



The Real Life of Vital Records

Secrets to Finding Them Today

What to know about any state

- Date of earliest settlement by Europeans and establishments/divisions of towns
- What early religious or civil traditions impacted vital records? Were any churches keeping the equivalent of vital records?
- What guides exist for vital records in that state?
- Early state laws probably established vital records collection. Were the records collected within each town? To what extent were those laws followed?
- How were the local (town) copies stored, and how are they accessible today? Were the books imaged or microfilmed at some point, and how can those be accessed today? Can the original index pages be accessed online in the same microfilm?
- Were early town records abstracted, transcribed, or indexed in the last 150 years? How can that be accessed? What additional materials, besides the town vital records, might have been included in those volumes – for instance, were any church records included?
- What additional records from the town will be helpful for vital events, such as cemetery transcriptions, military lists, state census, town records, town histories? Was there a local newspaper, and how can that be accessed?
- What was the date of state-mandated vital record collection, including the requirement that local governments report each record to the state on a regular schedule?
- Where are the state copies stored, and how are they accessible today? Is there special indexing, and how is that available? Were they imaged or microfilmed at some point, and can that be accessed today? Has more than one version of each record survived?
- Can records be requested from the state or the town? Do prices differ? If copies are ordered, are they newly-typed copies (like certificates)? Is there any way to obtain a photographic image of the record as it appears on the page? What are the rules for photography if visiting in person?
- What current state laws impact access to vital records? Will a genealogical membership card from an approved organization help for gaining access?
- Over the years, what significant vital records loss has occurred due to fire, flood, or other causes?

For any town, drill down by place in FamilySearch.org and explore record sets.



Resources

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- Anderson, Robert Charles. *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620-1633* (3 vol.) and *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England, 1634-1635* (7 vol.). Boston, NEHGS, 1995-2011.

 - Arnold, James N. *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, (21 vol. plus a volume for Rehoboth, Mass). See these volumes and others at:
<https://onerhodeislandfamily.com/free-rhode-island-resources/>

 - Alden G. Beaman. *Rhode Island Vital Records, New Series*, v 3-12 cover Newport, Washington and portions of Kent counties by extrapolating certain vital records from other “records” such as cemeteries and probate.

 - Boumenot, Diane and Maureen A. Taylor. *Research in the States: Research in Rhode Island*. Falls Church, VA: National Genealogical Society: 2018.

 - *FamilySearch Wiki* for any state: <https://www.familysearch.org/wiki>

 - Friday, Paul. *Vital Record Manuscripts in the State Historical Societies in New England*. Privately Printed, 2016.

 - Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy, 4th edition*, Chapter 12, “Vital Records.” Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2017.

 - Grundset, Eric G. *Connecticut in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians*. The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 2016.

 - Grundset, Eric G. *Massachusetts and Maine in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians*. The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 2015.

 - Grundset, Eric G. *Rhode Island in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians*. The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 2014.

 - Lambert, David Allen. *Research in the States: Research in Massachusetts*. Falls Church, VA: National Genealogical Society: 2018.

 - Leclerc, Michael J. *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 5th Edition. Boston: NEHGS, 2012.

 - MacLachlan, Linda. *Finding Early Connecticut Vital Records: The Barbour Index and Beyond*. Clearfield Press/Genealogical Publishing, 2019.

 - Torrey, Clarence A. *New England Marriages Prior to 1700*, vol. 1 – 3. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011.

 - White, Lorraine Cook. *The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Vital Records*. Baltimore: Genealogical Pub., 1994-2002.
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Check any state or local genealogy journal for transcriptions of small vital records sets. AmericanAncestors.org has indexing to a wide set of journals.