

# Connecticut Vital Records

By Barbara Jean Mathews, CG

## The Law on Access

- **Deaths...** open to all
- **Marriages...** open to all
- **Births >= 100 years old ...** open to all
- **Births < 100 years old ...** subject to restrictions

Your ability as a researcher to access vital records in Connecticut is governed by Public Act No. 96-258, “An Act Concerning Access to Genealogical Records and the Validation of Certain Marriages,” updating Sections 7-41a, 7-51 and 7-51a of the General Statutes. This act makes all marriage and death records – and all birth records more than 100 years old – open to everyone. That is, all genealogical researchers may receive certified copies of all marriage and death records and of all birth records at least 100 years old.

Access to birth records less than 100 years old is somewhat restricted. Only the people listed in the record, certain relatives, municipal employees, attorneys, and members of certain genealogical societies may receive certified copies of birth records less than 100 years old. Those relatives authorized to receive copies are a child, spouse, parent or guardian. Grandparents are also authorized to receive copies of the birth records of minors only.

Connecticut Statutes, however, recognize the valid concerns of genealogical researchers. Members of genealogical societies which are legally incorporated or authorized to do business in Connecticut are also permitted to access, copy, or receive certified copies of vital records. Although none have taken advantage, should a genealogical society incorporated in another state register with Connecticut’s Secretary of State to do business within Connecticut subject to Connecticut laws, its members would also be eligible to access recent birth records.

In return for this right of access, most genealogical societies in Connecticut require members to sign pledge a pledge that they will use the records they access ethically and legally. Each society reserves the right to rescind membership should problems occur with individual researchers. It is accurate to say that no Connecticut researcher’s briefcase is complete without a card for membership in one of these societies. Indeed, many town clerks will request your card and note its number on a sign-in log.

Ten genealogical and historical / genealogical societies are now incorporated within Connecticut (although one is inactive), thereby providing records access for their members. As of June 1999, those societies are:

- Connecticut Ancestry Society, Inc.
- [Connecticut Society of Genealogists, Inc.](#)
- [Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor, Inc.](#)
- [French-Canadian Genealogical Society of Connecticut, Inc.](#)
- [Friends of Godfrey Memorial Library, Inc.](#)
- [Jewish Genealogical Society of Connecticut, Inc.](#)
- [Killingly Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc.](#)
- Lance Genealogical Research Library Society, Inc. (inactive)
- [Middlesex Genealogical Society, Inc.](#)
- [Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut, Inc.](#)

The Connecticut State Library keeps a list called [\*Genealogical Societies Incorporated or Authorized to do Business or Conduct Affairs in Connecticut\*](#). The list includes addresses, telephone numbers, and web links to these societies.

## Where Records are Recorded

- **1635 to present [original records]** ... Town clerks, city registrars

- **1897-present [record copies]**... Connecticut Department of Public Health, Vital Records (now closed for microfilming)
- **1635 - perhaps 1900 [microfilm copies]** ... Many town vital records books have been microfilmed. The films are at the Connecticut State Library or they can be obtained through Family History Centers. You can check the [Family History Library Catalog](#) to find out what years are filmed for each town or city.

Vital statistics have always been registered at the town level in Connecticut. At no time were births, marriages, or deaths ever registered or stored at the county level. Since 1897, it has also been the law that copies of these records be sent to the state.

In 2000 and for the next few years, however, the state's vital records office is closed to researchers while the records are being microfilmed.

The only records kept at the county level to be considered within the framework of vital statistics are superior court records of divorce. Copies of decrees can be obtained from the court clerks. Their addresses are listed at [Connecticut Counties](#).

Some divorce records have been abstracted and published by Grace Knox and Barbara Ferris in two volumes. The books are available at NEHGS, Connecticut State Library [CSL], Connecticut Historical Society [CHS], and through most genealogical libraries:

- *Connecticut Divorces: Superior Court Records for the Counties of Litchfield, 1752-1922, and Hartford, 1740-1849*, published in 1989 by Heritage Press.
- *Connecticut Divorces: Superior Court Records for the Counties of New London, Tolland & Windham, 1719-1910*, published in 1987 by Heritage Press.

