

Notes

## CHAPTER 6

# GATHERING INFORMATION FROM PUBLIC RECORDS

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### More Than Your Own Strength

Once you have gathered and recorded the family history information readily available from your home and family, you may need to search public records to find more information. As your research becomes more challenging, remember the words of President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency:



“After you find the first few generations, the road will become more difficult. . . . You will be tempted to stop and leave the hard work of finding to others who are more expert or to another time in your life. But you will also feel a tug on your heart to go on in the work, hard as it will be.

“As you decide, remember that the names which will be so difficult to find are of real people to whom you owe your existence in this world and whom you will meet again in the spirit world. . . . Their hearts are bound to you. Their hope is in your hands. You will have more than your own strength as you choose to labor on to find them” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 82; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 79–80).

### Public Records to Search

There are many kinds of public records that you can search. Governments and churches often keep records of specific life events. These records may record events that occurred hundreds of years ago. In many cases the records were very carefully maintained. Examples include:

**Vital records.** Vital records often contain the dates and places of births, marriages, and deaths, which are important for temple ordinances. Vital records are usually found in government offices and churches near the places where your ancestors lived. In some countries, vital records are also called civil registration records.

**Census records.** Census records are a rich source of information about individuals and families. These records often list names, ages, relationships, birthplaces, and occupations. Thousands of census records have been filmed and made available for easy use on the Internet and in family history centers throughout the world.

**Immigration records.** Immigration records were created when an individual or a family arrived in a new country. These records are helpful in finding names and birthplaces of family members and dates of arrival in the new country. Many collections of immigration records can be found on the Internet and in family history centers throughout the world.

**Newspapers.** Newspapers may include articles about your ancestors and often include obituaries announcing the deaths of local citizens. Obituaries often contain valuable details about a person, including information about birthplace, birthdate, family members, religion, and burial.

**Church records.** Church records may provide information not available in other types of records. Churches often kept records of births, marriages, and deaths when local governments did not. These records can play an important role in your search for family information.

**Cemetery records.** Cemetery records, such as tombstone and sexton records, may give birth and death dates, age at death, name of spouse, names of children, and maiden names. Birthplaces are occasionally mentioned. Tombstones may have symbols or insignia suggesting military service and social, fraternal, or religious affiliations.

## Gathering Information from Public Records

To begin using public records, follow these steps:

1. **Pray for guidance.** You will have many choices to make, including choices about which ancestors to focus on, what information to look for, what records to search, and where to obtain those records. Ask the Lord to guide you and help you make the right decisions.
2. **Choose an ancestor.** You will be most effective if you focus on gathering information about a single ancestor or family. You may also want to identify the specific event—such as birth, death, or marriage—about which you want to seek information.

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3. **Use the Record Selection Table.** After you have decided what information you want to find, use the Record Selection Table in appendix C to help you decide which records you should search. If necessary, ask your family history consultant for help.
4. **Find the record.** Visit or contact the place where the record is kept. You can visit in person, or you can write, call, e-mail, or use the Internet to inquire about the records. Useful records could be stored in family history centers, libraries, archives, churches, courthouses, and on Internet sites. A few of these places are described below:

*Family history centers.* The Church has microfilmed public records from all over the world. Digital images of many of these records can be viewed online at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). Some of these records are available only on microfilm. You can order copies of these microfilms at a family history center for a small fee and then use the films at the center for several weeks at a time. Ordering films from a family history center is an easy and less-expensive way to search through record collections without having to travel long distances.

*Internet sites.* Your family history consultant may be able to recommend Internet sites for you to search. National, state, provincial, and county offices across the world publish their record collections on the Internet. You can check these Internet sites for vital record collections, newspapers, local history records, and church records. Some of these sites allow users to view their record collections at no cost. Many family history Internet sites are available at your local family history center at no cost.

*Archives and libraries.* National, state, provincial, and county archives store records created by government organizations. Public libraries also store many valuable records, such as newspapers and obituaries. If you cannot find the records of your ancestors on the Internet, you may want to visit government archives or local libraries in areas where your ancestors lived. Ask your family history consultant to help you plan your visits to these organizations.

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## Keeping Notes on What You Find

A research log is a record of where you have looked for family history information and what you have found. A sample research log is included in appendix A. Research logs help you organize your work and keep you and others from repeating research that has already been done. Record the following information in your research log:

**Who.** Write the name of the person you are researching and the contact information for people who can help in your search.

**What.** Record your research objectives, the kinds of sources you use, and what you discover, even if all you discover is a dead end.

Research Log					
Ancestor's name <u>James T. Lighter</u>					
Objective(s) <u>Find parents of James T. Lighter</u>				Locality <u>Stillwater, Ontario, Canada</u>	
Date of search	Location/ call number	Description of source (author, title, year, pages)	Comments (purpose of search, results, years and names searched)	Doc. number	
9/27/04	FHL Film # 1, 243, 241	Vital records of Stillwater, Canada	To find if a birth record exists for James T. Lighter with his parents	#124	
9/27/04	NAWL Stillwater, Ontario, Canada	Telephone call to Reese Cally	Ask what his father remembers about James T. Lighter	#125	
9/29/04	Personal possession of Gloria Dennison	Jurnal of James Lighter	James talks about his parents in detail, gives full names, along with extensive genealogy in Journal #1.	#126	

**Where.** Record the location or call number for each source and the places where events occurred in the lives of your ancestors.

**When.** Include the date when you use a particular source, and record the dates of important events in the lives of your ancestors.



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### ASSIGNMENTS

- **Use the Record Selection Table** in appendix C to identify a type of record that might contain additional information about an ancestor.
- **Contact the place where the record is kept.** You can visit the place in person, or you can write, call, e-mail, or use the Internet to inquire about the records. See what information you find on the records.
- **Record the results** of your search in your research log (see appendix A). Record any new information in the FamilySearch Internet site or on paper forms.
- **If you are taking the Temple and Family History course,** prepare for the next class by reading chapter 7.



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Henry B. Eyring, "Hearts Bound Together," *Ensign*, May 2005, 77–80.
- Alan E. Mann and Marvin R. Zautcke, "Family History via the Internet," *Ensign*, July 2000, 50–55.
- Sally Johnson Odekirk, "Putting the Puzzle Together," *New Era*, Nov. 2006, 18–22.
- *A Guide to Research* (30971).