

GENEALOGY TERM	DEFINITION
Abatement	Abatement is the difference between the amount of the estate an heir is to receive as specified in a will and the amount the heir actually received, due to property devaluation between the time the will was made and when the death occurred; the entry of a stranger into the estate after the death of the possessor but before the heir or devisee can take control.
Abstract	An abstract is a summary of a particular record or document. This summary usually contains only the most important information from the original document. Sometimes you may use abstracts instead of original documents when you do your research, and you may also create them for yourself when looking at original documents.
Administration	Administration is the management of the settlement of an estate.
Administrator	An administrator is an appointee of the court who settles the estate of a deceased person who died without leaving a will.
Ahnentafel numbers	Ahnentafel numbers are a numbering system used to identify each individual in a family tree. The formula states that an individual's father is twice that individual's number, and that an individual's mother is twice that individual's number plus one. For example, if your Ahnentafel number is 1, your father's is 2, and your mother's is 3.
Ancestor	Your ancestors are the individuals from whom you are descended. For example, your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and so on are your ancestors. (In general, we don't call our parents and grandparents our "ancestors." When we talk about ancestors, we are normally referring to more distant, deceased relatives.)
Ancestral	Of or inherited from an ancestor or ancestors.
Ancestral File	An ancestral file is a computerized file of individual and family records, created from records and pedigree charts submitted to the Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints since 1979. The purpose of the Ancestral File is to help people coordinate their research.
Ascendant	An ascendant is an ancestor.
Baptism	A Baptism is a ceremony or sacrament of admitting a person into Christianity or a specific Christian Church by dipping the person in water or pouring or sprinkling water on them.
Baptismal Certificate	A Baptismal Certificate is a formal document normally kept by a church, of baptisms that occurred in their congregation. It typically contains the names of the individuals baptized, the date of the baptism, where the baptism took place, the Clergyman's name, and the names of sponsors and place of residence.
Base-Born	A base-born individual was an illegitimate child.
Beneficiary	A Beneficiary is the person designated to receive the income of a trust or estate.
Bequest	Legacy; usually a gift of real estate by will.
Biographer	A biographer is the author of a biography.
Biography	A biography is a book written about a particular individual. You can also find compiled biographies, which are books that contain short biographies of many different people. A compiled biography normally is about a specific group of people. For example, you can find compiled biographies about individuals who were involved in a particular profession or who lived in a particular area. You can usually find the following information in a biography: occupation, accomplishments, affiliations, and family information.

Birth Certificate or Birth Record	A birth record contains information about the birth of an individual. On a birth record, you can usually find the mother's full maiden name and the father's full name, the name of the baby, the date of the birth, and county where the birth took place. Many birth records include other information, such as the birthplaces of the baby's parents, the addresses of the parents, the number of children that the parents have, and the race of the parents, and the parents' occupations.
Bond	A bond is a contract to carry out specific duties or actions. A penalty must be paid if the duties are not carried out satisfactorily. For example, couples often made marriage bonds prior to their marriage.
Bounty Land	Bounty land was land given to military servicemen as payment for their services. If the serviceman was killed in action, his heirs could also claim bounty land.
Bulletin Board System (BBS)	Bulletin Board Systems are used by many genealogists to share information. Larger BBSs, called commercial online services, include America Online, CompuServe, Prodigy, GEnie.
Cadastra	A Cadastra is a public record, survey, or map for tax purposes showing ownership and value of the land.
Cemetery Record	Cemetery caretakers usually keep records of the names and death dates of those buried, as well as maps of the grave sites. They may also keep more detailed records, including the names of the deceased's relatives. In addition to these paper records, you will find tombstones. Tombstones can provide information such as birth and death dates and the names of other family members.
Census Record	A census is an official enumeration of the population in a particular area. In addition to counting the inhabitants of an area, the census generally collects other vital information, such as names, ages, citizenship status, and ethnic background. The United States government began collecting census data in 1790, and has done so every 10 years since that date. Selected states have also conducted their own censuses over the years.
Chattels	Personal property, both animate and inanimate.
Christening	A Christening is a Christian ceremony of baptizing and giving a name to an infant.
Church Record	Church records are the formal documents that churches have kept about their congregations through the years. Churches normally record information about christenings, baptisms, marriages, and burials. The type of information you will find in the records are the name(s) of the individual(s) involved, the date of the event, the location of the event, and the clergyman's name. You may find additional information, such as parents' names (father's full name and mother's maiden name), the names of witnesses to an event, and the individual's (or family's) place of residence.
Clan	A clan is a Celtic group, especially in the Scottish Highlands comprising a number of households whose heads claim descent from a common ancestor.
Codicil	A codicil is a document or addition at the end of a will that changes the provisions in a will. The provisions in a codicil overrule the provisions in the original will.
Collateral Ancestor	A collateral ancestor is an ancestor not in the direct line of ascent, but of the same ancestral family.
Collateral Family	Collateral families are the families with whom your ancestors intermarried and moved.
Connubial	Connubial is of or relating to the married state: conjugal.
Consanguinity	Consanguinity is a close relation, kinship.
Conveyance	A conveyance is an instrument by which title to a property is conveyed.

