

Glossary & Definitions

Genealogists use a number of terms and records in their work. Learn what these commonly used words mean!

Ancestor: A person, typically more remote than a grandparent, whom is a direct blood relative.

Ancestry: Family lineage - one's family or ethnic descent.

Archive: A place where public records or historical documents are kept.

Census: An official recording of information about individuals living within a household. These were compiled every ten years starting in 1790, and give specific information about everyone within a house or dwelling.

Church and Synagogue Records: Records kept by religious institutions of parishioners, including marriage certificates, baptisms, confirmations, burials, birth records, Hebrew School attendance, and other materials.

Descendant: A person that is descended from a particular ancestor; to be a direct blood relative of a specific ancestors.

DNA: The carrier of genetic information that is hereditary and shared across generations of family members.

Family Group Sheet: A form designed for the recording of basic birth, marriage, and death information about members of a single family.

Genealogy: The study of family ancestries and histories.

Land Records: Deeds, mortgages, and other records dealing with the buying and selling of property; they often show ownership, location, and description.

Maternal: A relative that is related on the mother's side of the family.

Military Records: Records generated as a result of an individual's involvement in the armed forces, including draft registration cards, service records, pension records, and bounty land records.

Naturalization Records: Records generated through the process of an individual applying for and becoming a citizen of a country.

Obituary: A notice of a death, especially found in newspapers, which includes a biography of the person.

Passenger List: Records generated in the tracking of individuals arriving or departing a country. Passenger records have changed over time with different questions being asked through varying periods of immigration.

Paternal: A relative that is related on the father's side of the family.

Primary Records: Documents and records considered the closest to an event, and most accurate. They are usually created at the time of an event and by someone who was present.

Probate Records: Records and documents created during the settling of a person's estate, regardless of whether a person left a will.

Secondary Records: Records of a second-hand nature, including published family and oral histories, biographies, and other items generated at a later date by someone who most likely was not present at the event being recorded.

Vital Records (civil registrations): These records refer to civil (rather than religious) registrations of births, marriages, and deaths.