

Researching Iowa Birth, Death, Marriage and Divorce Records Library and Archives Research Center, Des Moines

Records of vital statistics are excellent sources of genealogical information. Prior to 1880, only marriages, which required a license, were recorded in public records, and then only at the county level. In 1880, legislation was passed creating the Iowa Department of Health and requiring all births, deaths and marriages to be recorded at both the county and state levels; however, many births and deaths went unrecorded prior to 1921.

Current state law requires that all records of vital statistics recorded at the state level must be 75 years or older to be made available to the public by the State Archives. State law also requires that all records of fetal deaths be closed. The State Historical Society of Iowa and the Iowa Genealogical Society have worked with the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) in purging all references to fetal death from the birth and death records microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah in the counties; thus making accessible on county records microfilm the remaining births and deaths. The end date for vital records in each county depends on the year that the Genealogical Society of Utah filmed the records.

Certified Copies

Certified copies of Birth Certificates, Death Certificates, and Marriage Records are available from the Department of Public Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Lucas Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa or from the County Recorder.

BIRTH RECORDS

Record Type	Collection	Dates
Birth Records	County Records Microfilm	1880-1904, 1906-Varies

Check the multi-volume [County Records Microfilm Guide](#) for individual county holdings, inclusive dates and indexes. Between 1880 and 1897, data requested included the child's name, sex, race or color, date and place of birth; father's name, age, occupation, place of birth and nationality; and mother's maiden name, age, and residence; as well as the names of the medical attendant. In 1898, a much shorter return form was introduced, requesting only the child's name, sex, and date and place of birth; mother's full name; and father's name.

In 1904, a birth certificate form was developed. Information requested on the certificate included the child's name, sex, and date and place of birth; father's name, age, color, occupation, place of birth and residence; mother's full maiden name, age, color, occupation, place of birth and residence; and the name of the medical attendant.

Record Type	Collection	Dates
Delayed Birth Certificates	State Records Microfilm, Public Health	1848, 1852-1916

Information included on a delayed birth certificate is similar to that of a birth certificate and includes sources of documentation and the date of recording.

There is a statewide index to this series on microfiche available at the Library and Archives Research Center reference desk. It is arranged alphabetically by name and includes date and county of birth, certificate number and microfilm roll number. Most Delayed Birth Certificates were filed many years after the birth. There are approximately 35,000 certificates for pre-1880, births covering years that births were not recorded in Iowa, as well as a total of about 400,000 certificates for births dating from 1880 to 1916.

DEATH RECORDS

Record Type	Collection	Dates
Death Records	County Records Microfilm	1880-1904, 1906-Varies

Check the multi-volume [County Records Microfilm Guide](#) for individual county holdings, inclusive dates and indexes.

Between 1880 and 1904, information requested for each death entry includes the deceased's name, sex, color, age, occupation, marital status, nationality, place of birth, place of death, cause of death and place of burial.

In 1904, a certificate format was created and the information requested was expanded to include date of birth and names of parents and their place of birth. A statewide index to deaths from 1904 to 1916 is available on microfiche at the Reference Desk. It is arranged alphabetically by name and includes date of death, county and certificate number. This index can be very helpful – as it indicates if the death was recorded and identifies the county. Next check the County Records Microfilm for the death record. If the death cannot be located on County Records Microfilm you may request a photocopy of the state death certificate.

Many gaps exist in county microfilm for deaths from 1917 to 1940. In an attempt to make all death records, except for fetal deaths, indexes were created for state death certificates through 1939. The indexes are [available online](#) and you may request photocopies of indexed certificates.

MARRIAGE RECORDS

Record Type	Collection	Dates
Marriage Records	County Records Microfilm	c.1835-Varies
Marriage Records	State Records Microfilm, Public Health	1880-1937
Marriage Records	Ancestry.com (Free use in Research Center)	1880-1937

Marriages were recorded at the county level even before Iowa became a territory. Information entered for early marriages usually includes only the names of the bride and groom, date, and the person conducting the ceremony. In 1880, legislation required that marriages be recorded at both the county and state levels. Check the County Records Microfilm Guide for individual county holdings and inclusive dates.

After 1880, the information requested for each marriage was greatly expanded to include the groom's residence, age, color, race, and place of birth, occupation, father's name, and mother's maiden name; as well as bride's residence, color, race, place of birth, father's name, and mother's maiden name. After 1900, the county level record is sometimes a shortened version of the state marriage record which include place of birth of the bride and groom or names of parents.

Record Type	Collection	Dates
Divorce Records	State Records Microfilm, Public Health	1906-1937
Divorce Records	State Records Volumes, Public Health	1838-1940

Legislation enacted in 1906 requires the County Clerk of Court report all divorces to the Iowa Department of Health. The divorce record includes the name of each party, age, and nationality, date and place of marriage, county and cause of divorce and number of children affected.