

## Genealogy - 25 Alternate Sources for Death Records

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### 25 Alternative Sources for Death Records

Death certificates aren't the only place to find details about an ancestor's death. The sources below can provide dates, places, and even causes of death, as well as important clues leading to new sources of information.

1) Mortality Schedules. Between 1850 and 1880, federal censuses recorded names of people who had died during the 12 months prior to the census on separate mortality schedules. Ancestry.com has these valuable records for many states and years.

2) Coroner's Records. Coroner's records can often be found in county or state archives. To locate them type "coroner's records" or "medical examiner's records" + the state and county of interest into your favorite search engine. Examples of some Salt Lake City coroner's inquest files can be found on Ancestry.com.

3) City Directories. If your ancestor lived in a city, directories can sometimes help you determine a year of death. When a name that has been listed for several consecutive years suddenly disappears, that person may have passed away. When a man died, his wife might be listed in subsequent years as "widow" or "widow of..." Ancestry.com has thousands of city directories for hundreds of cities and years.

4) Heirlooms. You can often find death dates in or on items found at home. Look for diaries, journals, letters, photographs, jewelry, embroidered items, etc. Many of the millions of family trees at Ancestry.com include photographs of heirlooms like these.

5) Court Records. In the United States, court records began very early, and in other countries, earlier still. Court records can include probate documents that name the decedent, date of death, and heirs. When a child's parent(s) dies, chances are good that guardianship records at the county court will provide death information. Check Red Book: American State, County & Town Sources on the Ancestry.com wiki for information on court records.

6) Cemetery Records. Don't overlook details that can be found on a tombstone or in the records of a cemetery sexton. Millions of cemetery records have been transcribed and indexed by genealogical societies. Find A Grave is a great source for finding cemeteries as well as photographs of millions of graves.

7) Body Transit Records. Health concerns led many cities to mandate recordkeeping for bodies transported through or into the city for burial. These records can sometimes be found at the local, county, or state level.

8) Passenger Lists. Particularly in the age of sail and before there were means to preserve a body, passengers (and crew) who died on board ship were usually buried at sea. Look for notations next to names on the manifest. Also check the end of the manifest, where the captain sometimes noted births and deaths on board.

9) Apprenticeship and Indentured Servant Papers. In the early years of the U.S. and in many European countries, children were often indentured or became apprentices. Ancestry.com has a sampling of these records for London, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and Virginia. In some cases, children were apprenticed or indentured because they had lost one or both parents, a fact the records may mention.

10) Almshouse Records. Many counties required institutions that looked after the poor to keep records, and many of those records include death information for residents who passed away at the institution.

11) Hospital Records. Admittedly, most contemporary hospital records are closed to the public. Still, some collections have ended up in archives and other repositories that you might be able to find by typing the place where your ancestor lived and the phrase "hospital records" into a search engine. You may turn up something like the Kansas State Historical Society's database of burials in the cemetery on the grounds of the Topeka State Hospital.

12) Insurance Records. Insurance records are typically found only at home, so ask around to see if a relative has kept them for members of your family.

13) Military Records. Military records, including many found at Ancestry.com, can contain death information. These include casualty lists and prisoner of war records, among others.

14) Genealogical and Historical Society Records. St. Louis City Death Records 1850-1902 is an example of an extraordinary database at Ancestry.com that was compiled by the St. Louis Genealogical Society. They're one of hundreds of genealogical organizations whose members spend untold hours preserving their city or county's history. Genealogical and historical organizations are good sources for learning about cemeteries in an area and may even have created indexes listing the people buried in them.

15) Mortuary Records (Undertaker's Records). Undertaker's records vary in format and content, but they can all be valuable for determining someone's death date. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has a great collection of undertaker's records, some beginning as early as the 1840s. Check other genealogical, historical, state, county, and local library and archives catalogs for possible holdings.

16) Necrologies. Many ethnic, fraternal and religious organizations annually printed names and death dates and sometimes full-length obituaries for their members.

17) Newspapers and Obituary Collections. The New York, Death Newspaper Extracts, 1801-1890 (Barber Collection) can be invaluable for finding information about New Yorkers and people who died there. There are plenty of similar obituary and newspaper collections, including Historical Newspapers, Birth, Marriage, & Death Announcements, 1851-2003.

18) Pension Records. Pension records often include death dates, particularly when a widow is applying for the pension. Ancestry.com has military pension records from the American Revolutionary War and an index to Civil War pensions among its collections. The Federation of Genealogical Societies is heading up a project to digitize and make millions of pensions from the War of 1812 available online. In addition, the National Archives and Records Administration holds millions of pension records that have not yet been digitized.

19) Periodical Source Index (PERSI). PERSI is the largest and most widely used subject index covering genealogy and local history periodicals written in English and French (Canada). The collection dates from approximately 1800. Staff at the Allen County Public Library have been compiling PERSI for more than a decade, and it currently includes over 1.7 million searchable records and nearly 6,000 different periodicals. You can find PERSI at Ancestry.com.

20) Bible records. Traditionally, pages in family Bibles include spaces for recording death dates and other landmark events. Check with family members to learn whether a family Bible has passed down any of the family lines.

21) Religious Records. Religious records often predate civil registration and often document deaths and burials.

22) Funeral or Memorial Cards. Funeral and memorial cards have been printed since the 1800s and were often distributed to family and friends. Check with relatives to see if any have been passed down in scrapbooks or among family heirlooms.

23) U.S. Homes for National Veterans. Following the Civil War, a network of homes was set up for disabled veterans. If the veteran died in the home, records noted death and burial information and sometimes included an accounting of personal effects and to whom money was disbursed. Records from these homes from 1866 through 1938 are available online at Ancestry.com.

24) 1890 Veterans Schedule. Though the 1890 Census perished in a fire in January 1921 in the basement of the Commerce Building in Washington, D.C., fortunately nearly 75,000 special schedules with the names of Union veterans and widows survived. In

cases where the widow is listed, you may find the place and date of death for the soldier. You can search these records on Ancestry.com.

25) Adoption Records. While most adoption records are closed by law, you can sometimes find information from adoption records by coupling the word "adoption" with the name of the place where your ancestor lived. Some genealogical societies indexed old adoption records before they were sealed from public access.

26) Marriage licenses. Often a widow or widower who remarried had to supply the date of death of the first spouse. I have found several dates that way. I had one where both bride and groom were widowers late in life and their tombstones didn't say they had been married previously as they were buried with the first spouses but the dates of death on the marriage license confirmed these were the same couples.

27) Equity Records. Often states had Equity records that contained information about a decedent in order to finalize some transaction such as an unfinished deed transfer, property outside of estates, etc. These can be used as well. I used this when our Governor Ehrlich wanted to join and couldn't find proof of a link. This was the only document which had it.

28) Depositions. In the early centuries of America, Depositions were taken regarding boundary land disputes, estate settlements, probates, etc. These often mention someone who died and how long ago, such as "twenty years hence". I have used these to confirm approximate years of death. These have been incredibly helpful in the 17th century records where few church records survive.