Coroner's Inquest	A Coroner's inquest is a legal inquiry, or inquest by a Coroner, to determine the cause of a sudden or violent death.
Cousin	Today, a cousin is normally the children of an individual's aunts and uncles. However, In colonial times it often meant a niece or nephew. When looking at older records, be careful about establishing relationships based on the word "cousin."
Daughter-in-law	Today, a cousin is normally the children of an individual's aunts and uncles. In colonial times, however, it often meant niece or nephew. When looking at older records, be careful about establishing relationships based on the word "cousin."
Declaration of Intention	A declaration of intention is a document filed in a court by an alien who intended to become a United States citizen. It could also be a declaration filed by a couple in a local court, indicating their intention to marry.
Deed	A deed is a signed and usually sealed document containing some legal transfer, bargain, or contract.
Descendant	Your descendants are your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so on -- anyone to whom you are an ancestor.
Directory	Directories come in all types: city, telephone, county, regional, professional, religious, post office, street, ethnic, and school. The directories you search will depend on the type of information you know about the individual. The information that you can find in a directory depends on the type of directory. For example, city directories normally list names and addresses. In some city directories you can also find information such as children's names, marriage dates, death dates, and birth dates. Other types of directories may provide you with even more interesting information about your ancestors. For instance, a church directory may tell you about an individual's involvement in church activities, professional directories may give you insight into your ancestor's professional life, and club directories may contain information about your ancestor's involvement in social activities.
Double Date	A double date appears on some documents as a result of two changes introduced by the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 to resolve the error caused by the Julian calendar in use up to that time. Scientists resolved that a year was slightly longer than the 365 1/4 specified by the Julian calendar, which resulted in the loss of ten days. The new calendar also changed the first day of the year from March 25th on the Julian calendar to January 1st. Different countries adopted the new calendar at different times and the practice of providing a double date was common. The British Commonwealth and the United States adopted the new calendar in 1752. By this time, the calendar was behind by eleven days. So, the day following September 2, 1752 was decreed to be September 14, 1752.
Dower	A dower is the amount of an estate that a widow is entitled to upon the death of her husband. Under common law, it used to be that one-third of a man's estate went to his wife.
Download	Downloading is electronically extracting files from a network or bulletin board system for use on your own computer. Many bulletin board systems with genealogy sections have files that you can download.
Emigration	Emigration is when an individual leaves their home country to live in another country.
Entail	To entail is to restrict the inheritance of land to a specific group of heirs, such as an individual's sons.
Enumeration	Enumeration is the process by which persons are counted for purposes of a census.
Enumerator	An Enumerator is a Census Taker.

