

Finding Original Records: The Real Game of Hide and Seek

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Whenever possible, a researcher needs to examine the original record. An original record is a document created at or near the time of the event. Using an abstract or an extract of an original may not yield all the information from the original record. With today's technology, many digital images of original records appear online, and it is easier than ever before to find originals. This class will explain the difference between original and derivative records, introduce various repositories for original records, and teach strategies for finding original records.

OBJECTIVES

- Explain original and derivative records and the primary and secondary information they contain.
- Discuss the value of using indexes.
- Demonstrate how to find original records online at FamilySearch and through some of our industry friends.
- Demonstrate how to find original records in Repositories and discuss how to prepare for visiting a repository.
- Practice what we learned by playing "Guess the Original" game.

ORIGINAL VERSUS DERIVATIVE RECORDS

Original records are most reliable and likely to be more free from errors than copies or extracts. Examples include certificates, wills, manuscripts, photographs, parish records, oral records, artifacts, and journals. Microfilm, photographic, and digital copies of original records are often considered original because the copying process is likely error free. Consider these factors as you carefully analyze original records.

Types of Original Records

- Originals
- Duplicate originals
- Clerk's Copies

- Certified copies
- Photocopies
- Scans
- Digital Copies
- Image Copies

Examples of Original Records

- Certificates
- Wills
- Manuscripts
- Photographs
- Parish records
- Artifacts
- Oral records
- Journals
- Microfilm
- Digital copies

A derivative record is derived from an original record. It comes in many forms such as a handwritten or a typed copy, transcription, abstract, extract, or the index of an original or derivative record. All derivative sources are less acceptable because errors could have occurred in their production. Information might have been left out. Examples include indexes, compiled genealogies, public online family trees, registers, ledger books, and other sources created from original records.

Types of derivative records

- Indexes

- Compiled Genealogies
- Public online family trees
- Registers
- Ledger books

Examples of derivatives

- Transcripts
- Translations
- Extracts
- Abstracts
- Nutshells
- Indexes
- Databases
- Reformatted reprints

Primary versus secondary information (facts)

Facts stated in an original or derivative record can be primary or secondary information. It is important to understand that original sources and derivative sources can and will contain both primary and secondary information.

Pieces of primary information are the facts on a record from an eye-witness. Secondary information is second-hand information or information recorded a long time after an event (remembered facts). To understand the difference, let's look at a death certificate. A death certificate contains both primary and secondary information. The blue areas highlight the primary information, and the orange areas highlight the secondary information.

APR 28 1965 REGISTRAR'S NO. 849 UTAH CERTIFICATE OF DEATH \$5 18 STATE FILE NO. 1924

1. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY Salt Lake b. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION Salt Lake City		2. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived - If institution - Residence before admission) a. STATE Utah b. COUNTY Salt Lake	
3. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or print) First: LOUIS Middle: JOSEPH Last: GALOFARO		4. DATE OF DEATH Month: APRIL Day: 12 Year: 1965	
5. SEX male	6. COLOR OR RACE white	7. MARRIED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NEVER MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> WIDOWED <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCED <input type="checkbox"/>	8. DATE OF BIRTH Month: March Day: 13 Year: 1906
9. USUAL OCCUPATION (Last kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) Retired		10. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) Albany, New York	
11. FATHER'S NAME Step-Father-John Coleman		12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? U.S.A.	
13. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Mae Unknown		14. NAME OF SPOUSE Irene Lenihan Galofaro	
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (If yes, give year or date of service) Yes W W 2		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. 528-22-1578	
17. INFORMANT Mrs. Irene Lenihan Galofaro-S.L.C., Ut.		18. CAUSE OF DEATH [Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c).] PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY: IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a) Coronary occlusion DUE TO (b) Generalized arteriosclerosis DUE TO (c) Hypertensive心脏病	
19. INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH		20. WAS AUTOPSY PERFORMED? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
21. ACCIDENT <input type="checkbox"/> SUICIDE <input type="checkbox"/> HOMICIDE <input type="checkbox"/>		22. DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED. (Enter nature of injury in Part I or Part II of item 18.)	
23. TIME OF DEATH Hour: 8:00 P.M.		24. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)	
25. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/> NOT WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/>		26. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION COUNTY STATE	
27. I attended the deceased from [Name] to [Name] and last saw her alive on [Date]		28. Death occurred at [Time] on the date stated above, and to the best of my knowledge, from the causes stated	
29. SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR [Signature]		30. ADDRESS Salt Lake City, Utah	
31. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED [Signature]		32. DATE SIGNED 4-12-65	
33. JUDICIAL CEMETERY (Removal of body) Burial		34. DATE 4/14/1965	
35. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY Redwood Memorial Estates		36. LOCATION (City, town, or county) (State) Salt Lake County, Utah	
37. FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE AND ADDRESS Russon Brothers Mortuary-S.L.C., Utah		38. DATE RECEIVED BY LOCAL REG. 4-13-65	
39. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE [Signature]		40. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE [Signature]	

