

Finding and Using Church Records

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The religious diversity of the United States affords a diversity of records. Our forefathers brought their religious beliefs and record keeping standards when they came to this country, therefore, we can find recordings in other languages in ethnic churches established by the immigrants.

What are the primary religions found in the United States? In alphabetical order, according to FamilySearch Wiki, they include: Anglican; Baptist; Buddhist; Church of the Brethren; Congregational; Disciples of Christ; Dutch Reformed; Episcopal; German Reformed; Greek Orthodox; Huguenot; Jehovah's Witnesses; Jewish; Latter-Day-Saints (Mormons); Lutheran; Methodist; Mennonite; Moravian; Muslim; Pentecostal; Presbyterian; Roman Catholic; Russian Orthodox; Society of Friends (Quakers); and, United Church of Christ. Of course, you can find many other denominations. It is important not to assume that your ancestors shared the same faith that you have today. "Your ancestor may have changed denominations for reasons of convenience or conviction. When the family moved to a new community, they may have started attending a church located there, or they may have changed denominations by conversion."¹

Today's presentation will show samples of a variety of records you may find as you search through various church records. We're fortunate that some of these records have been microfilmed and we can find them through the Family History Libraries. Others have been transcribed and put into book form or on the internet. What type of records might you find? Each denomination keeps different records in accordance with their theology. Typical records include: Christenings or Baptisms; Confirmations; Communion; Marriages; Burials; Admissions and Removals; Financial Records; Sunday School Lists; Church Censuses; and Church-related newsletters.

¹Taken from FamilySearch Wiki, https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/United_States_Church_Records

Sources

For a history of religions in the United States see:

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1972. (FHL book 973 K2ah.)

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