Executor	An executor is the individual chosen to carry out the instructions and provisions of a will.
Family Group Sheet	A family group sheet is a form which presents genealogical information about a nuclear family -- a husband, a wife, and their children. A family group sheet usually includes birth dates and places, death dates and places, and marriage dates and places. Family Tree Maker for Windows can help you create family group sheets for your family.
Family History/Genealogy	Family histories and genealogies are books which detail the basic genealogical facts about one or more generations of a particular family.
Family Pedigree	In general, family pedigrees refer to family group sheets that are linked in a computer system. When you access an individual's family group sheet in a linked pedigree, you also access all of the records that are linked to that individual.
Family Tree	A Family Tree is a genealogical diagram.
FamilySearch	You can find FamilySearch computers at the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or at one of the branch Family History Centers. The FamilySearch computer contains several databases of information: the Social Security Death Index, the Military Index, the Ancestral File, and the International Genealogical Index. You can use these resources to search for information about your family members right on the computer. You can also use the FamilySearch computer to look up items in the Family History Library Catalog. Because of the popularity of the FamilySearch computer, many Family History Centers require you to sign up for a time slot in advance.
Gazetteer	A gazetteer is a book which alphabetically names and describes the places in a specific area. For example, a gazetteer of a county would name and describe all of the towns, lakes, rivers, and mountains in the county.
GEDCOM	A GEDCOM is a standard file format for exchanging information between genealogy programs. The acronym GEDCOM stands for Genealogical Data Communications (GED). The Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS Church) developed the GEDCOM standard.
Genealogist	A Genealogist is a person who pursues the science or study of family descent. A professional genealogist is one who compiles family histories and genealogies for clients for a fee.
Genealogy	Genealogy is the study of family history and/or descent.
Grantee	A grantee is an individual who purchases or receives land. A grantor is the individual who sells or gives the land.
Grantor	A grantor is an individual who sells or gives the land. A grantee is the individual who purchases or receives land.
Holographic Will	A holographic or olographic will is handwritten and signed by the individual that the will belongs to.
Homestead	A homestead usually is a home on land obtained from the United States government. Part of the agreement between the individual and the government was that the individual had to live on the land and make improvements to it, such as adding buildings and clearing fields.
Husband	A husband is a married man; a man in his relationship with his spouse.
Illegitimate	An illegitimate child is a child that is born out of wedlock.
Immigration	Immigration is when an individual goes into a new country to live.

Indenture	An indenture is a contract stating that an individual would work for another individual for a specific number of years. Many early immigrants to the United States came over as indentured servants -- someone else paid for their trip over, and in return they had to work for the individual for several years.
Indenture	An indenture is a contract binding one person to work for another for a given period of time.
Index	In genealogical terms, an index is an alphabetical list of names that were taken from a particular set of records. For example, a census record index lists the names of individuals that are found in a particular set of census records. Indexes mostly come in book form, but you can also find them on CD-ROM, microfilm, and microfiche.
International Genealogical Index (IGI)	The International Genealogical Index (IGI) is one of the resources of the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Containing approximately 250 million names, it is an index of people's names that were either submitted to the church, or were extracted from records that the church has microfilmed over the years. You can use the IGI to locate information about your ancestors.
Intestate	When a person dies without having made a legal will, their estate is intestate.
Inventory	An inventory is a legal list of all the property in a deceased person's estate. The executor of the will is required to make an inventory.
Issue	Issue refers to an individual's children.
Land Record	Land records are deeds -- proof that a piece of land is owned by a particular individual. The information you receive from the records will vary, but you will at least get a name, the location of the property, and the period of ownership.
Lineage	Lineage is a direct descent from an ancestor.
Local History	A local history is usually a book about a particular town or county. Local histories were quite popular in the late 19th century. While they often give the history of the development of the area, they usually also include some information about the important families that lived there.
Manumission	Manumission is the act of being released from slavery or servitude.
Manuscript	Manuscripts are usually unpublished family histories or collections of family papers. Depending on what the manuscript contains, you may be able to find all kinds of family information. Generally, you will find more than just names, birth dates, and death dates.
Marriage Banns	Marriage banns were a religious tradition by which engaged couples had to announce their intention to marry. This announcement allowed anyone in the congregation to voice a protest. The marriage banns normally took place a few weeks before the actual marriage date, so be careful when you're looking at church records. Make sure you don't confuse the date of the marriage banns with the date of the actual wedding.
Marriage Bond	A marriage bond is document obtained by an engaged couple prior to their marriage. It affirmed that there was no moral or legal reason why the couple could not be married. In addition, the man affirmed that he would be able to support himself and his new bride.
Marriage Record	A marriage record contains information about a marriage between two individuals. On a marriage record, you can at least find the bride's and groom's full names, the date of the marriage, and county where the marriage took place. Many marriage records include other information, such as the names and birthplaces of the bride's and groom's parents, the addresses of the bride and groom, information about previous marriages, and the names of the witnesses to the marriage.
Metes and Bounds	A description of the boundaries of a piece of land that uses landmarks such as stones, hills, and trees.

