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## Getting the Most from Danish Church Records

### Historical Background

- In 1536, King Christian III confiscated the property of the Roman Catholic Church within his realm. Then he made the Evangelical Lutheran Church the state church.
- In 1665 King Frederick III created an absolute monarchy. He passed a law that all his subjects had to belong to the state church.
- Since 1849, when King Frederick VII assumed the throne, freedom of religion has existed in Denmark.
- The state church is divided into *stifte* (diocese), *provsti* (deanery), *sogn* (parish).

### Parish Records

- Oldest known Danish parish record was begun by the minister of Nakskov City. Only extracts exist.
- Hjørtkjær Parish has the earliest existing parish record dating from 1573.
- No specific form existed for the early records. Some ministers recorded all ordinances chronologically on the same page. Other ministers had separate pages for each type of ordinance.
- Commonly, several of the smaller parishes had the same minister. Some parishes had separate books for each parish, others were recorded in different parts of the same book.
- On December 11, 1812, by royal command, a printed form was to be used in each parish.
- This form contained separate parts for each ordinance.
- Two exact copies were to be kept: the minister's copy (*hovedministerialbog*), which was the main church book, and the parish clerk's copy (*kontraministerialbog*)—the counter church book. It is wise to consult both when available as one may contain more information than the other. Also, if pages are missing in one book, they may exist in the other.

### Birth and Christening Records Before 1814

- Child's name.
- Generally, only the christening date is given, but sometimes the birth date is given.
- Child was usually christened in the church on a Sunday or a holiday.
- Dates often listed as feast days, which must be converted into the modern calendar.
- The father's name and occupation are given. Most often the surname of the father is a patronymic but may be listed as a locality name or occupation.
- Many of the early records do not list the name of the mother. The witnesses to the christening are listed. They are usually relatives, whose names and residences can provide clues to extend the ancestral lines. Each child is carried to the baptismal font by a godmother (may be a grandmother or an aunt). The other witnesses may be brothers and sisters of the parents. In early records the christenings of illegitimate children are often in a separate list. Sometimes they are combined with absolutions.

## **Introductions**

- After each birth, the mother had to be received and introduced in the church. Sometimes the introduction occurred the same date as the christening, otherwise shortly after.
- Most parish registers contain these lists.
- Sometimes these records list the name of the mother (not always listed in the actual christening entry), but always list the father's name.
- Valuable when the child died before being christened and is not listed in the christening records.
- This ordinance was abandoned in 1754, but in practice they continued in the records long after.

## **Confirmation Records**

- The custom of confirmation was adopted in Denmark in 1736.
- Children are usually confirmed between the ages 14 to 19.
- The records will often list the name of each child, his or her age, and the name of the father along with his residence.
- Earliest records may only list the name of the child.
- Communion lists may also contain early confirmations (when the child received communion for the first time).

## **Absolutions**

- Record of persons to whom absolution was given.
- List the name of the offender.
- Description of the offense (most often adultery).
- The mother of an illegitimate child and the alleged (or acknowledged) father both had to receive a public remission.
- When the name of the father is not given in an illegitimate child's christening, it can be found in this record.
- Date absolution is given.

## **Betrothal Records**

- Usually contain the full name of the bride and groom, residences, marital status and occupations.
- Date of engagement.
- Names of sponsors, who are usually close relatives of the couple.
- In most cases the records will state if the bride or groom has been widowed.
- Usually discontinued in 1799.
- Commonly recorded along with the marriage records.

## **Marriage Records Before 1814**

- Usually contain the full name of the bride and groom, marital status, and residence.
- May provide the date(s) of engagement.
- Contain date of marriage.

- Provide names of the sponsors (witnesses), who are often close relatives of the bride and groom.
- Usually state if the bride or groom is a widow or widower.
- A royal license is required to marry without banns.

### **Death and Burial Records Before 1814**

- Most entries list the name of the deceased.
- Usually list the last residence of the deceased.
- Gives the date of the burial (often also the date of death).
- Often give the age of the deceased.
- Women are often listed with the name of their husband, but sometimes the entry will not list the wife's name.

### **Vaccinations**

- Records of children being vaccinated for smallpox. In the early 1800s Denmark there was a smallpox epidemic in Denmark. Vaccinations became law on March 4, 1810. Unless a person had natural immunity, vaccination was mandatory.
- Name of child is given.
- Sometimes gives age.
- Residence of the child is usually given.
- Father's name is usually given.
- Name of the doctor is usually listed.
- Generally, the vaccination date was recorded in the parish register with the person's confirmation and/or christening.
- The date of vaccination can be used to establish correct identity.

### **Birth and Christening Records After 1814**

- Birth and christening dates are listed.
- The child's given name is listed. Later records also list the surname.
- Parents' names are listed.
- Names of witnesses are given.
- Residences and occupations are listed.

### **Confirmation Records After 1814**

- List the names of the person confirmed.
- List the name, residence and occupation of the father. Most often the name of the mother is also listed.
- The age and/or the date of birth or christening will be listed.
- Sometimes the place of birth will also be listed, especially if born outside the parish where the confirmation took place.
- The person's character and date of vaccination are required.
- The date of the confirmation will be listed.

### **Marriage Records After 1814**

- List the full names of the bride and groom, their residences and most often their ages. Sometimes places of birth are listed.

- The marital statuses of the bride and groom are generally given.
- If a widower or widow, often how many previous marriages they have had.
- Sometimes names of fathers are given.
- The names of two sponsors (witnesses) will be given. These are usually close relatives.
- The occupations and residences of the sponsors (witnesses) are usually given.

### **Incoming Lists (Arrivals) Post-1814**

- Begin in 1814 and continue until about 1875.
- Generally, not kept current until approximately 1830. Many of the cities and large rural parishes didn't keep them as they involved too much work.
- Lists of persons moving into the parish. Usually record the name of the person, his or her age, the name of the parish of previous residence and the place in the new parish to which the individual is moving.

### **Outgoing Lists (Removal Lists) Post-1814**

- Give the same information as the incoming lists, but the parish to which the person is moving is given instead of the parish from which the individual came.
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### **Death Records After 1814**

- Contain both the death and burial dates.
- Full name, occupation, last residence and age are given.
- If the deceased is a child, the name, occupation and residence of the father will be given.
- If the deceased is a married woman, the name occupation and residence of the husband will be given. If a widow, often the same information will be recorded.
- Most stillbirths after 1814 are listed among the regular birth but may be kept in a separate section.

### **Registers (Indexes)**

- Intended to be a general index of every person recorded in the church records, referencing the page where each event is recorded.
- Very few parishes kept complete indexes.

### **Websites**

- Arkivalieronline <https://www.sa.dk>
- FamilySearch [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- Dansk Demografisk Database <https://www.ddd.dda.dk/kiip/findkirkebog.asp>
- MyHeritage <https://www.myheritage.com>
- Danish Family Search <https://danishfamilysearch.com>