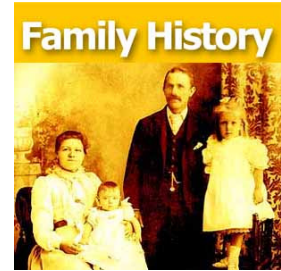


Family History: Genealogy Made Easy

with Lisa Louise Cooke

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Welcome to this step-by-step series for beginning genealogists—and more experienced ones who want to brush up or learn something new. I first ran this series in 2008-09. So many people have asked about it, I'm bringing it back in weekly segments.

Episode 24: Using Marriage Records in Family History

So far in this podcast series you've made a lot of progress. You've set up your genealogy database, talked to your relatives, gotten familiar with the Family History Centers and you have your research worksheet to lead you in your investigation backwards in time, through death records and the census.

In today's episode we're going to continue working backwards down the records aisle looking for marriage records. Marriage records are a type of vital records, meaning they provide vital statistics for a person's life. They can be a rich—even vital!—source of genealogical information.

Marriage records, like death and birth records (which we'll be covering in an upcoming episode) are primary sources. This means that the record was completed at the event or very close to it by someone who was present at the event. That means it's a pretty reliable source.

There are two types of marriage records: civil records which are recorded with the local government, usually at the county level, and church records, if the marriage took place in a church

Update: Many government and church marriage records have found their way into major genealogical databases (www.Ancestry.com, www.FamilySearch.org, www.FindMyPast.org, www.MyHeritage.com, etc). Look for indexed records and—if you're lucky—digitized versions of the actual record. (If you find only indexed records, use the process below to find copies of the actual record.)

Civil/Government Marriage Records

You need to determine where the marriage took place in order to figure out the proper civil authorities to contact. Usually that's the clerk in the town, county, district or parish where the happy couple said "I do." In the U.S., chances are it was at the county level, but if you're not sure, do a Google search on the name of the county and the phrase "vital records" or "marriage records." Chances are one of the first search results will be a link to the website for that county and hopefully the specific page that will tell you how to request vital records. There you should find specific instructions about how to make the request and any fees involved.

I have three tips for you:

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- Tip #1: Be sure and follow the instructions to the letter because otherwise you will likely have your request returned to you unfilled and asking for more information which just wastes time.
- Tip #2: As with Death Records, it isn't necessary to order a certified copy because you are not using it for legal reasons, just information reasons. Certified copies cost more and usually have more requirements to applying for them.
- Tips #3 Request a complete photo copy (which is sometimes referred to as a LONG FORM) rather than a SHORT FORM which can be a brief transcription of the record. There may be clues in the original record that may be left out (or mistranscribed) in the SHORT FORM.

If all this sounds cumbersome there is an easier to request marriage records and that is through Vitalcheck.com (see below). While it costs more you can order the records quickly and easily online.

If you're looking for civil records in England or Wales, those records have been officially recorded by local District Registrars who reported to the General Registrar Office since July 1, 1837. These records are probably easiest to access, particularly if you are not in the UK, through FindMyPast (www.findmypast.com), which does charge a fee for each record.

Types of civil records:

- *Marriage application*. I can't guarantee they're available in every county, but it's definitely worth asking!
- *Marriage license*. This record often holds the most genealogical value. It will include their names, ages, residences as well as perhaps their race, occupation, age, and perhaps their parents' names.
- *Marriage register record*. This confirms the marriage actually took place. This may be just a signature and date from the official who performed the marriage, and may be a small section at the end of the marriage license information. (The latter type of record may also be called a "marriage return" or minister's return.)
- *Marriage certificate*. While this record is part of the process it isn't available through the vital records office. It would have been kept by the couple and will involve some looking around and asking relatives to see if it still exists.

Tip: A marriage license alone does not prove a marriage. A couple could easily apply for a license but never go through with the big day.

Church Marriage Records

Start looking for these records at the Family History Library (www.familysearch.org).

Other places to look:

- *The church if it still exists*. Search for their website. Contact the church office and ask if they have records for the time period you're looking for. If they no longer have the records ask where they are being archived.
- Check in with the *closest local library* and ask to talk to the reference desk.

- Search the *WorldCat* catalog (see Links).
- Check the *US Gen Web* site for the state and county where the marriage occurred (see Links). These sites are run by volunteers and each county has a different variety of records and resources available. Contact the local genealogy or and historical societies and ask for their help.

Other records to look for:

- Banns of marriage records. Look for a record of the banns in the church minutes or church bulletins.
- A secondary source that you won't want to miss is newspaper marriage announcements. Tip: Keep in mind when you're searching a newspaper database and you find a listing for what appears to be the right family in the right area but the date is way off, be sure and check it out because it just may be a republishing of the news you were looking for! (Learn more about newspaper research in my book *How to Find Your Family History in Newspapers*, http://lisalouisecooke.com/lisa-louise-cookes-store/?slug=product_info.php&products_id=33.)

Links/Updates

FamilySearch

www.familysearch.org

To search for marriage records by place, click on Search, then Catalog, then search by location. You'll find both government and church marriage records listed here. Look at the county level for U.S. government records; look at the municipal level or under the Church records category for church marriage records.

USGenWeb

www.usgenweb.org

WorldCat

www.worldcat.org

VitalChek

<http://www.vitalchek.com/express-marriage-records.aspx>