



U.S. Records Before 1850

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Our ancestors who lived before 1850 left records that can help us learn about them. We will discuss several records, how they differ from later records, and how to effectively find and use them.

A very important resource is the FamilySearch Wiki at <https://familysearch.org/wiki> which gives information on the best records to use, where to find them, when records start, gaps in records, and links to great websites, etc.

For each state in the Wiki, check Online Records and the following types of records:

Major Types of Records Before 1850

Censuses, 1790-1840, useful for finding the head of family, though minimal information about other members of the family. See FamilySearch Wiki article, United States Census for more information.

Tax Records were kept by town, county, state, and federal governments. They show location and financial status. Often used as census substitutes. Check all applicable years. May indicate when a man reached adulthood, moved, or died.

Vital Records were not kept by states before 1850. Marriages were usually kept by counties, starting when a county was made. Towns may have kept vital records, especially in New England.

Church Records include baptisms, marriages, and burials. Baptisms often occurred soon after a child was born, so they can be used in place of birth records. Burials usually occurred soon after a person died, so they can be used in place of death records. However, sometimes if the ground was frozen, bodies were not buried right away. Member lists, admissions, and dismissions can also be helpful.

Cemetery Records include gravestone and sexton records. Many gravestone information may be found in books and online. Some of the online sites are Find a Grave, Billion Graves, USGenWeb Tombstone Transcription Project, Interment.net, and Dead Fred.

Land Records often show when a man moved into or left an area. Sometimes they tell where the man came from or where he was going. When land was sold, the wife's name was usually included on the deed. In New England, births, marriages, and deaths were often included in the land records books. In the South, sales of slaves were often recorded in land records.

Town Records include town meetings, appointments of town officers, land records, and records of families with birth, marriage, and death dates, though places were rarely given. Places may be deduced by comparing with land records.

Probate Records include wills, inventories, distributions, guardianships of children, and letters of administration. Information about slaves may be found in probate records.

Court Records include criminal and civil court proceedings so may have guardianships, divorces, name changes, probate records, trials, etc.

Passenger Lists are less available before 1820 when the federal government required that passenger lists be given to the government. Before that time, if a captain created a passenger list, it could have ended up anywhere. The best source for pre-1820 published passenger lists is P. William Filby's *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, available on Ancestry.com. After 1820, many of the passenger lists were filmed and are at the Family History Library.

Naturalization Records, pre-1906, are usually found at county courthouses, but city, state, and federal courts also granted citizenship. New England has: *Index to New England Naturalization Petitions, 1791-1906* (117 FHL films starting with 1429671) and digitized in Historical Records.

Military Records, may give age, place of residence, service information, death date and place, spouse, minor children, etc.

If ancestor was born between	Check records of	War Years
1562 and 1760	Colonial Wars	1622 to 1773
1700 and 1770	Revolutionary War	1775 to 1783
1742 and 1800	War of 1812	1812 to 1815
1781 and 1830	Mexican War	1846 to 1848
1800 and 1846	Civil War	1861 to 1865
1833 and 1883	Spanish American War	1898
1834 and 1887	Philippine Insurrection	1899 to 1902

Web sites

Access Genealogy www.accessgenealogy.com free but may link to subscription (\$) sites. especially great for American Indian research.

Ancestry.com \$ www.ancestry.com a leading website for databases.

Family Search.org www.familysearch.org another major website. Includes instruction and reference help.

Fold3.com \$ www.fold3.com part of Ancestry.com, it is especially great for military records but also has city directories, naturalization records, Native American collections, newspaper collections, etc. A major project is Civil War and War of 1812 records.

German Roots <http://germanroots.com> is useful for anyone with ancestors in the U.S. Has links to online death records and indexes, passenger lists, birth and marriage indexes, naturalization records and indexes, plus more.

Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/index.html> American Memory with historic maps and documents; Chronicing America with historic newspapers; 1 million images (about half the library's holdings); and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC).

New England Historic Genealogical Society \$ <http://www.americanancestors.org/> is a must for anyone with New England ancestry, but it also has a great deal of information for other eastern states. Contains family histories, bible, probate, town, and vital records, and more.

Olive Tree Genealogy <http://www.olivetreegenealogy.com/sitemap.shtml>

ProGenealogists: <http://progenealogists.com/genealogysleuthb.htm> created by professional genealogists with links, instruction, data, and reference aids. Free but may link to pay sites.

USGenWeb <http://www.usgenweb.org/states/index.shtml> Access to state and county records that have been put online. They are as good as the website administrator makes them.

Find A Grave <http://www.findagrave.com> has approximately 145 million grave records and is growing fast. You can search by name and/or cemetery.

Department of Veterans Affairs, Nationwide Gravesite Locator <http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov> has a search for burial locations of veterans and their family members in VA National Cemeteries, state veterans cemeteries, various other military and Department of Interior cemeteries, and for veterans buried in private cemeteries when the grave is marked with a government grave marker.

U.S. Societies

Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) www.dar.org

Descendants of Mexican War Veterans www.dmwv.org

Holland Society of New York www.hollandsociety.org

Mayflower Descendants www.themayflowersociety.org

Sons of the American Revolution www.sar.org

In the Wiki for each state, also check **Societies** and **Archives and Libraries**. Societies, archives and libraries often have records and information that may not be found anywhere else.

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