

THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Te Tari Taiwhenua

Family Record Research



A guide to tracing your
Family History

Births, Deaths and Marriages
January 2008

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Introduction

This brochure is written to assist persons using Births, Deaths and Marriages registers to undertake family history research. It contains details about the registered information we hold and how you can obtain this information.

Births, Deaths and Marriages registers and maintains New Zealand birth, death, marriage and civil union information and provides access to that information by issuing certificates and printouts.

While our registers hold a small number of overseas births, deaths and marriages, generally, the registers only contain life events that occurred in New Zealand. For information about births, deaths, marriages and civil unions in other countries you should:

- search the Internet for the appropriate overseas registry office
- inquire at your local public library for material on family history research in the country in which the event took place
- contact a genealogical group/society for assistance.

Always contact the overseas registry office to ensure your request includes all the information they need to search their records.

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History of Births, Deaths and Marriages

The registration of New Zealand births and deaths was first required by legislation in 1848 and for marriage records in 1854.

The registration of Māori births and deaths did not become compulsory until 1913 although some earlier Māori births and deaths were registered in the general system.

The first civil unions in New Zealand were solemnised on 29 April 2005 (3-days after the Civil Union Act 2004 came into force on 26 April 2005).

For more information about the history of Births, Deaths and Marriages please refer to our book titled “Little Histories *Reflections on the keeping of New Zealand’s registers of births deaths & marriages*”. Contact us to purchase this book or you may view a copy on our website at www.bdm.govt.nz.

Personal information has been collected and held in accordance with the various Acts since 1848. The information forms part of a public register and with a few restrictions (e.g., in respect of adoptions and sexual reassignment), Births, Deaths and Marriages makes the information available to any member of the public by way of a certificate or printout, provided they meet certain criteria.

How our records are compiled

Generally, the births are registered by the parents and deaths by a funeral director who obtains the information from the next of kin or a relative of the deceased. There is also special provision for the registration of deaths of service persons whose deaths occur overseas. As the information is provided to Births, Deaths and Marriages by an informant, there is always the possibility of error, in the spelling of names or in other particulars. The records can only be as accurate as the information provided. It is frequently found that people use and are known by first names other than those under which their births were registered. This can lead to all kinds of misunderstandings in family record research. All reasonable care is taken to ensure that the particulars entered in the registers are accurate.

Prior to the computerisation of records in 1998

At the end of each month, Registrars sent to the central registry office the original of all the entries made during the month. These returns were made on a standard form, were sorted and the individual pages (or folios, as we call them) were then numbered in one series to cover the whole country. An index was then prepared for each record to give surname, first names, and folio number. Since 1955 the district of registration has been added and since 1960 the mother's first name has been included in the birth index. In the case of death registrations, the date of birth of the deceased was shown.

This process was repeated for each month, with the folio serial numbers for the month following on from those of the preceding month. At the completion of the indexing for the last month of each year an annual alphabetical index for the whole of New Zealand was prepared. The index is arranged in alphabetical order of surnames, then first name order within that surname.

Helpful hints

Births

If the child's parents had not been married at the time of the birth the registration could be in either the father's or mother's family names. Try both family names.

Deaths

Death notification is the responsibility of the person in charge of the burial or cremation. If they fail to register the death there will be no record of that death.

The death indexes also include deaths occurring outside New Zealand in respect of a person while serving as a member of the NZ Defence Forces or United Nations Peace Keeping Forces

Marriages and Civil unions

When searching for a woman's second or subsequent marriage, remember, the bride's details may be recorded under her family name at birth or any of her previous husbands' family names. This may similarly apply when searching on either partner of a civil union.

Registered information

Please note that the birth, death, marriage and civil union information held in the registers are only as accurate as the information supplied by the informant.

Less information was required to register a life event in, for instance, 1848 than is required today. Therefore the information that is available on a printout or certificate will vary depending on when the event was registered.

The Births and Deaths Registration Act of 1848 required the following to be registered. Those marked * are shown on a certificate; those marked ** are the additional fields included on a printout:

Births

From 1848 birth entries showed:

- * Date and place of birth
- * Child's name and sex
- * Parents' names
- ** Occupation of father
- * Birth name or maiden surname of mother.

From 1876 there is further information included in birth registrations:

- ** The date and place of marriage of the parents
- * The age and birthplace of each parent
- ** Particulars of the informant

From 1913 birth entries also included the sex and age of living offspring of the marriage and also the number and sex of previously deceased offspring at the time of the birth being registered. Names of previous children were not recorded.

Deaths

From 1848 death entries showed:

- * Date of death
- * Full name
- * Sex
- * Age
- * Occupation
- * Cause of death
- ** Particulars of the informant

Pre-1876 death entries are of little value for genealogical purposes as no relationships are shown and the identity may not be positively established.

