



Using Religious Records

Are you ready to do a little soul searching?

Long before most governments got around to it, members of the clergy were dutifully recording names and dates associated with baptisms, marriages, burials, and other ceremonies within their congregations. In England alone, parish registers pre-date civil registration by almost 300 years.



WHY RELIGIOUS RECORDS?

Religious records can give your research a real boost. In addition to the fact that they often pre-date vital registration of births, marriages, and deaths, some records include the names of witnesses and sponsors, who were often family members. They can also include biographical details and clues for continuing research, which makes them highly valuable sources.

Finding death dates in religious records will often lead to cemeteries where other family members may have been buried. And marriage information in religious records will sometimes be the best means of finding maiden names – or even name changes.

DETERMINING THE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

If you're not sure what religious affiliation your ancestor had, step one is to determine that. Most members in your family may have been of one faith, but consider the possibility that individuals and families may not always have been members of the same religious denomination. For a number of reasons, they may have switched their affiliation from one to another, including:

- Individuals who married into families of a different religion
- Living in places where their chosen or traditional religion was not represented by a house of worship, especially in rural areas that were dominated by a specific religion
- Conversions influenced by what may have been going on in a particular time or place (there may have been local prejudices, or even laws in place, that prompted a conversion)

Religious affiliation can often be found in the pages of historic newspapers. Obituaries often suggest ties to a specific religion, and individuals were regularly mentioned in notices about events sponsored by a church group, such as picnics or other social events. Engagements and weddings announced in newspaper society pages may include clues as to religious denominations.



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DETERMINING THE CHURCH AFFILIATION

If you have a civil record for your ancestor, it may hold clues to both a denomination and a specific religious institution. On marriage records, look for the name of the officiant. If the couple wasn't married by a civil authority, you may be able to determine religious affiliation by the church affiliation of the person who married them. Check for the officiant's name in a city directory. The officiant's directory listing may include the name of the church or an address that can be compared with religious institutions in the city directory.

Historical city directories can also serve as an excellent means for pinpointing your ancestor's address in a particular time period. Then, by browsing the list of churches and synagogues, you may be able to determine the closest church, meetinghouse, mosque, or synagogue. If your ancestor was an immigrant or a close descendant of your immigrant ancestor, pay special attention to religious institutions that mirror his or her ethnicity.

Make sure to look for clues to church affiliation on civil death records, which could name a place of burial that's affiliated with a particular denomination or even with a specific church.

In some religious groups funeral cards or programs were common. These and other home sources can name the church where funeral services were held. Obituaries are another good source.

Many religious institutions are described in county and local histories or histories about specific denominations. An internet search or a search of the [Ancestry Card Catalog](#), filtered by your ancestor's location, may lead you to a wealth of information about the specific congregation your ancestors belonged to, even if it disbanded long ago.

Monroe Alexander, h 1758 Seaview av
Annie, emp G. C. B. & Co., bds 63
Harral av
Charles A., laborer, h 15 Whiting
Frederick D., emp Curtis & Curtis, h
145 Lewis
George, waiter, h 84 State
Joseph B., carpet cleaner, h 101 Beards-
ley
Katherine, emp G. C. B. & Co., bds 63
Harral av
Lewis H., emp B. Brass Co., h 1149
North av
Thomas L., plumber emp 1328 Main,
bds 63 Harral av
William, laborer, h 63 Harral av
William, painter, h 1183 Pembroke
William Jr., emp W. & W. Mfg. Co.,
bds 63 Harral av
Wilmer Rev., pastor 2d Church of
Christ, rms 18 Beach

CHURCHES.

Baptist.

First Baptist Church—Washington av e West av. Organized September 30, 1837. Pastor, Rev. George W. Nicholson; Treasurer, E. B. Hawkins; Society's Clerk, William J. Platt; Organist, F. Quinn; Superintendent of Sunday School, Louis S. Morris.

East Washington Avenue Baptist Church—548 East Washington av e Kossuth. Organized in 1874. Pastor, Rev. George D. Reed; Clerk, J. Frank Cox; Treasurer, W. K. Miller; Organist, Miss Mabel Holmes; Society's Clerk, W. H. Blakeslee; Society's Treasurer, J. A. Black; Superintendent Sunday School, John W. Barnes.

The First Swedish Baptist Church—Seeley e Lewis streets. Organized in 1882. Pastor, Rev. T. Clafford; Treasurer, D. Hjort; Organist, J. Nelson; Church Clerk, Axel Ahlberg; Superintendent of Sunday School, S. Svenson.

Immanuel Baptist Church—393 Lafayette street. Organized in 1878. Pastor, Rev. Leslie O. Brooks; Treasurer, Bennett F. Morris; Church Clerk, Mrs. H. B. Weir; Superintendent of Bible School, Samuel Vanstone.

Messiah Baptist Church—Arch street. Pastor, Rev. William N. Norton; Clerk, Ross H. Farrar; Treasurer, Charles W. Broadfield; Superintendent of Sunday School, William N. Morton.

German Baptist Church—38 Burrough street cor Kossuth street. Pastor, Rev. H. L. Dietz; Clerk, J. Ratzlaff; Treasurer, Rudolph Naber.



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LOCATING THE RECORDS

If your ancestor's place of worship is still active, this is the obvious place to start. An online search typically will bring up the institution's website and contact information. If the records are not held onsite, the office should be able to direct you to them.

