

Looking for Vital Records in all the other places

- The Usual
 - We are always trying to document vital events:
 - Birth
 - Marriage
 - Divorce
 - Death
 - Burial
 - Some of these records are not available prior to 1915-1920.
 - So, now what?

- Personal Records
 - Personal papers
 - The most frequent are Bibles
 - Don't overlook other books.
 - Sometimes people record this information inside other books they owned.
 - Sometimes simply on a sheet of paper, or in a letter that was preserved.

- Church records
 - Useful church records can vary by denomination.
 - What's available depends on the denomination.
 - The easiest records to use are those from Liturgical churches.
 - Liturgical churches can best be described as
 - those churches that follow a set liturgy organized around "Sacraments" that mark life events and are required to record these events in registers:
 - Catholic, Episcopal, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, to a lesser degree Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches.
 - Sacraments relevant here are: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Orders, as well as Burial registers.

- Non- liturgical churches also have records that can be useful, but less reliably so for vital records.
 - These include Baptist churches and other non-denominational churches.
 - However, *always* look for Sunday bulletins and Funeral Bulletins.
 - Also look for newsletters, anniversary programs, other special program booklets where notices are posted.

- There are other religious groups with varying recordkeeping traditions:
 - Quaker Meeting Minutes
 - Synagogue registers for Bris, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, Marriage, & Burial

- Many records have been microfilmed and are now being digitized.

- Others can be located through the denomination in question, at the local congregation, or in archives and libraries.
- *FamilySearch, Ancestry, Jewish Genweb.*

- Legal Records
 - Legal records can provide great information on vital events.
 - Divorce Records can provide several different pieces of information:
 - The date of the marriage,
 - The date of the divorce,
 - Names and age and/or birth dates of children,
 - The birth dates of the couple divorcing.
 - These are found in lower courts' records.

- Probate Records
 - Probate Records by definition relate to death.
 - However, the date of death of the individual is not all that can be found, especially if an intestate process
 - What is the Process?

- With a will:
 - Letters Testamentary
 - Publication to creditors
 - Inventory
 - Account of Sales
 - Distribution of the estate

- Intestate, or no will
 - Letters of Administration
 - Publication for Creditors
 - Establishing the Heirs
 - Inventory
 - Account of Sales
 - Distribution of Estate

- Probate with a will
 - Letters testamentary
 - Will identify the decedent, date of death, and who will be in charge of the estate distribution.
 - Publication for creditors will have date of death of decedent.
 - Inventory of property
 - Not usually useful for vital records, EXCEPT for SLAVES.
 - Slaves listed may have ages listed, but more frequently general age category: boy/girl, old person.

- A woman and child together usually indicates the child is a baby, probably not weaned yet.
 - Account of sales
 - Again, not useful, except, again, for slaves.
 - Distribution of Estate - nothing
- Probate – Intestate (no will)
 - Letters of Administration
 - Date of death and who's in charge,
 - Often a spouse or child.
 - Publication for creditors
 - Date of death
 - Inventory – same as above
 - Identification of Heirs.
 - In the 20th and 21st centuries a more formal process than previously.
 - Will include all names and birth dates or death dates and subsequent heirs.
 - In some states must follow the lineage down to next living heir.
 - In some states there are statutory limits for the generations followed.
 - Account of sales – same
 - Distribution of estate -- same
- Where to find Probate Records
 - Probate process found in different courts in different states even over time.
 - Maryland – Orphan's Court, Chancery Court (now defunct)
 - Georgia – Court of the Ordinary
 - Virginia – Chancery, now Circuit Court
 - North Carolina – Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions, now Superior Court, Equity Courts
 - New York – Surrogate's Court
 - Delaware – Chancery
 - Probates that are contested will usually be heard in courts of equity or chancery courts, possibly a superior court.
 - Records are also usually copied into separate probate registers.
 - A will may not be in the same register as the inventory, especially if a long time period separates their recording.
 - Estate files should include all relevant documents for that estate.
- Land and Property Records
 - Deeds – more than land transactions
 - Deeds convey title from someone to someone
 - Mortgages or Trust Deeds
 - Deeds of gift often occur between family members especially when anticipating death.

- Deeds conveying property of married individuals require statements from wives saying they aren't being coerced into agreeing to the sale of the property.
 - This is called "Coverture."
 - The legal status of a married woman, wherein she's considered to be under her husband's protection and authority.
 - This has implications for dower slaves that come into a family through the wife.
 - This also impacts surname identification for slave descendants.
- Other Land records
 - There are many record types associated with land and property besides conveyance books:
 - Tax Records
 - Debt Books
 - Mortgage Records
 - Rent Rolls
 - Because land inherited but not sold may not show up in the deed books, these records may be your only clue to the heirs and their possible relationships when other records have not survived.
- Don't forget these
 - Newspapers – esp obituaries, death notices, but also births, engagements and marriages.
 - On-line funeral sites – Legacy.
 - City Directories – sometimes the death of a spouse is noted.
 - Cemetery tombstones
 - Including *Findagrave*, *Cemetery census*, local historical society transcriptions.
 - Historical Societies – clipping files.
 - School & alumni directories – many on-line.
 - Social Media.
- Always ask yourself
 - Who would I want to know, and
 - who must I tell that my parent, spouse, child, has died, and
 - how would I get word to those with whom I have little contact
- Some things to keep in mind
 - In most states outside of New England and Pennsylvania, there will not be government sponsored vital records prior to the 20th century,
 - Except for marriage records.
 - This is especially true in the South.
 - Understand at what age one can do what,

- Because it will help you understand what age someone might be
- Giving you at least some approximate dates for vital events.
- Understand that the laws governing at what age one can do various things (e.g., marry, vote) is different at different times in history.
- Learn the laws of the times.
- Some examples
 - Voting until the late 20th century (1968 election): 21 years old.
 - Don't forget regulations for women and people of color varied over time as well.
 - Guardianship: If someone has been placed under a guardianship they are less than 18 years of age for men and 16 for women, but there are exceptions.
 - Marriage age was not usually regulated until the 20th century.
 - Yes, girls did marry as young as 11 and 12
 - Especially if they were poor.
 - Marriage under minimum age with permission of parents continues to be allowed.
 - Some states have absolute minimums, but
 - Some states, even today, do not.