### What Indexes Are Available

Because you must look for vital records at the town level, identifying in which town the record was generated becomes quite important. There are several indexes and approaches you can use to locate the records you need.

Note that this location may not always be the town in which the person was residing. For example, the town of Roxbury, Connecticut, is quite small and has no hospital. Roxbury residents thus have a tendency to experience birth and death at the nearest hospital, which is in New Milford, Connecticut.

Birth records are copied to the towns of residence of the parents. This is not the case with deaths and marriages. Fortunately, there are other avenues to discover the location of a death. These avenues include:

- Checking the [Social Security Death Index](#)
- Checking newspaper obituaries and marriage notices
- Checking headstone inscriptions
- Checking the online version of Connecticut's death index at [Ancestry.com](#).

### Other Avenues to Discover the Location of a Death

- **1635-1850, statewide index to births, marriages and deaths:** Called the Barbour index, the original slip index is at Connecticut State Library, microfilms are at NEHGS, CHS, or available through Family History Centers. For more information, consult the Connecticut State Library web page on the Barbour index.
- **1850-1897, not indexed by the state:** No statewide vital record index exists. As a substitute, try the Hale index to cemetery headstones and newspaper death and marriage notices, cited below.
- **1949-1996, statewide death index:** [Ancestry](#) (membership required). Go to the Search Page and scroll down to "death records" under Member Databases. Use the pull down bar to select the Connecticut Death Index, which has three parts: 1949-1970, 1971-1987, and 1988-1996.
- **1635-1936, Hale index for deaths and marriages:** The Hale index covers headstones, newspaper death notices

and marriage notices. The slip indexes are at the Connecticut State Library, microfilms are at NEHGS, or available through Family History Centers. Consult the Connecticut State Library for more information on the Hale index to cemeteries and newspapers.

- **1635 to 1850, marriages:** [The International Genealogical Index](#) [IGI] can be a useful help at this point. It contains extracted records for Connecticut marriages.
- **1956-present, Social Security Death Index:** Available as CD ROMs in libraries. Several sites allow free lookup. These include [Family Tree SSDI](#) and [Ancestry SSDI](#).
- **1999 Births, Marriages, Deaths, & Obituaries:** Generally newspaper web sites include obituaries and many local papers still carry births and marriages. *The Hartford Courant*, for example, keeps obituaries available online for 90 days. Check [Cyndi's List](#) for several sites listing newspapers in Connecticut.

The Barbour slip index is statewide, but local index books have also been compiled for individual towns. Many genealogical lineage societies accept printouts or photocopies of the Barbour slip index or town index books as readily as certified birth records. The Barbour index is now the subject of an ongoing publication effort by Lorraine Cook White through the Genealogical Publishing Company. So far 18 multi-town volumes have been published in alphabetic order (through Hebron).

*A Note on the Barbour Index: It was compiled largely from transcriptions of local vital records and never compared against the original town record books. In some towns, such as Newtown, this has resulted in poor or missing records. Other towns, such as Guilford, did not have all records available at the time of transcription. Guilford's first book of vital records is not included in the Barbour index. For early Guilford events, please check volumes 15, 16, and 17 of TAG.*

When using the Connecticut Death Index at Ancestry. com, please be aware that record sorting is not perfect by either date or name. For example, my grandmother Adelaide Mathews died 10 January 1978, and my grandfather William Mathews died 28 January 1981, both in New Milford Hospital. As their granddaughter, I have copies from the state vital records office of both death records. A search on Ancestry. com for Adelaide's death did not yield a record in the state index. The answers based on "Mathews" were rudely sorted by year, but 1980 and 1981 were filed at the end of 1987, so only at the end of the list did I find William's death. Only a completely thorough search will yield results here.