If the congregation merged with another, a yearbook or denominational directory may clue you in to the new congregation, which may now have the records.

Local churches and archives of the denomination often have such directories. In cases where the institution no longer exists, the records may be with a denominational archive. Here again, online searches for the denominational headquarters can help you locate the repository.

Tip: When contacting a church or synagogue, bear in mind that the office has to tend to the running of the institution. Your request may have to take a back seat to day-to-day duties. Patience and kindness go a long way, and donations to the institution may hasten your request along.



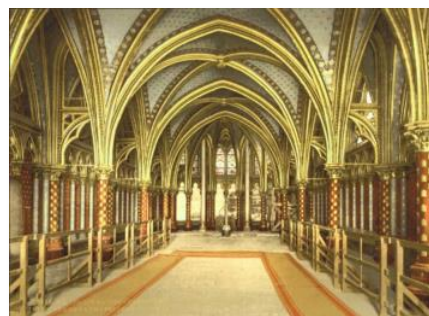
LOCATING RECORDS ONLINE

Fortunately, we're seeing an increase of religious records online. Try some internet searches, or visit [Cyndi's List](#) to see what resources are available for your ancestor's denomination.

[JewishGen.org](#) is committed to preserving Jewish history and family history and has many resources available to assist researchers. JewishGen and other Jewish organizations have partnered to make many Jewish records available in the [Jewish Collection](#) on Ancestry.

You can find many other denominations represented in the collections on Ancestry as well. For instance, Ancestry is home to a huge collection of [Quaker records](#). Quakers kept meticulous records from their earliest days, and their monthly meeting records can reveal rich details about your Quaker ancestors.

[The Drouin Collection](#) includes records from ecclesiastical archives of multiple denominations in parts of Canada and the U.S.



Some of the religious records on Ancestry are in geographically-based collections. The [Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1708-1985](#), database, like the Drouin Collection, includes the records of multiple denominations in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.



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LOCATING RELIGIOUS RECORDS ON ANCESTRY.COM

On Ancestry, the Card Catalog is a great place to start your search for religious records. Since baptisms, marriages, and burial records mentioned in religious records relate to births, marriages, and deaths, you'll find these records in those categories. In the filters on the left of the Card Catalog page, select **Birth, Marriage & Death**, followed by the geographic location you're searching in.

Card Catalog

Searchable listing of all record collections

Title

Keyword(s)

Search or Clear All

Filter Titles

- Birth, Marriage & Death
- USA
- New York
- Kings

Filter By Collection

TITLE	COLLECTION	RECORDS	ACTIVITY
New York City, Deaths, 1892-1902	Birth, Marriage & Death	468,922	
Web: Brooklyn, New York, Green-Wood Cemetery Burial Index	Birth, Marriage & Death	458,755	
Brooklyn, New York Catholic Church Baptism Records, 1837-1900	Birth, Marriage & Death	22,731	
Brooklyn, New York Catholic Church Marriage Records, 1839-1900	Birth, Marriage & Death	10,282	
New York City, Dutch Church Burials	Birth, Marriage & Death	3,664	
New York City, Lutheran Church Records, 1834-1854	Birth, Marriage & Death	8,165	
Cemeteries in Kings and Queens Counties, Long Island, New York	Birth, Marriage & Death	61	
Dutch Reformed Cemetery, Flatbush, Kings County, New York : 1754 per 1913	Birth, Marriage & Death	39	

Title

Keyword(s)

Search or Clear All

Filter Titles

- USA
- New York
- Kings
- Schools, Directories & Church Histories
- Church Histories & Records

Filter by Dates

1600s	1700s	1800s	1900s
1600s	1700s	1800s	1900s
1610s	1710s	1810s	1910s
1620s	1720s	1820s	1920s
1630s	1730s	1830s	1930s

TITLE	COLLECTION	RECORDS	ACTIVITY
New York City, Dutch Church Burials	Church Histories & Records	3,664	
New York City, Lutheran Church Records, 1834-1854	Church Histories & Records	8,165	
The story of a rare parish	Church Histories & Records	203	
The 1933 Brooklyn church year book	Church Histories & Records	198	
Year book, Brooklyn Federation of Churches	Church Histories & Records	302	
Old Sands Street Methodist Episcopal Church of Brooklyn, N.Y. : an illustrated centennial record, historical and biographical	Church Histories & Records	575	
A history of Long Island	Church Histories & Records	444	
St. Ann's Church (Brooklyn, New York) : from the year 1784 to the year 1845 : with a memorial of the Sunday Schools : to which	Church Histories & Records	221	
Historical sketch of the Church of St. Antony of Padua, Brooklyn, N.Y. : with an account of the rectorship of Rev. P. F. O'Hare	Church Histories & Records	171	
The history of Plymouth Church : (Henry Ward Beecher) 1847 to 1872 : inclusive of historical sketches of the Bethel and the Nav	Church Histories & Records	318	

In addition to traditional church records, don't overlook church histories and directories. They may include mentions of your ancestors and their place within the religious community. They can also add depth and color to your family history. To locate religious histories and directories on Ancestry, select the

filter for your location and add **Schools, Directories & Church Histories**, and then the sub-category of **Church Histories & Records**.

Tip: When searching religious records, be aware that some records may be in Latin or in some other language. Many records in the Drouin Collection are in French. Use an online translator to find your ancestor's name in that language and use that name in your search.

