

# Filipino Genealogy 101

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## *Brief History of Filipino Records*

### Jurisdiction Information



### Periods of Occupation

- **Pre-Colonial (900 AD–1565):** Social structure: a *Barangay* led by a *Datu* (chief), with upper, middle, and lower class citizens. Sultanates or Rajahnates also existed based on location/religious exposure.
- **Spanish Period (1565–1898):** Ferdinand Magellan first makes contact in 1521. In 1543, the islands were named *Las Islas Filipinas* in honor of Prince Philip (later King Philip II of Spain). Colonization truly began in 1565.
  - Philippine Revolution: 1896–1898
- **American Period (1898–1946):** Philippines ceded to the U.S. in the Treaty of Paris.
  - Philippine-American War, 1899–1902.
  - Insular government until 1935, Commonwealth until 1942.
- **Japanese Occupation (1942–1945):** Invasion began 8 December 1941.
- The United States granted independence to the Philippines on 4 July 1946.

## *Languages*

### Spanish

- Most records were kept in Spanish due to 300+ years of Spanish colonization.
- Spanish Genealogical Word List, FamilySearch Wiki: [tinyurl.com/FSSpanishList](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spain%3A_Spanish_Genealogical_Word_List)
  - FamilySearch Wiki has many additional Spanish language resources.

- BYU Center for Family History and Genealogy has paleography lessons and exercises for Spanish Records: [tinyurl.com/BYUSpanishDocs](https://tinyurl.com/BYUSpanishDocs)

### Local Languages

- Official languages of the Philippines: Filipino (Tagalog) and English.
- 180+ spoken native languages in the Philippines.
- Four most prevalent native languages: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, & Hiligaynon.
- Local language use in records: mostly names and locations, especially early on.

### *Filipino Naming Practices*

#### Claveria's Decree of 1849

- 21 November 1849: Governor General Narciso Claveria decreed that all Filipinos adopt standardized surnames.
- Before the decree, some surnames existed, but were not passed down in families.
- The *Catalogo Alfabetico de Apellidos* was created (53,000+ surnames, from both Spanish and native languages) & distributed for each household to choose from.
- Most standardized names appear in records from March 1850 onward.

### Naming Patterns

- Surnames: prior to U.S. Colonization, Filipinos followed Spanish style. Afterward, mother's maiden name became all children's middle name.
- Names are sometimes created from combining other family names, nicknames are prominent but not necessarily derived from given names.
- Some Filipinos alter their names when moving to a big city (Jose to Joe, etc.).

### *Primary Record Types*

#### Catholic Church Records

- Oldest and most complete record sets; some date back to the mid-1500s.
- Birth/Baptism, marriage, death records, also some censuses, other misc. registers.
- Volume 3 of *Tracing your Philippine Ancestors* includes explanations/charts as to record availability by location (reminder that this resource is dated).
- FamilySearch Catalog: Search location by "Philippines, Province, City/Municipality." Look for "Registros parroquiales," "Documentos eclesiásticos," etc.

## Civil Registration

- Birth, marriage, and death records, as well as some citizenship/naturalization, adoptions, name changes, legal separations, annulments, etc.
- Multiple starts and stops in the late 1800s, began in earnest in 1922.
- Local Civil Registrars (LCRs) keep records, and are required to send a copy to the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA). If you can't find a copy in one place, check the other.
- National copies from Jan 1932–Feb 1945 destroyed due to WWII. LCR copies may still exist!

## Other Record Types

- **Wills/Probates:** Not commonly compiled. Some may be found in courts, with LCRs, or in the National Archives.
- **Censuses:** Some counts taken during early Spanish times, first official census in 1877. Returns not available to the public except for some of the unfinished census of 1896—check under Province name on FamilySearch Catalog.
- **Court Records:** Various Municipal trial courts are the most local, next highest level are the Regional Trial Courts (“Court of the First Instance” through 1980).
- **Naturalization, Immigration, etc:** Some in National Archives, also in Regional Trial Courts or LCRs. Also consider the Bureau of Immigration.
- **Land Records:** Consult the local land registration office, or the Land Registration Authority.
- **Newspapers:** Full obituaries with extensive information are not common. Short death notices or annual remembrances are more frequently published.

## Major Record Repositories

- **Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA):** order online through PSASerbilis (from 1945 onward): [tinyurl.com/PSASerbilis](http://tinyurl.com/PSASerbilis)
- **Philippines National Archives:** utilize collection lists and services info: [tinyurl.com/PhilNatArchives](http://tinyurl.com/PhilNatArchives)
- **National Library of the Philippines:** large digital collection, not all genealogy: [tinyurl.com/NPLDigitalCollect](http://tinyurl.com/NPLDigitalCollect)
- **Catholic Parishes/Churches:** FamilySearch Catalog and collections.
- **Local Civil Registrar offices:** individual contact, some on FamilySearch.

## *Filipino Emigration*

### Filipinos in the United States

- Largest concentrations of Filipino-Americans: CA, HI, TX, NJ, IL. NV and AK are also popular destinations.
- First Filipino settlement: 1763 in the LA bayou. Immigration was very slow until the start of the American Period (early 1900s). Next migration wave: post-Philippine independence/post-WWII. Immigration reform in 1965 led to another wave.

### Other Migration Destinations

- Saudi Arabia, Canada, UAE, Australia, etc.
- As with migration to the U.S., destinations were/are chosen largely for educational and/or professional opportunities.

### *Additional Resources and Websites*

- *Tracing your Philippine Ancestors*, by Lee W. Vance (quite dated, but helpful).
- *The Catalogo, Narciso Claveria, and Thoughts on Filipino Surnames*, by Todd Sales Lucero (available on Amazon).
- Philippines collections on FamilySearch, some also available on Ancestry.com, MyHeritage, FindMyPast, etc.
- **FamilySearch Wiki**: Philippines country and province pages, as well as Learning Center presentations.
- **Freedom of Information Philippines**: document requests from all major government entities (ONLY for Filipino citizens!). [foi.gov.ph/](http://foi.gov.ph/)
- **Geni.com**: Philippines surnames/family projects. [tinyurl.com/GeniPhilProjects](http://tinyurl.com/GeniPhilProjects)
- **Philippines Genealogy Project**: [tinyurl.com/PhilGenProject](http://tinyurl.com/PhilGenProject)
- **The Philippines Genealogy Channel (Youtube)**: [tinyurl.com/PhilGenChannel](http://tinyurl.com/PhilGenChannel)
- **Angkang Pilipino**: [tinyurl.com/AnkangPilipino](http://tinyurl.com/AnkangPilipino)
- Local Filipino-American (Fil-Am) community resources.
- *Historical Dictionary of the Philippines*: [tinyurl.com/HistDictPhil](http://tinyurl.com/HistDictPhil)
- *Catalogo Alfabetico de Apellidos*: [tinyurl.com/CatAlfaApellidos](http://tinyurl.com/CatAlfaApellidos)
- *Gazetteer of the Philippines*, vol. 1 & 2: [tinyurl.com/GazPhilVol1](http://tinyurl.com/GazPhilVol1); [tinyurl.com/GazPhilVol2](http://tinyurl.com/GazPhilVol2)