INDEXES

Indexes are a valuable asset in family history research. They are a type of derivative source created to help lead to derivative and original records. They may be handwritten, typed, or created through computer recognition of typewritten records. They may be the work of one or many people working together. Indexes come in many forms including book volumes, computer databases, and microforms, such as microfilm and microfiche. Some indexes are included with the original source in the front or at the end, and others are far removed from the records they index, possibly not even in the same repository, database, or website.

Indexes should not be used as a source but as a tool to help you determine the correct record for your ancestor or those which are possibly your ancestor. They are a finding aid for the original record.

Yes! I found my ancestor in the index!

Today many indexes offer more than just a name, which may or may not be your ancestor. Many are full of information, so much so that you can determine that the index you found is from a record of your ancestor. Although tempting, don't stop with the index. A good index should have sufficient information to lead you to the original. Find it.

Here are a few reasons why you want to find the original records:

- The original may contain additional information. Even when an index seems robust, you want to discover what else might be on the original.
- Was the record indexed correctly and the handwriting read correctly? You are the judge.
- Clues from the record book itself might be helpful. What is the condition of the original? Are there entries near your family that might hold clues?
- Was the index created from the original or from a derivative source? This is very important to discover in order to determine the reliability of the information.

FINDING ORIGINAL RECORDS ONLINE

Some original records are not, and may never be, online. Many original records have been digitized and, although they may not be name-searchable, the archive may have created a printed index to the collection or another type of finding aid.

FamilySearch

FamilySearch has both indexed and original records housed on the website. There are various ways to search.

FamilySearch Records

- FamilySearch Historical Records are indexed collections, comprising only about twenty percent of the records available on FamilySearch. Because they are indexed, they are name-searchable. Some collections may only be partially indexed, so don't give up if you don't find your ancestor here.

FamilySearch Images

- Explore Historical Images allows you to see brand new images that have not yet been catalogued or indexed. You can browse by place or look items up by DGS number (found in the catalog).

FamilySearch Catalog

The FamilySearch Catalog is where you will find most of the records at FamilySearch. Search by Place, Surname, Title, Author, Subject, Keyword, Call Number, or DGS Number.

Ancestry.com (\$)

Ancestry.com has all indexed records housed on the website. All collections are browsable and allow you to view the original records.

MyHeritage (\$)

MyHeritage has all indexed records housed on the website. All collections are browsable and allow you to view the original records.

NARA Digitized Records

[Microfilm Publications and Original Records Digitized by Our Digitization Partners | National Archives](#)

Several of our digitization partners, including Ancestry.com, Fold3.com, and FamilySearch.org, have digitized microfilm publications and original records from NARA's holdings and made them available on their websites. The digitized list on NARA's website includes microfilm publications and original records that have been either partially or wholly digitized by their partners.

Genealogy Societies

[American Ancestors®](#)

[Daughters of the American Revolution \(dar.org\)](#)

Other Useful Online Sources

The Internet Archive
<https://archive.org/>

Hathitrust Digital Library
<https://www.hathitrust.org/>

Digital newspapers
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/titles/>

www.newspapers.com

www.newspaperarchive.com

FINDING RECORDS AT A REPOSITORY

Archives and Libraries

Some original records are not even digitized and are only available at the archive or library. In these cases, on-site research may be necessary to track down original documents.

Archives exist to gather, preserve, and make historic materials available. Items often include manuscripts, photographs, letters, books, diaries, journals, maps and physical

objects and artifacts. These records can be published or unpublished and come in many types of formats.

