



Documenting Family History in Georgia

How to Begin

Before you begin

When compiling a family history, remember that any piece of information—oral or written—that links a name, place, and date together may help you in establishing kinship lines. As you begin to gather data, record it on preprinted forms (ancestral charts and family group sheets) or use one of the many commercial computer programs available.

For each ancestor, you will wish to determine the following: birth place and date; parents; when and where they attended churches, synagogues, and schools; occupation; when, where, and to whom married; names of children and when and where children were born; death date, death place, and burial place.

When planning a research trip, arrange the information you have gathered and develop a plan of research. Know for whom you are looking and the type of information you are seeking.

Places to Begin

1. Start with “known” information: record all relevant information about yourself, your parents, and grandparents. Remember: start recent, THEN work backward.
2. Begin a pedigree, or “ancestry”, chart and maintain it as you gather information.
3. Search the U.S. Census. Beginning in 1790, the census has been taken every 10 years. Census records are available through 1940. The census is the building block of genealogical research. Unfortunately, the 1790, 1800, 1810, and 1890 Federal census for Georgia are not available. You can use tax digests from those time periods to locate ancestors. Census records are available through Ancestry.com and other sources.
4. Get birth, death, and marriage certificates. These all contain vital information on your ancestors. Some are kept by the state Vital Records department and others are with the Archives.
5. Locate church records. These records – baptismal, birth, death, marriage, membership – often contain revealing information.
6. Search for birth, marriage, and death notices in local newspapers. Many are located on microfilm in the archives.
7. Look for family genealogical folders, family Bibles, and published family histories.
8. Check county histories for information on prominent families within the county.
9. Make a trip to the city/county where your ancestors lived to see if there is a local archive/historical society/special library collection which might contain records pertinent to your research.
10. Try an on-line search to see if there is information on your family line done by others. ALWAYS VERIFY THE INFORMATION YOU FIND ONLINE!



THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES

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Home-Based Research

Record names, dates, and places on a genealogical chart.

- Record the facts you already know. Use a pencil when working with forms, since this makes later corrections much easier.
- Record additional information for each family on a family group sheet.
- Interview older family members.
- Transcribe all audio and video interviews. (Remember that magnetic media are not permanent.)
- Ask general questions, but let your relative do most of the talking.
- Question gently, especially when interviewing older relatives who are sharing their life story with you.
- Get as many names, dates, and places as possible. Review documents and photographs in your family's possession and make notes about all information you discover (be certain to cite the source).
- Bible records (these often note births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths)
- Letters
- School report cards and diplomas
- Membership cards and certificates for clubs, lodges, and other organizations
- Insurance policies
- Birthday, sympathy, wedding, and other occasion cards
- Marriage, death, and divorce records
- Previously compiled family history

Local-Area or Community-Based Research

- Church and synagogue records (including minutes and membership lists)
- Cemetery records and tombstones
- Public libraries (usually have a local history room)
- Historical and genealogical societies

Governmental Records

City halls, county courthouses, and state archives provide a wealth of information for the genealogist. In Georgia, most of the important official records that serve to document family history are created as a function of county government. Among the county records of particular interest to the genealogist are:

Probate (formerly known as Ordinary or Inferior) Court

- Marriages
- Estate records (wills, letters of administration, inventories, annual returns, sales, and guardian bonds)

Superior Court

- Deeds
- Criminal and civil cases, including divorces
- Registers of physicians, dentists, lawyers, and other professionals authorized to practice in a particular county.
- Voter registration lists (sometimes found under the Probate Court)
- Property tax digests

Most pre-1900 Georgia county records (except for civil and criminal case files) are available on microfilm at the Georgia Archives. Many probate and marriage records are also available online through FamilySearch.org. With a few exceptions, notably tax digests and some marriage records, county records created after 1900 are not available for research at the Georgia Archives.

Information or copies of post-1900 records may be obtained by writing county officials (judge of Probate Court or clerk of the Superior Court) directly or by visiting the courthouse.