Military Records	The US government has always kept records on all military and civilian workers. Most of these files have very detailed information, such as the individual's name, their spouse's name, date of birth, place of residence, which wars the individual served in, their military organization (Navy, Marines, or Army), when the individual's service began and ended, where and when the individual died, and where the individual was buried. The amount of information you get will depend on the record and the point at which the file began. The National Archives has the following types of military records: pension records, bounty land records, service records, personnel records, draft or conscription records, regular military forces records, and burial or cemetery records.
Mortality Schedule	Mortality schedules counted the number of deaths that occurred in the year before the census was taken, and exist for the 1850 through 1880 censuses. This means that there are only four schedules currently available for the U.S. census. A mortality schedule lists the individual's name, age, sex, occupation, cause of death, date of death, and place of death by county.
Mulatto	A mulatto is legally considered to be an individual with mixed black and white heritage. However, some individuals who were designated mulattos may have a slightly more mixed parentage, perhaps including Native American blood. The 1850 and 1860 censuses only allowed an individual to describe himself as white, black, or mulatto. In 1870, these categories were expanded to include Chinese and Native American as well. The ethnicity selected for your ancestor in one of the censuses may not be completely reliable, however, because often the census takers did not ask about an individual's ethnic heritage. Instead, they put down an ethnicity based on what the person looked like.
Naturalization Record	Naturalization records document the process by which an immigrant becomes a citizen. An individual has to live in the United States for a specific period of time and file a series of forms with a court before he or she can become naturalized. Naturalization records provide the following information: place and date of birth, date of arrival into the United States, place of residence at the time of naturalization, a personal description, and sometimes the name of the ship that the individual arrived on and the individual's occupation.
Née	Née literally means "born." It is usually used to refer to a woman's maiden name. For example, "Mary Lincoln, née Todd."
Newspaper Announcement	Normally, newspapers announce events of genealogical interest such as births, deaths, and marriages. The amount of information in these announcements will vary. Most likely you will find the names of the individuals involved in the event, the date of the event, and where the event took place. Sometimes you can even find pictures.
Nuclear Family	A nuclear family is a family group that consists only of father, mother and children.
Olographic Will	An olographic or holographic will is handwritten and signed by the individual that the will belongs to.
Onomastics	Onomastics is the science or study of the origin and forms of proper names of persons or places.
Oral History	An oral history is a collection of family stories told by a member of the family or by a close family friend. Normally, an oral history is transcribed onto paper, or is video or tape recorded. Oral histories can yield some of the best information about a family -- the kinds of things that you won't find written in records.

Passenger List	Passenger lists are lists of the names and information about passengers that arrived on ships into the United States. These lists were submitted to customs collectors at every port by the ship's master. Passenger lists were not officially required by the United States government until 1820. Before that date, the information about each passenger varied widely, from names to number of bags. The contents of post-1820 passenger lists also varied over the years, with more information being collected in the later years. However, the lists always included each individual's name, age, sex, occupation, and nationality. Later passenger lists began to include information such as marital status, last place of residence, destination in the United States, personal description, and birthplace.
Patronymics	Patronymics is the practice of creating last names from the name of one's father. For example, Richard, John's son, would become Richard Johnson. Richard Johnson's son William would become William Richardson.
Peerage	A peerage is a book containing a list of peers with their genealogy, history, and titles.
Pedigree Chart	A pedigree chart is a form for recording an individual's ancestry. It usually includes that person's parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on, but does not include brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and other relatives.
Primary Source	Primary sources are records that were created at the time of an event. For example, a primary source for a birth date would be a birth certificate. While you can find birth dates on other documents, such as marriage certificates, they would not be primary sources for the birth date, because they were not created at the time of the birth.
Primogenitor	A Primogenitor is an ancestor, forefather.
Probate Record	Probate records are records disposing of a deceased individual's property. They may include an individual's last will and testament, if one was made. The information you can get from probate records varies, but usually includes the name of the deceased, either the deceased's age at the time of death or birth date, property, members of the family, and the last place of residence.
Progenitor	A progenitor is a direct ancestor. For example, your father's father is your progenitor. Your father's father's brother is not your progenitor.
Progeny	Progeny is descendants, children.
Public Domain	The public domain is land belonging to the U.S. government. Many homesteaders settled on public domain land in the mid-19th century.
Quadroon	A quadroon is an individual with one black grandparent.
Quitclaim Deed	A quitclaim deed is a legal document giving up one's rights to a piece of land without guaranteeing the title of the land.
Record Agent	A Record Agent is a person specializing in the knowledge of records and sources.
Redemptioner	A Redemptioner is an immigrant to the United States in the 17th and 18th centuries who obtained passage by becoming an indentured servant.
Relict	A relict is a widow.
Researcher ID Card	All researchers using original records at the National Archives or National Archives regional centers must get a researcher ID card. If you just plan to use microfilmed records, you do not need to get an ID card. To get an ID card, bring photo identification, such as a driver's license, school identification card, or passport on your first visit to the archives. You will also be asked to fill out an application. Researcher ID cards are free of charge and are valid for two years. The ID card must be presented at each visit.

