



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 as much of the following as possible: 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, organize 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. 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.

Steps to Follow

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. Using a pencil will make later corrections or additions much easier. Record additional information for each family on a family group sheet.
3. Search the U.S. Census. Beginning in 1790, the census has been taken every 10 years. Census records are available through 1950. The census is the building block of genealogical research. Unfortunately, the 1790, 1800, 1810, and 1890 Federal census records 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. Look for estate records which may confirm dates of death and family relationships when there are no birth or death certificates (in Georgia, generally before 1919).
6. Locate church records (baptismal, birth, death, marriage, membership), which often contain revealing information.
7. Search for birth, marriage, and death notices in local and regional newspapers. Many are located on microfilm in the archives and at the University of Georgia Library. Regional newspapers have been scanned and are available through the Digital Library of Georgia.
8. Look for family genealogical folders, family Bibles, and published family histories.
9. Check county histories for information on prominent families within the county.
10. 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.
11. Try an online 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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Governmental Records

City halls, county courthouses, and state archives provide a wealth of information for the genealogist. In Georgia, most of the official records with genealogical value are created at the county level. Among the county records of particular interest to the genealogist are:

Probate Court

(formerly known as Ordinary or Inferior)

- Marriages
- Estate records (wills, letters of administration, inventories, annual returns, sales, and guardian bonds). Many, though not all, of Georgia's estate records are now available through the FamilySearch.org collection "Georgia Probate Records, 1742-1990."

Superior Court

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

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 visiting the courthouse or by directly writing county officials (judge of Probate Court or clerk of the Superior Court).

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 is the official repository for permanent records created by the various branches of state government. The Georgia Archives also has some county records and private records of individuals and organizations that related to state and local history. Some genealogically significant sources are:

- **County records:** Pre-1900 records of Superior Court and Probate (formerly Ordinary or Inferior) Court for most of Georgia's 159 counties are available on microfilm. Original records for some counties include marriage certificates and case files from the superior and inferior courts.
- **State government records:**
 - Confederate Pension Applications (available in Georgia's Virtual Vault),
 - Executive Department Incoming Correspondence,
 - Department of Revenue Tax Digests (1874-1890 available online at Ancestry.com),
 - Death Certificates (available online in FamilySearch.org and in Georgia's Virtual Vault),
 - File II Names (original records available online in Georgia's Virtual Vault),
 - Colonial and Headright and Land Lottery Grants and Plats,
 - Headright and Bounty Documents (available online at FamilySearch.org),
 - Central Register of Convicts (available online at Ancestry.com).
- **Books:** Family histories, local histories, out-of-state material, indexes to various records such as census records and cemeteries; search the Archives online book catalog (GIL).
- **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 through fold.3.com); Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- **Newspapers** (microfilm only, spotty selection)
- **Private manuscript collections:** Letters, diaries, account books, organizational records, Bible records, and church records, collection descriptions available through the Archives online book catalog (GIL).

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Research from Home

Georgia's Virtual Vault

Many valuable records from the Georgia Archives have been digitized and hosted online in Georgia's Virtual Vault at <https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/>. Useful genealogy collections include:

- Colonial Wills
- Confederate Enlistment Oaths & Discharges
- Confederate Pension Applications
- County Tax Digests (1785-1799)
- File II Names
- Georgia Death Certificates and Georgia Non-Indexed Death Certificates (1919-1930)
- Marriage Records from Microfilm

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.

In addition to the Georgia Archives web site and Georgia's Virtual Vault, some basic, general reference sites and sites with original records relevant to Georgia genealogy that may prove helpful include:

- **Digital Library of Georgia:** <https://dlg.usg.edu/>
- **Georgia GenWeb Project:** <https://thegaproject.org/>
- **National Archives at Atlanta:** <https://www.archives.gov/atlanta>
NARA Atlanta Finding Aids: <https://www.friendsnas.org/findingAids/index.html>
- **The Georgia Genealogical Society:** <https://gagensociety.org/>
- **Ancestry:** <https://www.ancestry.com/> (subscription required)
- **FamilySearch:** <https://www.familysearch.org/>

Oral Interviews

Interviews with family members can be a valuable source of information, from family names to dates and locations which may be helpful for narrowing your research. 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. Transcribe all audio and video interviews (remember that magnetic and digital media are not permanent).

Collecting Information from Home

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, birthday, sympathy, wedding, and other occasion cards
- School report cards and diplomas
- Membership cards and certificates for clubs, lodges, and other organizations
- Insurance policies
- Marriage, death, and divorce records
- Previously compiled family history

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Local-Area or Community-Based Research

Resources focused on a specific geographic area or community may provide other valuable information. Some of this information may also be found in published books or on microfilm at the Georgia Archives.

- Church and synagogue records, including minutes and membership lists (view the “Church Records Microfilm Collection” in the Virtual Vault for a list of the Georgia Archives church records)
- Cemetery records and tombstones (the Georgia Archives has many published resources)
- Public libraries (usually have a local history room)
- Historical and genealogical societies

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 1950 census is the most recent census available for the public use. Georgia census records, 1820 through 1950 (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 online research guide, “[Census Records](#).”

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 II 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*. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Need more help?

If you need more help, we invite you to visit the Georgia Archives, where we will be happy to assist you with your research.

Please check our website for updated hours and directions. The Archives is closed for most federal and state holidays, which may also be found on our website.

At this time, we have no mail reference services. Brief factual questions and questions about Georgia Archives holdings may be submitted through our Ask an Archivist web form.

Ask an Archivist web form: https://www.georgiaarchives.org/research/research_services

Reference phone: 678-364-3710

Research guides: https://georgiaarchives.org/research/research_help

GIL (Georgia Archives Book and Manuscript Catalog): <https://gil.georgiaarchives.org/>

Georgia Archives Finding Aids for State Records: <https://georgiaarchives.as.atlas-sys.com/>