

Compiled by:
Sandra M Barnes

Finding Maiden Names

I have put together a list of the ten most likely places where one might find the maiden name of a female ancestor . I also included one other hint (#11). They are listed in order of importance from most likely to least.

1. Marriage Certificate

To find a woman's maiden name on a marriage certificate, you must at least know the full name of the groom, the first name of the bride, the approximate date of the marriage, and the state or county of the marriage, depending on when the marriage took place.

Note: also includes marriage announcements, marriage banns, and marriage bonds.

2. Church Records

To find a woman's maiden name in church marriage, baptism, or christening records, you must at least know the individual's name, and either the name of the church where the ceremony was performed or the name of the clergyman that appears on the certificate.

3. Newspapers

To find a woman's maiden name in a wedding announcement or obituary, you must at least know the approximate date of the event, the name of groom for wedding announcements or the full name of the deceased for obituaries, and the state and city or town where the event took place (or where the announcement or obituary was likely to have been published).

Note: you may find notices for siblings or other family members that provide helpful clues.

4. Bible Records

To find a woman's maiden name in Bible records that are no longer in the family's possession, you must at least know the woman's full married name, as well as the state and county in which she lived.

5. Military Records

To find an woman's maiden name in a military pension record, you must at least know the veteran's name, the branch of service, such as Army, Navy, or Marine Corps, the state from which the veteran entered the service, and the war in which the veteran served. If the period of service was after 1916, you must also know entry and release dates, military ID number, Social Security number, whether an officer or enlisted, and date of birth.

6. Probate Records or Wills

To find a woman's maiden name in probate records, you must at least know the woman's full name at time of death, the approximate date of her death, and the county or town in which she lived at the time of her death.

Note: If you have a possible set of parents for your female ancestor, search for their probate record or will.

7. Cemetery Records

The cemetery may be the only place where you will find proof of the existence of a female ancestor. Tombstones may list women under their maiden names, with "wife of so and so" as the record of their married name, or may include the wife's maiden name as a middle name or initial. For those with no mention of the female's maiden name, check nearby plots for possible family members.

8. Census Records

Check every census year available for your female ancestor, up until the year that she died. Young couples may be found living with the wife's parents; an elderly parent may have been added to the household; or brothers, sisters, or other family members may be found living with the your ancestors' family. Clues may also be found in the names of families living nearby.

9. Land Records

Land was important, and often passed down from father to daughter. Examine deeds for your ancestor and/or her husband which include the Latin phrases "et ux." (and wife) and "et al." (and others). They may provide the names of females, or names of siblings or children. Also keep your eye out for a man or a couple selling land to your ancestors for a dollar, or other small amount. The ones selling the land are more than likely the parents or relatives of your female ancestor.

10. Death Records

If your female ancestor died recently enough to leave a death certificate, this is potentially one of the few places where her maiden name may appear. Since death certificates can often include inaccurate information, check the certificate for the name of the informant. The closeness of the relationship between informant and the deceased can help you assess the likely accuracy of the provided information.

11. Naming Patterns

It is only a clue, but the maiden name of a mother can sometimes be found buried somewhere among the names of her children. Unusual middle names, among boys or girls, might be the maiden name of a mother or grandmother. Or the eldest daughter might be named for her maternal grandmother

Information compiled from the following websites:

<http://www.genealogy.com>

<http://genealogy.about.com>