Types of archives

- Government: materials relating to government and the records they create including federal, national, state, county, city, town, etc.
- Religious: archives relating to the traditions or institutions of a faith, denomination, or individual place of worship.
- College and University: may accept and preserve materials pertaining to genealogy of a group or groups of people. Many hold special collections of original records for individuals, families, institutions, corporations and governments.
- Historical Society: dedicated to preserving, collecting, researching, and interpreting historical information and artifacts. Usually concentrated on a specific geographic region.
- Genealogical Society: dedicated to preserving, collecting, and assisting others in finding genealogical information. Often concentrated on a specific area, ethnicity, or culture.
- Corporate: manage and preserve records of a business's history, activities, and policies.

Finding archives and libraries

- FamilySearch Wiki: each state and county in the United States has a Research Wiki page which contains a list of the archives and societies including their contact information. https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page
- Google search
- Bibliographies in books and websites for the area or subject you are interested in.
- ArchiveGrid: contains collection descriptions from libraries and archives. <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
- WorldCat: listings of materials held in libraries all over the world. <https://www.worldcat.org/>

- National Archives Catalog: online catalog of the National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/research/catalog>
- NUCMC – National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections: descriptions of manuscript and archival collections from a wide variety of American repositories (shares with WorldCat). <https://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/>

ORDERING ORIGINAL RECORDS

National Archives (NARA) – You can order original records directly from NARA by visiting www.eservices.archives.gov.

Repositories – archives, churches, societies, and other repositories will often allow you to purchase a copy of their records. Be aware of these policies so you can be prepared.

TIPS FOR ON-SITE RESEARCH

Prepare

- Exhaustive online research. Find all the available digital records before you plan for on-site research. There is no need to search on-site if the records are available online.
- Prepare your research. Create a research goal. Gather and organize the necessary files. Prepare lists of collections you would like to see.
- Travel plans. Make your travel plans including arriving, place to stay, rental car, food and extra expenses.
- Check the facility days and hours. Some may offer special visiting hours. Make an appointment if available.

Tips for visiting an archive, society, or library

- Parking: There may be free parking but there is always the possibility of pay parking garages or on-street meter parking. Be prepared.
- Learn and follow the rules.
- Copies: Copy costs will vary from institution to institution. Always carry change as some facilities are not equipped to handle credit or debit cards.

- Most institutions will not allow briefcases or backpacks. A folder, laptop and pencil seem to be the norm.
- Always make a donation.

Tips for visiting churches

- The best time to visit a church is Sunday worship services. It gives you an opportunity to see the inside the church your ancestor attended and to introduce yourself to the minister or priest. Make an appointment to view the church records.
- While many older churches have been modified over the years, you may still want to take a picture of the interior. Always ask permission to take interior pictures.
- Each church is different. Some churches will let you examine the church records while others will examine the records after you have given them the names of individuals.
- Always offer a donation.

Tips for visiting a courthouse

- One of the most important places to visit is the county courthouse. The courthouse usually holds land, probate, tax, vital and other assorted records.
- If you are traveling by car to the courthouse consider where you will park.
- Always take cash with you as some places are not set up to take debit or credit cards.
- You will pass through security. It is best to put all items in your briefcase or backpack and send it through the scanner. Each courthouse is different so just obey the rules. Be flexible and accommodating.
- Some facilities have constructed separate research rooms for genealogy research.
- Follow the rules of the facility.
- The staff is there to do the work of the county, not family research. Be patient and polite.

Tips for visiting a cemetery

- Check for an office: Church graveyards will usually not have an office to check who is buried in the cemetery. However, city and corporate cemeteries will keep lists of the buried. These records will usually give the location of the plot. Often, the cemetery office will provide a map of the cemetery.
- Is the groundskeeper available? Church graveyards, located in rural areas, will always have a groundskeeper. Check with them for the burial site of your ancestor.
- Walk a number of rows at a time: If you must walk a cemetery, walk it about three rows at a time. You will be able to see the family sections and identify individual stones more quickly than if you walk every row.
- Take a camera: You never know what you will find, and taking a photograph is a good way to remember what you saw.

Take a Break

- Do not stay indoors your entire trip. Visit the houses where your ancestors lived. If possible, talk to individuals in the neighborhoods where your ancestors lived. Visit historical sites in the area.
- Walk the cemeteries. Sometimes the interesting items are not in the repositories but outside of the repositories.

Helpful Articles

- 10 Tips for Planning a Genealogy Research Trip
<https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/10-tips-for-planning-a-genealogy-research-trip/>
- Genealogy Research at the Courthouse, Archives or Library
http://genealogy.about.com/od/basics/a/onsite_research.htm