

32 Ways to Find Ancestor Birth Information

- **State Birth and Death Indexes** – whether online or in a book at a library/archive – these provide dates and sometimes the location of birth. But since they are indexes that are most likely entered from birth certificates, hospital reports, or death indexes, you always have to keep in mind that transcription and typing errors can occur.
- **Birth Certificates** – this is the best document for establishing date and location of birth. Usually they are signed by an attending physician who was there when the baby was born. At least for those in the last several decades.
- **Cemetery Records** – there are lots of different ways to find this information. On a headstone the date of birth (often only the year) is inscribed. And you can visit individual cemeteries where records sometimes are made available. But these are only as good as the information that the purchaser of the gravestone has provided. Mistakes can be made.
- **Draft Cards** – the applicant must enter their exact birth date.
- **Naturalization and Citizenship Records** – Exact birth dates are included.
- **Military Records** – the military is quite good at keeping lots of information regarding service members – so you should have lots of places where the birth information is recorded, especially in enlistment papers.
- **Social Security Applications** – the birth date is always requested in the SS-5 application.
- **Birth Announcements in Newspapers** – older ones in the Vitals section say “To the wife of John Smith, a son, in Marysville on Wednesday” or something like that. You can calculate based on the date of the newspaper the exact birth date. There are also birth announcements in the local news and society page sections.
- **Census Records** – well you won’t find anyone’s birth dates in most census records (except you can get the birth month and year in the 1900 U.S. Census). But you do get the age stated and that could lead you to a possible birth year within 1, 2, or 3 years.
- **Immigration Records** – although the exact birth date is not often included – the age is, so simple math, similar to census records, can get you within a year or so for the birth year.
- **Travel Records** – although these are sometimes called immigration records – many in the 1900’s indeed do have the actual birth date of the traveler.
- **Death Certificates** – often the date of birth is included in the death certificate, if not the actual date but at least the age at the person’s passing so the year can be calculated. But again – the information is only as good as the memory of the informant.
- **Church Records** – baptism and christening records and similar records for other faiths may include birth dates or the date of the event, from which you might be able to calculate the birth date. You might want to keep track of what churches, synagogues, etc. that your ancestors and their families worshiped.
- **Personal Bibles** – many families recorded birth and death date information in the family Bible.
- **Marriage Licenses and Announcements** – usually the age of the applicant is listed in the newspaper and on the license itself, so again simple math can lead you to the birth year.
- **Funeral and Memorial Records/Books** – often the deceased’s birth date is included in the memorial cards or books. And also the records from the funeral home.
- **Passport Applications** – the date of birth is included in many variations of applications for passports.
- **Social Security Death Index (SSDI)** – the date of birth is included in the SSDI.
- **Great Registers** – used for voting primarily in the 1800’s, the age of the voter is included – so you will have to use your math and subtraction skills to ascertain the approximate birth year.
- **Employment and Union Records** – hard to find but may include date of birth
- **Newsletters and Minutes** – organizations, clubs, churches, and other types of organizations often publish or recognize birthdays for members, which sometimes may include the year of birth as well.
- **School Records** – enrollment records
- **Employment Records** – job applications and other employment files
- **Membership Organizations** – unions, fraternities/sororities, lodges, clubs, etc.
- **Divorce Records** – at least the age is included if not the birth info
- **Wills and Estate Files** – age and possibly birth information is included. Probate court documents may provide fruitful.
- **Pension Records** – whether military or civilian, birth date and location may be included.
- **Town Records** – Most often in the New England states, but also in others, towns maintained vital statistic information and published them in annual Town Reports.
- **Personal Testimony** – often used in obtaining a Delayed Registration of Birth when no official records was created at the actual time of birth.
- **Hospital Records** – might be useful if accurate records were maintained and made accessible years after the birth.
- **Obituaries** – might include the actual birth date and location, if not just the age. It seems that more recent online tributes contain the actual date, while older newspaper obituaries more than likely do not.
- **Motor Vehicle Department Records** – if retained, at least the age if not the birth date of the driver will be included