

UTILIZING AMERICAN CHURCH RECORDS IN YOUR RESEARCH

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WHY ARE CHURCH RECORDS IMPORTANT?

In 1787, the Constitution guaranteed the separation of church and state and religious freedoms. As a result, America is a land filled with diverse religions, with a variety of different churches and records. These records are an often underutilized source in American genealogy and can help provide vital information where other records might be lacking. This guide will discuss what kinds of records might be available, how to determine which church your ancestor may have attended, and how to access the records.

TYPES OF CHURCH RECORDS:

RECORD TYPE	INFORMATION RECORDED:
Baptism/Christening (Usually a child, but can also be an adult)	Name of the individual baptized, names of parents, date and place of the event, and often information about birth.
Marriage	Names of the bride and groom, date of marriage. Sometimes includes ages, residences, birth information, or names of parents.
Burial	Name of the deceased, date and place of burial. May also include date and place of death, age or birth date, or names of spouse(s) and parents.
Confirmation Records	Name of the individual confirmed and date of confirmation. For many religions, confirmation takes place at a particular age, which can be used to calculate an approximate birth year.
Membership Records	Name, date and location of the membership list.
Family Bibles	Family genealogies and histories.

*Other records may include church censuses, church histories, financial records or Sunday School lists.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH CHURCH MY ANCESTOR ATTENDED?

- Family tradition
- Obituaries
- Cemeteries – were they buried in a church cemetery?
- Ethnicity or origin
 - Discovering your ancestor's country of origin can help provide a clue as to what religion they may have affiliate with. See the chart below:

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:	CHURCH LIKELY ATTENDED IN THE U.S.
England	Episcopal
France	Catholic or Lutheran (if French Huguenot)
Germany	Catholic or Lutheran
Greece	Greek Orthodox
Ireland	Catholic
Latin American Countries	Catholic
Nordic Countries	Lutheran
Scotland	Protestant
Spain	Catholic
Russia and Eastern Europe	Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish or Lutheran

- County histories
 - Locate county histories by using: *FamilySearch Wiki*, *FamilySearch Catalog*, [Archives.org](https://www.archives.org), county historical and genealogical societies, *Google*, *Google Books*.
- Use maps to locate nearby churches
 - The following map collections may be useful: *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*, *David Rumsey Map Collection*.

ACCESSING CHURCH RECORDS:

Because church records were kept individually by church, it can often be difficult to locate church records. The following are some resources that may be useful in your research.

Title	Link or access information	Description
Southern Historical Collection	https://library.unc.edu/wilson/shc	Resource for manuscript collections in the Southern United States.
Druin Collection	https://www.ancestry.com/search/collection/s/drouinus/	Indexed Catholic Records for states including AL, AK, IL, IN, LA, ME, MA, MO, MI, NY, PA.
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)	https://www.ancestry.com/search/collection/s/elcabmd/	Records from more than 2,000 ELCA congregations.
Swedish American Church Records	https://www.ancestry.com/search/collection/s/swedishamericancovenant/	Records from select Evangelical Covenant churches in America.
Presbyterian Church Records	https://www.ancestry.com/search/collection/s/presbyteriansociety/	Presbyterian records
Catholic Heritage Archive	https://www.findmypast.com/catholicrecords	Online collection of Roman Catholic Records.
Jewish Records	http://www.ajhs.org/family-history https://www.jewishgen.org	Excellent Jewish research websites.
The Archives of the Episcopal Church	https://www.episcopalarchives.org	Digital archives are available.
Methodist	https://www.drew.edu/library/special-collections-archives/umahc/	Official archival repository for the United Methodist Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Records_of_The_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints	Special Collections at FHL; restrictions may apply.
German Immigrants in American Church Records	Minert, Roger P. <i>German Immigrants in American Church Records</i> . Available at the FHL, BYU FHL or available for purchase online.	Indexed church records for German immigrants. Several volumes, divided by location.

- Family History Library
 - The Family History Library has microfilmed and/or digitized many church records. Search using your locality and look for "Church records."
- Church Archives or Headquarters
 - Your ancestor's church may have a central office or archive. Search the web.
- Contact the church your ancestor attended
 - The records may still be stored at the church or local church leadership might be able to direct you to where their church records are now stored.
- Genealogical and Historical Societies
 - Many genealogical and historical societies have preserved church records. Search the web for a society in your locality.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE SEE:

"United States Church Records," *FamilySearch Wiki*, <http://familysearch.org/wiki>.

"U.S. Church Records Class Handout," *FamilySearch Wiki*, <http://familysearch.org/wiki>.

Sunny Jane Morton, "Genealogy Workbook: Church Records," *Family Tree Magazine*, <http://familytreemagazine.com>.

***Links current as of June 2019.**