

Birth to Death and In-Between: Finding, Using, and Integrating Christian Religious Records in the United States



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“Carefully evaluate the church records you find to make sure you have really found records for your ancestor and not just a “near match”. If one or more of the details do not line up, be careful about accepting the entry as your ancestor. There are guiding principles for deciding how to resolve discrepancies between records that are seemingly close” (“United States Church Records,” *FamilySearch Wiki*, 2024).

Beginning at the Beginning with Church Records

What is a church record?

- **Information** about the church, its events, memberships, changes, and its punishments
- Handwritten on paper, on official forms, or typed; loose, bound, or published

What are some terms I should know?

- A church: A formal gathering of like-minded believers
- A church also describes the building the congregation meets in
- A congregation is the term for a collective group of members who have formally joined the church.
- Baptism is an act conducted by an official of officiant of the church creating membership and spiritually cleansing of sins
- Ecclesiastical refers to the church or its Clergy.
- Clergyman/Pastor/Ministers are titles of those who officiate in the church.

Why do I want them?

- Individual **information** and events
- Family relationship **information** and events
- Friends, associates, and neighbors (FAN club) **information**

Where should I search for these records?

- Local churches
- Local repositories (historical, genealogical, or individual storage)
- University archives
- Church affiliated university archives

- Church headquarters on regional, state, and or national level
- Online indexes
- Online complete records
- Articles

What do I do with them when I find them?

- Obtain copy and digitize if not already
- Cite as complete a citation as possible
- Compare and correlate with other information in timeline

What strategies should I use to identify my ancestor's church?

- Question family and friends for background information: full name, baptism, surname origin
- Access death records: burial and cemetery, obituary, funeral information
- Military service information
- Do a census search
- Use maps to identify proximity of local churches
- Local libraries
- Occupation
- County histories, online search sites for articles and books online
- Consult the *FamilySearch Wiki* (see Resources for Wiki article suggestions)

Wiki Articles for Records of Major Religious Denominations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adventist • Amish • Anabaptist • Anglican • Apostolic Christian • Armenian Catholic • Armenian Evangelical • Armenian Orthodox • Assemblies of God • Bahá'í • Baptist • Buddhist • Catholic Apostolic • Church of the Brethren • Community of Christ • Confucianism[ⓘ] • Congregational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coptic Orthodox • Disciples of Christ • Dutch Reformed • Episcopal • German Reformed • Greek Orthodox • Hinduism • Huguenot • Hutterites • Jehovah's Witnesses[ⓘ] • Jewish • The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) • Lutheran • Maronite Catholic Church • Melkite Greek Catholic • Methodist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mennonite • Moravian • Muslim • Orthodox Church in America (OCA) • Pentecostal • Presbyterian • Roman Catholic • Russian Orthodox • Schwenkfelders • Serbian Orthodox • Sikhism[ⓘ] • Society of Friends (Quakers) • Syriac Orthodox Church • Ukrainian Orthodox • United Church of Christ • United Brethren in Christ • Unitarian/Universalist

"United States Church Records," *FamilySearch Wiki*, *FamilySearch*, 2023

Organizing My Church Records Research

For _____

Check these possibilities	Local	Regional	State	National	Private	Individual	Online	Transcribed	Source Citation
Denomination (Church)									
Librarian									
Genealogical Society									
Historical Society									
Church Affiliated University									
University									
Archive									
Repository									
Cemetery									
Military Records									
Death Documents									
Occupation									
Maps									
Census									

Caveats

- Records are usually created locally when the church is established.
- Records may be kept locally, within regional and/or national ecclesiastical archives,
- Records may include locality and dates of births, marriages, and deaths. Possibly included are dates and localities of migration and names of family members.
- Search by denomination and locality of congregation.
- Remember that a baptismal date is not always akin to a birth date and is not always a child.

Resources

Sites to Search

Ancestral Findings (<https://ancestralfindings.com/>)

ArchiveGrid—OCLC (<https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>)

Booksellers

FamilySearch Digital Library (<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>)

Godfrey Memorial Library (<https://www.godfrey.org/scholar/godfrey-home.html>)

Google Books (<https://books.google.com/>)

HathiTrust Digital Library (<https://www.hathitrust.org/>)

Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>)

JSTOR (<https://www.jstor.org/>)

National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMUC) (<https://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/>)

Periodical Source Index (PERSI) (<https://www.genealogycenter.info/persi/>)

Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/>)

Webinars, Blogs, and Digital Information

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Journal Articles & Books

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Brooks, Walter H. "The Evolution of the Negro Baptist Church," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan. 1922), pp. 11-22; (<https://doi.org/10.2307/2713578> : accessed 2 October 2023).

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