From 1876 the following were added to the death registrations:

- * The full names of the parents of the deceased
- * The father's occupation
- * The mother's maiden surname or family name
- * The place of birth of the deceased
- * Length of time the deceased had lived in New Zealand

If the deceased had been married, there was included:

- * The place of marriage
- * The age of deceased at the time of marriage
- * Name of the person to whom married
- * The sex and age of surviving children (but not their names)
- * The date and place of burial

From 1912 the age of the surviving wife was added.

Marriages

Under the Marriage Act of 1854, the only particulars recorded were:

- * The date and place of marriage
- * The full names, ages, and conjugal status of the bride and bridegroom
- * The occupation of the bridegroom
- ** The witnesses' name, addresses and occupations

By the Act of 1880, also added were:

- * The birth place and usual place of residence of each party
- ** The full names of parents of each party
- ** The occupation of the father in each case
- ** The maiden surname or family name of the mother

Māori registrations

For the duration of the separate Māori register, the particulars required for registration were different from those in the general register. This Māori register applied to persons of half or more Māori blood for the period 1913 to 1961 for births and deaths, and 1911 to 1952 for marriages.

The following information is shown on both a certificate and printout:

Births

- (a) Date and place of birth
- (b) First names of child and sex
- (c) First names and residence of parents
- (d) Tribe (iwi) and degree of Māori blood of each parent

Deaths

- (a) Date and place of death
- (b) Full name, residence, and tribe (iwi) deceased
- (c) Sex and age
- (d) Name of husband or wife
- (e) Number and sex of living children
- (f) Causes of death
- (g) Names of parents of deceased with their place of residence, tribe (iwi) and degree of Māori blood

Marriages

The particulars of marriages were similar to those in the general register except that the details of the parents of the bride and bridegroom were restricted to the names only.

Information requirements

To find a particular record we need to know at least the person's family name, given names, and the year and place of the event.

Ideally, all of the following information should be provided:

- the full name of person (or both people if for a marriage or civil union. Ensure to quote the party's surnames at birth or previous marriage or civil union surname. In the case where a folio number is provided we will accept either the bride's or the groom's name)
- date of event. If you cannot supply an exact date, a year of event is acceptable, although your request may then incur additional search fees.
- place the event occurred
- names of parents (if applying for birth record)

Please also include your name, address, daytime phone number and email address (if available) if we need to contact you about your request.

Searching over a greater range of years will only be performed on your specific request because search fees are then applicable.

Please note that it is important the information you provide with your request is as accurate as possible. It may be an idea to ask other family members for information before making your request.

It should be noted that if insufficient or incorrect first names are supplied then the entry may not be located. In some cases, particularly with more common names, there are often a number of entries with the same name.

Indexes in microfiche form are available for searching purposes at most major libraries and at Identity Services office in Wellington. It is recommended that these indexes be searched as an aid to finding an entry.

It is important in continuing correspondence with Births, Deaths and Marriages that the reference shown in the top right corner of our previous reply is quoted. This may save some previous searching from being repeated and may result in saving you money.

Fees

Births, Deaths and Marriages fees are regulated by the Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration (Fees) Regulations 1995.

Fee	Description
NZ\$26.00	Printout – from years 1848 to 1874
NZ\$20.00	Printout – post 1874
NZ\$26.00	Certificate
NZ\$15.00	Search of index for each event under 1 name for a given year (plus year either side)
NZ\$ 1.00	Continuation of search at the same time for each event under 1 name for each additional year

Example

If we cannot locate the record with the information provided, search fees will apply. Prior to contacting you, we will have searched a 3-year period and a fee of NZ\$15.00 will have been accrued.

For example, if the year you quote is 1992 we undertake a search of index for the year given plus a year either side. If we cannot find the event in those years we will contact you to ask if you would like us to search additional years at NZ\$1.00 for each additional year. If you agree and request us to search 1994 and 1995 then we will charge you an extra NZ\$2.00:

- If we find the event in 1995 and you wish to have a certificate then the total fee for the certificate is NZ\$43.00 (NZ\$26.00 plus the NZ\$17.00 search cost); or
- If we cannot find the event the total fee will be NZ\$17.00 (NZ\$15.00 plus NZ\$2.00 search cost) and you will not receive a certificate. However, you can request more years to be searched or we can refund the amount remaining to you.

Glossary

This list describes commonly used terms:

Printout	A printout is a copy of the information from the registration that is often preferred by genealogists and people researching family history because they usually contain more information than certificates. Printouts are not acceptable for official purposes
Certificate	A birth, death, marriage or civil union certificate is an official document. Certificates contain registered information, are produced on special paper, and bear the seal (or, before 1995, the signature and/or seal) of a Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages
District Keys	Compiled books of the folio numbers against places of registration – used to derive the place of registration for records prior to 1875
Folio number	Page numbers in the old pre-1998 registers – folio numbers are shown on the microfiche indexes that are available for searching at most public libraries and at Identity Services office in Wellington
Registration Number	The unique number allocated to each registration