

27 Ways to Find Ancestor Marriage Information

- **Marriage Indexes** – whether online or in a book at a library/archive – these provide dates and the location of marriage. But since they are indexes that are most likely entered from marriage certificates, you always have to keep in mind that transcription and typing errors can occur.
- **Marriage Certificates** – this is the best document for establishing date and location of the marriage. Usually they are completed and signed by the person performing the ceremony. Often they were called “Marriage Returns” when the officiant “returned” the signed certificate.
- **Marriage Licenses** – these are tricky because they do not evidence that a wedding actually occurred – so further research is required to ascertain that fact. Please notice that on many licenses it indicates the number of previous marriages for the individual. On several occasions I have found that ancestors had previously been married, which was a total surprise to me.
- **Cemetery Records** – although dates and location of marriage are not included – many times husband and wife are buried next to each other, so if you did not know a person was married – look at the person next to them – if they are the same name they might have been married to that person, so at least you can get more clues. This may seem obvious, but depending on how the naming was engraved – it may have been a son or brother. Also, interment cards and plot deeds may reference a married couple.
- **Draft Cards** – the applicant enters a contact person and often parenthetically enters the word “wife.” No marriage dates or locations but at least an indication that they were married, and the given name of his wife will be helpful for further research,
- **Naturalization Records** – Exact marriage dates are included.
- **Military Records** – For next of kin information, the spouse’s name and contact information is included, if not the actual dates and location of marriage.
- **Pension Applications** – military or not, evidence of marriage is required for beneficiary certification, so a copy of the marriage certificate is required.
- **Census Records** – well you won’t find anyone’s marriage dates in census records. But that “M” or “S” will indicate if they are married or single. And even a “W” for widowed, or “D” for divorced will tell you if they were married. Often an “M1” or M2” will indicate whether they are on their first or second marriage. Questions such as “years married” or “age at first marriage” are helpful for tracking down marriage dates.
- **Immigration and Travel Records** – often the “Married or Single” question is included so at least their marital status is indicated..
- **Death Certificates** – the marital status is included as well as the name of the surviving spouse, but not the date of marriage or how many years they were married.
- **Church Records** – just as churches maintain birth and christening records, marriage records are also often available.
- **Personal Bibles** – many families recorded marriage date information in the family Bible.
- **Marriage Licenses and Other Announcements in the Newspaper** – marriage license announcements, as well as weddings and engagements abound in newspapers. Tons of marriage related information can be found in newspapers, in the vitals section, society pages, women’s sections as well as the local interest sections.
- **Passport Applications** – the name of a married woman’s husband is included for early 20th century passports. And sometimes, place and date of marriage is included.
- **Divorce Records** – dates and locations of marriage are included in divorce records. Divorce indexes are usually not as detailed, as they often do not include the actual marriage date, but only the number of years married.
- **Wills and Probate Documents** – although dates and location of marriages are not often included, at least the name of the spouse is available.
- **Dowry and Pre-nuptial Documents** – the name of the spouse and often date and location of marriage is included. I have a dowry document from the 1800’s that includes this information.
- **Cohabitation Registers** – for marriages and children born to those in slavery.
- **Personal Collections** – wedding invitations, wedding programs, and personal letters citing a family wedding.
- **Land Deeds** – may identify spouse if both parties names are on the deed.
- **Court Records** – may include spouses names, and possibly widow or widower’s name.
- **Marriage Banns** – recorded announcements of intended marriages are often maintained by churches and town records.
- **Marriage Bonds** – written guarantees or promises of payment made by the groom or another person.
- **Consent Papers** – generally required if the bride or groom was underage. Usually kept with the marriage license by the local government entity.
- **Newspaper Obituaries** – sometimes, the date of marriage was included in the written obituary printed in newspapers.
- **City Directories** – Often city directories include the first name of the spouse of the person, and also if the person is widowed, the name of the deceased spouse.