresses, age or date of birth, occupation, residence, political engagement, naturalization status, household members, community demographics
- Where to locate: state and county election offices

Exploring non-census records requires a different approach than analyzing census data but, when successful, researchers can locate a wealth of information to add to their genealogies.