

## 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, state 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, unrecorded births and deaths were common prior to 1921.

Current state law requires that state Birth, Marriage and Divorce records of vital statistics must be 75 years or older to be made available to the public by the State Archives. State law also requires that all Death or Fetal Death records of vital statistics must be 50 years or older to be made available to the public by the State Archives.

Birth, Marriage and Divorce vital records less than 75 years old and Death and Fetal Death records less than 50 years old are available to entitled individuals through either the Iowa Health and Human Services Vital Records office or at the Recorder office in the county in which the event occurred. Divorce vital record statistics less than 75 years old are only available at the Iowa HHS Vital Records office. To obtain divorce court records, please contact the [Clerk of Court](#) in the county in which the case was filed and adjudicated.

The State Archives partners with [FamilySearch](#) and [Ancestry](#) to make available Birth, Death, Marriage, and Divorce records within its custody available online. Family Search is free to use at home and Ancestry requires a subscription, however both are available to use for free in our Research Centers.

### **Certified Copies**

Certified copies of Birth, Marriage and Death Records are available from the Iowa Health and Human Services Vital Statistics or from the County Recorder. For more information, please visit [Iowa HHS](#).

### **Birth Records**

<b>Record Series</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Birth Records	County Records Microfilm	1880-1904, 1906-Varies by county
Birth Records	State Records, Department of Public Health (some available on <a href="#">Ancestry</a> or <a href="#">FamilySearch</a> )	1904-1949

Check the [State Historical Society of Iowa County Records](#) index for series level holdings, inclusive dates and indexes by county. Between 1880 and 1897, data requested was available on ledgers and 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. 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.

Between July 1, 1904 and June 30, 1906 births were only recorded by the state. They were not recorded in the county and are not available on County Records Microfilm.

State birth certificates from 1909-1921 are part of a [statewide index to births for these years](#) and as of 2024, these are not available online. You may request photocopies or scans of indexed certificates.

### *Delayed Birth Certificates*

<b>Record Series</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Delayed Birth Certificates	State Records Microfilm & Index, Public Health (Available online <a href="#">FamilySearch</a> and <a href="#">Ancestry.com</a> )	1852-1916 1852-1940

Delayed Birth Certificates are certificates not filed at the time of birth. Information included on a delayed birth certificate is similar to that of a birth certificate and includes the sources of documentation and date of recording. There are nearly 35,000 certificates for pre-1880 births, covering years that births were not recorded in Iowa, as well as another 500,000 certificates for births from 1881 to 1940.

## **DEATH RECORDS & FETAL DEATH RECORDS**

<b>Record Series</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Death Records	County Records Microfilm Available on <a href="#">FamilySearch</a> Available on <a href="#">Ancestry.com</a>	1880-1904, 1906-Varies 1904-1951 1880-1904, 1921-1968

Check the [State Historical Society of Iowa County Records](#) index for series level holdings, inclusive dates and indexes by county. Between 1880 and 1904, records were available on a ledger and included: 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 introduced and the information to be entered expanded to include birth dates and names of parents and places of birth.

An index to the state death certificates from 1904 to 1916 is available in the Research Center Reference Desk in Des Moines, however many of these records are also available on FamilySearch. You may request photocopies or scans of indexed certificates.

## **MARRIAGE & DIVORCE RECORDS**

<b>Record Series</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Marriage Records	County Records Microfilm State Records Microfilm, Public Health <a href="#">Ancestry.com</a> (Free use in Research Center)	c.1835-Varies by county 1880-1949 1880-1948

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 and may not include the place of birth of the bride and groom or names of parents.

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<b>Record Series</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Divorce Records	State Records Microfilm, Public Health (available <a href="#">on Family Search</a> ) State Records Volumes, Public Health (available <a href="#">on Family Search</a> )	1906-1937 1938-1949

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.