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Birth and Death Records

With a few exceptions, there are no birth and death records in Georgia prior to 1919. For more specific information, please see the Georgia Archives information sheet, "Georgia's Vital Records."

Georgia Archives Research

The Georgia Archives, a division of the University System of Georgia, is the official repository for permanent records created as a function of state government. The Georgia Archives also serves as a repository for some official county records and private records of individuals and organizations that illuminate state and local history. Some genealogically significant sources are:

- **Official county records:** Pre-1900 records of Superior Court and Probate (formerly Ordinary or Inferior) Court for most of Georgia's 159 counties.
- **State government records:** Confederate Pension Applications (RG 58-1-1, available online), Executive Department Incoming Correspondence (RG 1-1-5), Department of Revenue Tax Digests (RG 34-6-1), Death Certificates (available online), File II Names (RG 4-2-46, original records available online), Headright and Bounty Documents (RG 3-4-5, available online at FamilySearch.org), Colonial and Headright Grants, Land Lottery Grants.
- **Books:** Family histories, local histories, out-of-state material, indexes to various records such as census records.
- **Vertical Files:** Family folders, military records, church and cemetery files.
- **U. S. records:** Census; Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; Confederate Service records, also available online; Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- **Newspapers**
- **Private manuscript collections:** Letters, diaries, account books, organizational records, Bible records, and church records.

On-site Research

Research facility hours are subject to change. Before making a research trip, always check the hours of any repository you wish to visit. Usually this information is available on their website and telephone.

Off-site Research

You may also obtain general information by visiting our web site www.GeorgiaArchives.org. Our website contains information about our holdings and links to our on-line catalog and descriptive inventories.

Genealogy on the Internet

When using the Internet for research, it is crucial to understand that much of the information available on the Internet is **not verified**. In other words, you need to treat your research through the Internet as a secondary source, much as you would a published book. The reliability of the information is equivalent to that of any published source—excellent to poor—and should be used as clues to guide you to the primary, or original, record that would substantiate the genealogical information. If the primary or original record is available online, review that record to make sure that information has been correctly indexed and transcribed or that important information has not been omitted. It is extremely important to notice who is creating and displaying the information. Is it the official page for a historical society, or is this the contribution of an individual? Traveling from link to link can sometimes take you to sites where it may not be clear who the author is.

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In addition to the Georgia Archives web site, some basic, general reference sites on Georgia genealogy that may prove helpful include:

- **The Georgia Genealogical Society:** <http://www.gagensociety.org>
- **Georgia GenWeb Project:** <http://www.rootsweb.com/~gagenweb>
- **Ancestry:** <http://www.ancestry.com/>
- **FamilySearch:** <http://www.FamilySearch.org>
- **National Genealogical Society:** <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org>
- **National Archives at Atlanta:** <http://www.archives.gov/southeast/>

Ready to Begin? Plan your research strategy.

Oral interviews

- Home-based research
- Fill in genealogical chart with the names, places, and dates that you know
- Begin your records research with the most recent U.S. census record available for the family you are researching. The 1940 census is the most recent census available for the public use. Georgia census records, 1820 through 1940 (except for the 1890 that was destroyed) are available at the Georgia Archives, National Archives, and many public libraries, either on microfilm or in a digital, online format. For more information on census records, please see the Georgia Archives information sheet, "Using the Federal Census in Georgia."

Always remember to cite the source for all information. A photocopy of a document is of little value unless you know where the original is located. We recommend the following formats:

- **For original governmental records:** Series Title, Record Group numbers, Name of Institution. For example: *File 11 Names, RG 4-2-46, Georgia Archives.*
- **For private papers:** Collection Title, Accession Number, Name of Institution. For example: *Henry Dickerson McDaniel Family and Business Papers, ac 1966-0400m, Georgia Archives.*

For citations of published, microformat, or electronic materials, we recommend you consult the following:

- *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.