Table 1: Records with Genealogical Information

Type of Record	Description	Information in Record
Vital Records – Created by Governments	This includes the recording of births, marriages and death by towns or states. Not until the twentieth century in the U.S. did government record keeping of vital events become universal.	Name, date, place and sometimes parent's names, including mother's maiden name
Vital Records – Created by Religious Institutions	Records kept by religious institutions of parishioners, including marriage certificates, baptisms, confirmations, burials, birth records, Hebrew School attendance, and other materials.	Same as above, plus witnesses to the event
Vital Records – Created by Families	Bible records	Name and date and sometimes place
Census	US Census: Every ten years beginning in 1790. Until 1850, the census only listed the head of household and tabulated the ages of household members by age categories. From 1850 onward, the census became a much more useful source of genealogical information.State Census: Some states conducted their own censuses in between federal census years.	Name, age, and gender of each family member, occupation, birthplace and other information, depending on year
Cemeteries	Tombstones vary in the amount of information captured. Online websites such as Findagrave.com may include transcriptions of obituaries or biographical information in addition to a photo of the tombstone.	Name, date of birth, date of death. Sometimes the maiden name and the place of birth are included.

Immigration and Emigration Records	Records generated in tracking individuals arriving or departing a country. Includes ship passenger lists, border crossing records, and passport applications.	Few lists pre-1820. From 1820-1893 – just the name, age, gender and country of origin were recorded. Beginning in 1893 more extensive information such as last residence and marital status were captured. Passport applications typically include name, date and place of birth.
Naturalization and Citizenship Records	Records generated through the process of an individual applying for and becoming a citizen of a country. Beginning in 1790 the US naturalization process required two steps. After living in the U.S. for at least two years a person could file a declaration of intent to become a citizen, followed three years later by a petition for naturalization. The final certificate was issued based on the petition.	Name, nationality, date and place of birth, port and date of arrival. After 1907, may find spouses name, date and place of birth as well as information about children.
Land and Property	Records generated by the purchase and sale of land, such as warrants, deeds and mortgages. In the colonial period, most rural heads of house owned land.	Name, name of wife, names of family members, names of neighbors. Some states, such as Maryland, gave parcels of land names such as "Peace," or "Dorsey's Folly," which makes tracing ownership across generations somewhat easier.
Probate	Records generated by the process of settling an estate after death. If a person made a will, they are said to have died "testate;" without a will, "intestate."	Wills mention relationships: husband, wife, children.
Taxation	Records generated to track receipt of taxes paid to government.	Name, property. In colonial periods, the presence of a name on a list signified the person was of legal age (16, 18 or 21 depending on the colony).

	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	Draft: Name, age, place of birth, occupation, residence. Service: Name, age, dates of service Pension: Name, date of birth, death, family members.
Military		
Newspapers	Birth, marriage and death notices are the principle uses of newspapers by genealogists although some ancestors generate news articles.	Names, dates of events, location, family members.

Table 2: Other Sources of Genealogical Information

Source	Description	Information
Compiled genealogies	Published family histories	Descendants, lineage. Some compiled genealogies have been carefully documented, others present data without source citations and must be treated as finding aids.
Local Histories	Histories of towns, counties, and states provide a wealth of useful information for genealogists. They describe the early settlement of an area and describe the founding of churches, schools, and businesses. Many histories include lists of pioneers, soldiers, and civil officials. Prominent citizens receive a biographical write-up.	Names, relationships, places, occupations. These histories may place your ancestor in an area before the ancestor left a record.
Biographies	Life histories of prominent people	Names, relationships, migration patterns, occupations, residences.

Table 3: Suggested Records by Information Needed.

Information Needed	Search These Records First	Then Search These Records
Age	Census, Vital Records, Cemeteries	Military Records, Taxation
Birth date and place	Vital Records	Cemeteries, Newspapers, Census
Country of foreign birth	Naturalization Records, Vital Records, Census	Military Records, Vital Records, Newspapers
Death date and place	Vital Records, Cemeteries, Probate Records, Newspapers	Newspapers, Bible Records, Military Records
Foreign birth location	Vital Records, Published Genealogies, Biographies, Naturalization, Immigration, Census	Vital Records, Newspapers, History, Emigration and Immigration
Immigration date	Census, Immigration, Naturalization	Newspapers, Biographies
Maiden name	Vital Records, Newspapers	Cemeteries, Military Records, Probate Records
Marriage date and place	Vital Records, Census, Newspapers	Cemeteries, Military Records, Probate Records, Naturalization, Land
Parents' names	Vital Records, Census, Probate Records, Newspapers, Published Genealogies	Emigration
Places family has lived	Census, Land, Local Histories, Directories	Military Records, Taxation, Obituaries

Tips

Start your research with the U.S. Federal census. The census will anchor your ancestor to a place and time and give you clues about family relationships.