

## NORWEGIAN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH Major Sources

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### BACKGROUND FOR RESEARCH

#### Surnames

Surnames are derived from four sources:

- **Patronymic.** Based on the given name of the father, such as Mons Arnesen (son of Arne)
- **Occupation.** Based on the individual's trade, such as Arne Smed (blacksmith)
- **Nickname.** Based on the characteristic of a person, such as Siver Rødskjegg (red beard)
- **Locality.** Based on a person's farm name, such as Guttorm Engelsviken

After about 1850 it was customary in the cities to take a permanent surname. By 1900 many parts of Norway began using an established surname. In some areas the use of patronymic surnames prevailed until the 1923 law requiring people to adopt a permanent surname. At this time many Norwegians chose to take the name of their farm as their surname.

#### Given Names

Until 1900 a certain naming pattern was common in Norway. The pattern was not strictly adhered to, but the pattern can be helpful in researching Norwegian families. The pattern is as follows:

- First male child named for the paternal grandfather.
- Second male child named for the maternal grandfather.
- First female child named for the maternal grandmother.
- Second female child named for the paternal grandmother.
- Additional children were often named for the great-grandparents.
- If a person died and the surviving spouse remarried, the first child of the same sex as the decedent was given that name.

### CHURCH RECORDS

The Evangelical Lutheran Church became the state church after the Reformation in 1536, becoming an arm of the national government. The church keeps vital records for the government. In April 1668 a resolution was adopted at a Congress of Deans to keep parish records, but it wasn't until 1688 that the keeping of parish registers was required by law. The earliest existing parish record dates from 1623, but the state church records are not available in most areas until about 1700.

Prior to 1814 there is no uniform system of keeping parish registers. A uniform system was introduced in December 1812, but the standard form was not begun until the winter of 1814. This form was replaced in 1820 with a new one and another in 1870. For fear over possible destruction of church books the Ordinance of 1812 required that duplicate registers be kept in a different place from the original registers.

#### Information Found in Church Records

**Baptisms (*døpte*):** A child was usually christened shortly after birth. The records usually give the child's name, the name(s) of parent(s) and residence, whether the child is legitimate or illegitimate, names of godparents and witnesses, and the christening date. The birth date of the child may also be given as well as the father's occupation. Stillbirths are usually recorded along with live births.

**Marriages (*viede*):** These records give the date of marriage and the names of the bride and groom. Often the record also states whether the bride and groom were single or widowed and gives the names of sponsors. In the earlier records the date of betrothal is often given. After 1814 the records include additional information, such as the ages

of the bride and groom, places of residence, occupations, and after 1830 the places of birth for the bride and groom along with their fathers' names. Marriages usually took place in the home-parish of the bride and the couples usually were in their 20s when they married.

**Burials (*begravede*):** Burials were recorded in the parish where the individual was buried. Burials usually took place 1 to 2 weeks after the person's death. The burial records give the name of the deceased and date and place of burial. After 1814, the deceased's age, place of residence and occupation are listed. For children, the child's father is most often listed. Stillbirths are generally recorded in burial records.

**Confirmations (*konfirmasjon*):** In 1736 the Lutheran church required that youth be instructed in catechism and pass a test before taking first communion. The test and first communion were called confirmation. No one could marry unless they had been confirmed. The confirmation usually took place when the person was anywhere from 14 to 20 years old. Before 1814, the age and place of residence was recorded. After 1814 the name of the head of household where the young person resided, the age or baptism date, and the place of residence and birth date are usually recorded. From the 1830s parents' names are also listed.

## **CENSUS RECORDS**

Censuses have been taken by the Norwegian government and ecclesiastical authorities to determine population and for taxation. These records detail information about familial relationships, age, year of birth, property descriptions, and birthplace, depending on the time period.

### **Census Records, 1664 to the Present**

The first census in Norway was taken between 1664 and 1666. The next census was taken in 1701. The next census was not taken until 1801. Another was taken in 1815 and every ten years after through 1875. Beginning in 1890, a census was taken every ten years.

The following information is found in the census records:

**1666 to 1666.** Two censuses were taken—one clerical and one civil. They usually only list the names and ages of the household head and all male family members over age 12. They cover only the rural areas. Missing for some parts of the country.

**1701.** This census lists all male members of the family by name and age. Covers the rural areas only. Missing for some parts of the country.

**Middle-1700s.** A clerical census was taken called a *sjeleregister* (register of souls). This census lists all members of the family and anyone living in the household. Most of these records have been lost but exist for some areas. Rogaland is the only county where the complete census survives. Some parish registers contain the lists of souls.

**1801.** All family members are listed in this census along with persons residing in the household, along with their relationships, ages and occupations.

**1815 to 1860.** Censuses were taken on a regular basis during these years but were mainly for statistical purposes. Those that have more than statistics have been microfilmed and are available at the Family History Library.

**1865.** In addition to the information given in the 1801 census, these census records provide the place of birth and information about the farm.