To search further for Adelaide Mathews, I used the Social Security Death Indexes at Family Tree and at Ancestry. com. Both supplied her date of death, and showed her place of residence as Roxbury. Only one, that at Family Tree, supplied the last place a payment was sent, which was New Milford. This element of information would have led me to the death record's location in that town.

## How to Order Vital Records

Vital records cost \$5 whether birth, marriage, or death. [The one exception to this rule is that birth records cost \$15 when ordered from the state vital records office. These records, however, are not accessible at this time.] Once you know the location of the event, you need both an application form and an address. To obtain an application form, try one of these sources:

- The application form can be downloaded or printed from the Connecticut Department of Public Health, Vital Records Section's web page for Requests for Certificates and Town Clerk Telephone Numbers.
- Forms can be copied from the *International Vital Records Handbook* by Thomas Jay Kemp. The book is published by the Genealogical Publishing Company and available at most genealogical libraries and the NEHGS online bookstore.
- Forms for the cities of Bridgeport and Hartford only can be accessed online at VitalCheck's [Vital Record Providers for CT](#). These cities accept credit card payments and the forms provided here allow you to include this information on a fax to the cities' registrars of vital statistics.
- Or you can just write your own letter, being sure to include every conceivable item of information that could be

found on the record.

When you write for a birth record less than 100 years old be sure to include a photocopy of your driver's license to prove you are at least 18 years old and either (1) a photocopy of your membership card in a genealogy society organized in Connecticut or (2) a statement that you are a close relative of the person in the birth certificate. To obtain the address of the town clerk or city registrar, try one of these approaches:

- The state's vital records office does maintain a web site listing the telephone numbers of the various town clerks and city registrars on Requests for Certificates and Town Clerk Telephone Numbers.
- Use the "blue book". This is *The Connecticut State Register and Manual* published annually by the Secretary of State. The 1998 edition contains 873 pages of information on town, state, and national government. This information includes the names and addresses of all town clerks, city registrars of vital statistics, libraries, and museums (such as historical societies) in Connecticut. Quite inexpensive, too, as the paperback edition costs \$10 plus shipping and handling. The blue book is available in all libraries in Connecticut or you can be order it from the Secretary of State's web site. The quickest method and my favorite, however, is to go directly to the town listings in the [Interactive Online Register](#).
- At [VitalRec.com](#), Elizabeth T. Orsay has a web site designed for locating vital records. There is a Connecticut page with addresses for town halls.
- Or you can always use the brute force method: just write to the Town Clerk, Town Hall, Town name, State, ZIP code. Use a ZIP code directory to choose the most likely candidate for the zip code.

## Summary

Researchers with ancestors in Connecticut are lucky. Vital records have been kept since earliest times and many are still extant. A search for a birth, marriage, or death record in Connecticut will often be successful.

Connecticut's vital records access law permits genealogical researchers to see and copy all types of records down to the present day. Membership in a genealogical society that operates under Connecticut laws is a requirement in particular for access to births less than 100 years old.

The closure of the state's central office for vital statistics has made the search more difficult. Without the central repository, the researcher must know the town in which the record was generated. Fortunately for births, the records are copied to the town of residence of the parents. In the case of deaths, there is an index online for the years 1949-1996 (membership in Ancestry is required to access it). The Hale index to cemetery inscriptions and newspaper marriage and death notices to 1936 and the Social Security Death Index (covering ca. 1956 to the present) serve as alternate sources of information.

Connecticut remains by far my favorite state for research. Massive efforts by Lucius Barbour and Charles Hale produced indexes to vital records to 1850 and headstone inscriptions to 1936. The scholarship of other genealogists has produced town-wide genealogies of the highest caliber. In my next column, I'll discuss the books that should be on every Connecticut researcher's bookshelf.