

# The Paper Trail of Death

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A death is the beginning of a trail of paperwork.

## Death Certificates

Check jurisdiction to see when death records were recorded and where they were recorded. Certificates may identify parents, residence, funeral home, cemetery, cause of death, and possible relative informant. Remember, death certificates are not filled out by the deceased. Do not forget to look for amended certificates.

Document all numbers on a certificate. There may be a State file number and a registration number. It is best to cite both numbers.

Handwritten numbers on earlier death certificates indicate the IDC [International Classification of Diseases Coding System]. The coding has been updated numerous times. Learn more at [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/ppt/nchs2012/li-14\\_minino.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/ppt/nchs2012/li-14_minino.pdf)

## Death Registers

Prior to the issuance of death certificates or in conjunction with, records of deaths were recorded in death registers. Death registers were usually held at the local level. Locate the records at courthouses or at state archives.

## Mortality Schedules

Federal and State schedules are available. Federal schedules were produced for 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880. They are arranged by state, county and city/town. The schedules indicate deaths that occurred twelve months prior to the census. Additional information of state mortality schedules may be located on the FamilySearch Wiki or at New Horizons Genealogy. <http://www.newhorizonsgenealogicalservices.com/mortality-schedule.htm>.

## **Funeral Records and Mortuary Records**

Current funeral home addresses may be located at <http://www.funeralnet.com> under the member services tab.

- Guest books
- Pall Bearers – usually members of family or close friends
- Sympathy Cards, Floral Cards, Letters
- Memorial Cards
- Funeral Cabinet Cards
- Funeral Home Records
- Copies of obituaries
- Coffin plates

Burial records depend upon the state or local rules. In Arizona before a body is buried, the location of the cemetery must be filed with the county recorder's office. Arizona (the State) has no laws that prohibit burial on private property. Local laws may exist.

## **Cemetery Records**

- Cemetery Deeds
- Cemetery Receipts
- Monument Records [who purchased and ordered headstone]
- Sexton or Caretakers Records
- Find A Grave, Billions of Graves, Grave Locator
- Deathindex.com has links to websites with death indexes
- Burial permits
- Headstone inscriptions, shape, symbolism
- Who is buried nearby.

## **Church Records**

Prior to death registers and death certificates, local churches recorded death information. Contact a church for access or to find out where the records are archived. Funerals may be recorded or the Pastor/Preacher/Father may have a journal or personal record of performing a service. The type of religion will dictate what types of records will be available. Death records may also be included in church newsletters.

## Obituaries and Newspaper articles

- Usually published within a week of death.
- May name family members.
- Frequently includes birth, death, and marriage information.
- May include occupation and schooling information.
- Obituaries usually reference a funeral home, cemetery, or possible family residence.
- Look for an article in the paper rather than just an obituary.
- Smaller community newspapers may have references to family members attending funerals or a loss of a family member.

To locate obituaries, try online databases such as [Chronicleingamerica.loc.gov](http://Chronicleingamerica.loc.gov), [Newspaperarchive.com](http://Newspaperarchive.com), [GenealogyBank](http://GenealogyBank), local historical and genealogy societies, local libraries, and funeral homes.

## Probate Records

Located in county courthouses. Wills are wonderful for learning about families and relationships. May include estate inventories, assets, judgments, sheriff sales, heirs, date of death and real estate.

## Social Security Records

Social security numbers retrieved from death records will enable you to send for the Individual's Social Security Card Application <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps9/eFOIA-FEWeb/internet/main.jsp>. You must provide the social security number, and proof of parent's death (if you wish the information included in application) or the number holder must be over 100 years old. Applications include address, parents, and employer.

- Numerical Identification Files (NUMIDENT) Death files from SSN numbers with verified death information are online at: <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=5057&cat=all&bc=sl>
- Ancestry and FamilySearch have a Social Security Death Index.

## Records at the National Archives (NARA)

Deaths of US citizens in Foreign Countries

- Civilian Death Reports 1975 to current are located at the Department of State, Passport Services, Vital Records Section, 111 19<sup>th</sup> St NW, Room 510, Washington, DC 20036.
- Ancestry has indexed images in a database named “Reports of Deaths of American Citizens Abroad, 1835-1974”.

#### Military Records

- Military pension records
- Widow’s applications
- National Gravesite locator <http://m.va.gov/gravelocator/>

#### Miscellaneous Records

- Coroners Reports – Most likely noted on death certificate, located at local level.
- Military Records
- Immigration Records – death on voyage, notes in immigration file citing death of applicant.
- City Directories – did entries note widow or widower, did someone drop from the directory
- Land Records – transfer of ownership
- Tax lists – dropped from tax list
- High school and college alumni lists and newsletters
- Family bibles
- Marriage applications may indicate prior marriage or widow/widower status
- Census records may indicate whether widowed
- Ebay may have death certificates, bibles, or memorial cards for family members

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Death Indexes <https://www.deathindexes.com/>