**1870.** This census covers only the cities and seaports.

**1875.** Contains information like the 1865 Census.

**1885.** Only for the cities and seaports.

**1891.** Covers the entire country.

**1900.** All inhabitants were registered.

**1910.** This census added the full birth date for each person in the household.

**Later censuses.** Censuses after 1910 are currently unavailable. Norwegian law restricts access for 100 years.

**Census Indexes.** Many of the census records have been indexed on Digitalarkivet, FamilySearch, MyHeritage and The Norwegian Historical Data Centre.

## **EMIGRATION**

The following emigration/immigration records are available at the Family History Library, many of which have been digitized:

1. Emigrantprotokollane for Bergen, 1874-1924 (microfiche).
2. Emigrantprotokoller for Ålesund, Møre og Romsdal, 1852-1923 (microfilm).
3. Emigrantprotokoller for Trondheim, Sør-Trøndelag, 1867-1926 (microfilm).
4. Emigrantprotokoller for Kristiania (Oslo), 1867-1966 (microfilm).
5. Emigrantprotokoller for Kristiansand, Vest-Agder, 1873-1927 (microfilm).
6. Emigrantprotokoller for Kristiansund, Møre og Romsdal, 1882-1959 (microfilm).
7. Emigrantprotokoller for Larvik, Vestfold, 1887-1970 (microfilm).
8. Emigrantprotokoller for Sandefjord, Vestfold, 1904-1921 (microfilm).
9. Emigration Records, Scandinavian Mission (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, 1852-1920 (microfilm).

## **PROBATE RECORDS**

Probate records are a type of court record listing the distribution of a person's estate upon his/her death. These records may include the date of death, names of heirs and guardians, relationships, residences, an inventory of the estate, names of probate officials and witnesses.

### **Probate process:**

Before 1687 probate records were usually part of the general court records. After 1687 probate records were separated from the other court records and handled by a probate judge.

The probate process began when the authorities were notified of a person's death. The authorities then held a registration of the estate at the deceased's residence. If the decedent was a parent, the surviving spouse and all children still at home were required to be present. Heirs residing outside the parish were given a certain time to present themselves to the court, depending on how far they had to travel. If a widow was pregnant when her husband died, she had the right to keep possession of the estate until the birth of the child. All guardians had to be present when the estate was settled.

In 1687, laws for dividing property were established based on previous customs. The surviving spouse received half of the estate. The children divided the other half, each of the sons receiving twice as much as the daughters. The law provided that guardians were to be appointed for minors (under age 25) as well as for a widow. The law required that the children's closest male relatives were to be appointed guardians—the relatives of the father first, then the relatives of the mother. If no relatives were available, the court appointed the guardians.

### **Availability of probate records:**

Most Norwegian probate records have been microfilmed and are available at the Family History Library. Digitized probate records are also available on Digitalarkivet. Many of the probate records have been indexed in the probate books themselves and special indexes that have been prepared. These indexes may be indexed by given name, surname, or the name of the farm on which the person died.

## **LOCAL HISTORIES**

The Family History Library has many local histories compiled for Norwegian parishes. The histories are called *bygdebøker*, often referred to as “Farm Histories”. These books contain statistical information about the parish and genealogical information about the families who resided on each farm for generations. These histories should be consulted for information on your families, which can shorten your research time. However, it is important that original records be consulted when researching your family as much of the information given in the histories will be in abbreviated form and it is not unusual to find clerical errors in these publications.

## **LAND RECORDS**

Norwegian land records generally start in the 1700s. They often contain information regarding real estate conveyances, mortgages, contracts, agreements, deeds, land leases, and auctions. Oftentimes these records will provide information about a family, such as a spouse’s name, heirs and other relatives.

For the period before 1700 you may need to search court records which contain property information. The records before 1865 (and some later) are available at the Family History Library. Many land records are available on Digitalarkivet.

## **MILITARY RECORDS**

Norwegian military records include the following:

- Muster Rolls
- Personnel Files
- Regimental Account Books
- Officer Lists
- Naval Records

To use these records, you need to know the unit your person served in.

### **Availability of military records:**

The Family History Library has most available military records 1643-1909.

## **ONLINE RECORDS**

Following are some major sources of Norwegian records online:

### **Vital Records**

- Digitalarkivet—digital images of Norwegian church records <http://arkivverket.no/>
- Kirkebøker—indexed parish registers <http://slektshistorielaget.no/>
- Registeringssentral for Historiske data—indexed parish records for some areas of Norway <http://rhd.uit.no/>
- Family Search—Norway Burials, 1666-1927; Norway Baptisms 1634-1927; Norway Marriages 1660-1926

### **Censuses**

- Digitalarkivet—searchable index of Norwegian national censuses and some digital images <http://arkivverket.no/>
- FamilySearch—1875 Norwegian Census
- MyHeritage
- Registeringssentral for Historiske data—searchable index of Norwegian census records <http://rhd.uit.no/>

### **Court Records**

Digitalarkivet—digital images of court records <http://arkivverket.no/>

**Probate Records**

Digitalarkivet—indexes and digital images of Norwegian probate records <http://arkivverket.no/>

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