Secondary Source	A secondary source is a record that was created a significant amount of time after an event occurred. For example, a marriage certificate would be a secondary source for a birth date, because the birth took place several years before the time of the marriage. However, that same marriage certificate would be a primary source for a marriage date, because it was created at the time of the marriage.
Self-addressed Stamped Envelope (SASE)	When you request records or other information from people and institutions, you should include a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) in your letter. Of course, a SASE with U.S. postage stamps on it is only good in the United States. If you are expecting return mail from overseas, you should include an International Reply Coupon with your self-addressed envelope. This coupon serves as payment for any international postage you may need to pay. They can be purchased at your local post office.
Sepulchre	Sepulchre is a place of burial, tomb.
Sibling	A sibling is a brother or sister.
Sine Prole	A sine prole is without offspring, sometimes seen as D.S.P. (died sine prole).
Social Security Death Index	The Social Security Death Index is an index of Social Security Death records. Generally this includes names of deceased Social Security recipients whose relatives applied for Social Security Death Benefits after their passing. Also included in the millions of records are approximately 400,000 railroad retirement records from the early 1900s to 1950s. You can find the following information in the Social Security Death Index: the individual's name and Soundex code, birth date, death date, Social Security number and state where it was issued. Seventy-seven percent of the records contain the Zip Code of the individual's last known residence and the primary location associated with it. Fifteen percent of the records contain the Zip Code of the address where the death benefit payment was sent and the primary location associated with it.
Soundex	As you may know, most last names can be spelled in a variety of ways. For example, "Smith" can also be spelled "Smyth," "Smithe," and "Smythe." This is one of the reasons why the Works Progress Administration created Soundex in the late 1930s. Soundex is a method of giving names sound codes. It is important to understand, because it was used by the United States government to index the surnames of some of the United States census records and ship passenger lists. By grouping together last names that sound similar, Soundex allows people to search for ancestors, even when the surname may have been recorded in any of several different spellings. Only the 1880, 1900, 1920, and part of the 1910 census have Soundex indexes.
Sponsor	A sponsor is an individual other than the parents of a child that takes responsibility for the child's religious education. Sponsors are usually present at a child's baptism. Sponsors are also referred to as godparents.
Step-brother	A step-brother is a person's step-parent's son by a former marriage.
Step-child	A step-child is of a person's spouse by a previous marriage; dte-daughter or step-son.
Step-daughter	A step-daughter is a person's step-parent's daughter by a former marriage.
Step-parent	A step-parent is the spouse of a person's parent.
Testament	A testament is the act by which a person determines the disposition of his or her property after death.
Tithe	A tithe is a tenth part of something paid as a voluntary contribution or as a tax especially for the support of a religious establishment.
Trustee	A trustee is a natural or legal person to whom property is legally committed to be administered for the benefit of a beneficiary.

	Vital records document the "major" events of an individual's life: birth, marriage, death, and divorce. In general, vital records weren't kept in the United States until the early 1900s. Vital records usually contain the full name of the individual involved in the event, the date of the event, and the county, state, or town where the event took place. Many vital records contain much more information. For example, marriage records often record the names and birthplaces of each individual's parents. Divorce records usually list the names of the couple's children. Death certificates often mention where the individual will be buried, and also give the name of the individual who reported the death.
Vital Record	
Widow	A widow is a woman whose husband is deceased.
Widower	A widower is a man whose wife is deceased.
Wife	A wife is a married woman; a woman in her relationship with her spouse.
Witness	A witness is an individual present at an event such as a marriage or the signing of a document who can vouch that the event took place.