United States Church and Cemetery Records

Joni L. Kesler, Research Specialist, AG®
FamilySearch
keslerjl@familysearch.org

This class is designed to provide individuals with a basic understanding of U.S. Church Records, including the various types of records, what is contained in them, how to find an ancestor’s religious denomination, and locating the records.

BASIC TYPES OF CHURCH RECORDS

- Christenings/Baptisms
- Marriages
- Burials
- Confirmations
- Communion
- Admissions and removals
- Financial records
- Sunday School lists
- Church censuses
- Church related newsletters

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR ANCESTORS DENOMINATION

- Which church do descendants belong to?
- What is the national origin of the ancestor?
- Was there only one church in town when the ancestor lived there?
- Do family records give any clues?
  - Marriage records
  - Obituaries
  - Family histories
  - Cemeteries
  - Family Bibles
Do funeral home, cemetery, or sexton records give additional clues? If you find the name of the pastor who performed the marriage or funeral, check local histories or city directories to determine the denomination of the pastor. Then check the records for that church.

**History of United States Denominations**

**Baptist**
- Started in Rhode Island in the colonial era
- Strongest in the Mid-Atlantic states and the Southern states
- Largest Protestant denomination by the early 1800s until about 1820
- Again became largest after 1920

**Methodist**
- By 1850, about one-third of American Protestants were Methodists
- From 1820 to 1920, Methodism was the largest Protestant denomination

**Roman Catholic**
- Began in the following states:
  - Florida – 1565
  - Southwest – 1598
  - Maryland – by 1649
  - Louisiana – early 1700s
  - Large cities

**Congregational Church (Puritans, Separatists, Disciples of Christ, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Church)**
- Started in Massachusetts in 1620 with the Puritans
- Many groups, such as Puritans, Separatists, and Independents
- New England pre-1850 was mostly Congregational, except Rhode Island
- State church of Connecticut until 1818
- Several groups later united and became one of these churches:
  - Disciples of Christ
  - Congregational Christian Churches
  - United Church of Christ
  - Unitarian Universalist Association

**Anglican Church**
- Began in Virginia
- Was strong in colonial times, especially in the Southern states
- A family of autonomous churches, also known as:
  - Church of England
  - Church of Scotland
  - Church of Wales
  - Church of Ireland
  - Episcopal
  - Protestant Episcopal Church

**Presbyterian**
- Started in the 1600s
  - Brought to U.S. by immigrants from Scotland and Northern Ireland
• Strongest in:
  • New York
  • Pennsylvania
  • New Jersey
  • Delaware
  • Southern states

**Society of Friends/Quakers**
• Started in the late 1600s
• Brought to U.S. by immigrants from England, Wales, and Germany
• Strongest in:
  • Pennsylvania near Philadelphia
  • New England
  • Mid-Atlantic states
  • Southern states, especially North Carolina

After the Revolution, many left the Southern states and went to:
• Ohio
• Indiana
• Illinois

**Lutheran**
• In the U.S., many came to Pennsylvania in the 1700s
• Brought by immigrants from
  • Germany
  • Scandinavia
  • Especially Sweden to the upper Midwest

**German Pietists**
• Mennonites (1683)
• Dunkards (1719)
• Brethren (1723)
• Amish (early 1700s)
• In Pennsylvania by the 1700s

**Dutch Reformed**
• In the U.S., started in New York City area by the mid-1600s
• Soon in New Jersey
• Mainly immigrants from The Netherlands

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)**
• Started in 1830 in New York
• Utah since 1847 has been heavily LDS
• By 1850, most were in Utah
• By 1900, strong in most western states

**Jews (a religion but not a church)**
• Arrived in the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s
• From eastern Europe, especially Austria and Russia
• Settled mainly in large cities

**Religions of Ethnic Groups**
• English  
  Church of England  
  (Anglican)  
  (Protestant Episcopal)

• Irish  
  Catholic  
  Church of Ireland (northern)  
  (Anglican)

• Scots  
  Presbyterian (Church of Scotland)  
  Episcopal (Anglican)

• Welsh  
  Church in Wales (Church of England)  
  (Anglican) (Episcopal) (Established)

• French  
  Catholic  
  Protestants - Huguenot

• German  
  Lutheran (northern)  
  Catholic (southern)  
  Reformed

• Dutch  
  Dutch Reformed

• Greek  
  Greek Orthodox (Eastern Orthodox)

• Mexican & Latin American  
  Catholic

• Russian  
  Russian Orthodox

• Scandinavian  
  Lutheran

• Swiss  
  Lutheran (north)  
  Catholic (south)  
  Reformed

By region of origin

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<tr>
<th>Northern Europe - Lutheran</th>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Poland</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Germany (northern)</td>
<td>Switzerland (northern)</td>
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<th>Southern Europe - Catholic</th>
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<td>France</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany (southern)</td>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
<td>Switzerland (southern)</td>
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<th>Eastern Europe - Eastern Orthodox or Catholic</th>
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<td>Country</td>
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<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
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Major Religions in Various Areas of the United States

- New England: Congregational
- Southern States: Baptist, Protestant Episcopal, Anglican
- Maryland & Louisiana: Catholic
- Southwest: Catholic
- Pennsylvania: Catholic, Quaker, Mennonite, Amish, Lutheran
- New York: Dutch Reformed, Catholic
- Utah: LDS
- Upper Midwest: Lutheran
- Alaska: Russian Orthodox

**LOCATING THE RECORDS**

Check the church of attendance
- Telephone directories
- Search online
  - Church mergers
- Yearbook or annual of present denomination
- Online search of church or denomination

Church ceased to exist
- Utilize all available local and denominational information
- Church clerk
- Denominational archives, libraries, historical societies
  - Check for a central archive or library
    FamilySearch Catalog
- Do a place search for either the town or county and then click on church records or church record indexes. Also go to Records, choose the United States or any state and then in the Filter by Collection Name box, enter the word Church.

  PERSI (Periodical Source Index) available at the following places:
  Findmypast available free at the FHL and many family history centers.

- Look for church records under the state and/or for local or regional periodicals
  http://search.findmypast.com/search-world-Records/periodical-source-index

- www.heritagequestonline.com available at many local public libraries

**RESOURCES ONLINE**

FamilySearch Wiki

- Search by name of religion
  https://wiki.familysearch.org

Search Engines

- Search by town, county, state and the name of the church or minister
  www.google.com
  www.yahoo.com
  www.bing.com

  Cyndis List www.cyndislist.com

- Click on “R” for Religion and Churches or choose “U” for United States, then click on a state and then Religion & Churches.

**SOURCES**

- *International Genealogical Index*
- Encyclopedias
- Histories of city/town/county
- *Source Book and Bibliographical Guide for American Church History*, 1921. (US/Can 973 K2ms)
- *A Survey of American Church Records*, 1978 (US/Can 973 K2k)
- *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, annual, (US/Can 970 K2wh)

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