Genealogy Research in California

California Birth, Marriage and Death Records
Churches kept the earliest records of births, marriages, and deaths. Counties began recording some vital records in the 1800’s. Statewide registration of births, marriages, and deaths began in 1905.


Birth and Death Records
**The County Recorder’s office**: Obtain a copy of a county birth or death record from this office.
**California Department of Public Health Vital Records** – Request “informational copies” of California birth and death records from 1905 to the present. Certified copies are restricted.

Marriage Records
**County Recorder’s Office** – Obtain a copy of a “public” marriage record. The beginning year of records varies by county.
**County Clerk** – “Confidential” marriage records are kept in this county office. Access to these records is restricted.
**County Superior Court’s office** stores copies of divorce records.
**California Department of Public Health Vital Records** – Request “informational copies” of California marriage records from 1905 to the present. Certified copies are restricted.

Some Californians got married in bordering states, especially Nevada.

Other Records giving Birth, Marriage or Death Information:
- Newspaper announcements
- Church records
- Military records
- Census records
- Family Bibles
- Funeral Home/Cemetery/Probate records

California Churches
Spanish Mission Records list many of the earliest settlers.
View an index of Spanish mission censuses from 1796 to 1798 on Ancestry.com.

Major Repositories of California Genealogical Information
California State Archives · California State Library · Sutro Library · California Historical Society · California Genealogical Society · Huntington Library · UC Berkeley Bancroft Library · Los Angeles Public Library · Chinese Historical Society · National Archives Pacific Region (Riverside) · National Archives Pacific Region (San Francisco) · Family History Library

California Migration Routes
Applegate Trail · Butterfield Overland Mail · California Trail · Camino Real de California · Central Overland Trail · Mormon Trail to Southern California · Old Spanish Trail · Atlantic and Pacific Railroad · Central Pacific Railroad · Santa Fe Railway · Southern Pacific Railroad · Texas and Pacific Railway · Union Pacific Railroad

The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - [http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html](http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html)
Land Records
Spain issued land grants until 1822. Mexico then granted land until 1846. Disenos land grant maps were created from 1827-1846. They were used by the Spanish, Mexican and United States governments to demonstrate land grant boundaries for individuals. They have been digitized and can be viewed at https://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/disenos-collection/.
View colonial land grant records at The California State Archives and at the U of C Berkeley’s Bancroft Library.
In 1848, the U.S. government agreed to honor the colonial land grants. The 1852 Land Commission processed the claims to those land grants.
View copies of U. S. government land grants from 1852 – 1910 at the National Archives (NARA) and at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, UT.
The U.S. government sold California Public Domain land beginning in 1853. View Land Patents for these sales on the Bureau of Land Management website www.glorecords.blm.gov. Use the information from the patents to request the records from NARA at www.archives.gov/research/land
Deeds and private land sales were recorded by the County Recorder where the land was located. View San Mateo and San Francisco County deeds on FamilySearch.org.
California Immigration Records
Many Latinos crossed the border from Mexico into California.
View Border Crossing records from 1903 to 1957 on FamilySearch.org and on Ancestry.com
The most used ports of entry for overseas arrivals were San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles.
Various collections of passenger lists are located on FamilySearch.org and on Ancestry.com.
From 1910 to 1940, Chinese immigrants were screened and many were detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco. Ancestry.com has an index of The Chinese Arrival Case Files. If you find your ancestors in this index, use the information to view copies of the case files at the National Archives branch in San Bruno, CA.

California Genealogy Websites
NOTE: Check online for the GenWeb and Genealogy Trails of the county in which your ancestor lived.

California Bound - Passenger list of those bound from NY to CA for the Gold Rush - http://www.sfgenealogy.com/californiabound/cb188.htm
California Genealogical Society & Library – free/$ - free search California Names Index – order a specific record for $10 – San Francisco and newspaper records available to members - http://www.californiasecrets.org/
California GenWeb – links to variety of genealogical records organized by county - www.cagenweb.com
California State Archives – city censuses 1897 – 1938; military, prison and county records, Disenos land grant maps - www.sos.ca.gov/archives
California State Library – 1852 state census; county voter registers; pioneer card file; cemetery records; LA county baptisms; pioneer obits; early wills - www.library.ca.gov
DAR California Pioneers – index of names submitted to the California DAR, volume and page # of their record - http://cagenweb.com/cpl/dar1.htm
Early California Population Project – search, view images of baptism, marriage, and burial records in California's historic mission registers, encompassing the years 1769 – 1850 - http://www.huntington.org/Information/ECPPLogin.htm
Italian Americans in California – historical information about Italian immigrants in California - http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/italianamericans/index.html
Museum of City of San Francisco – read online biographies, articles, etc. of people and events in San Francisco history, links to other websites - http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/subjects.html
Norcal Genealogy, SF Genealogy – links to genealogy and history databases about northern California residents - http://www.sfgenealogy.com/norcal/caldata.htm#calvitals
Online Archive of California – indexed lists, descriptions of collections of diaries, letters, photos, at over 200 organizations - http://www.oac.cdlib.org/
Online County Histories - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il
San Diego Genealogical Society – tax lists, early deed indexes, church, mortuary, newspaper and cemetery records of San Diego County – www.casdgs.org
Spanish 1790 Census of California – online transcription of census - www.sfgenealogy.com/spanish/cen1790.htm

Western States Marriage Index – marriages in selected counties in California - http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/aboutWesternStates.cfm

California African American Research
AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrogeneas.com/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized -https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/

Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of “Information Wanted” advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Voyages - the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; Intra-American Slave Trade Database documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the African Names Database gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

California Cemetery Research
Find a Grave – transcriptions of burial information, photos, some obits, etc. - www.findagrave.com
Brawley, Imperial County, CA Riverview Cemetery District: search listing by name or browse entire listing of burials – name links viewer to whatever information is available, which can include birth, death, veteran status, cemetery map and photo of stone - http://riverviewcemeterydistrict.com/BurialsOnTheWeb
Santa Clara, CA: Mission City Memorial Park – index of burial information; cemetery map - http://www.schgs.org/research/databases/

California Military Research
California, Military Registers, 1858-1923 – name indexes for Independent Militia Units, 1851–1866, and Civil War Volunteers, 1861–1867; organization papers and muster rolls of California units in the Civil War, the Indian Wars, the Spanish–American War, and World War I – www.ancestry.com.
California State Archives – California Adjutant General’s office records, 1849 - 1945 - www.sos.ca.gov/archives
California State Military Museum – links to records of California soldiers in various wars – www.militarymuseum.org
Fold3.com – indexes of U. S. military service and pension records, many records of California soldiers in the Civil War and the World Wars
Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/


Note: Military draft registrations are located on the websites Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org and Fold3.

**California Native American Research**

Native American Tribes of California - [http://www.native-languages.org/california.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/california.htm)

**California Newspaper Research**

Amador County Local Newspapers 1855 – 2004 – search 9 newspapers, various years of publication - [https://dr652b.bmiimaging.com/index/index?datasetName=Amador%20County%20Library](https://dr652b.bmiimaging.com/index/index?datasetName=Amador%20County%20Library)

California Digital Newspaper Collection – search over 400,000 pages of California newspapers 1846 to the present - [https://cdnc.ucr.edu/](https://cdnc.ucr.edu/)

California Online Historical Newspapers – location, years of publication, of digitized California newspapers, links to websites – [https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home/usa/ca](https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home/usa/ca)

Chronicling America – [www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:

- *FamilySearch.org* Wiki
- Family Tree Magazine
- *The Weekly Genealogist, NEHGS; Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter; The Genealogy Newsline*