

## **DEATH RECORDS** – oldest dates may be “iffy”

- A county assessor went from farm to farm, recording data for taxes; he would also ask about and write down family deaths for the past year as remembered.
- The assessor left “deaths” with the county clerk, to be recorded months later; some had errors due to either bad memory of family members or transcription errors.
- A recorded date of death is used most often to find an obituary or obtain a death certificate.

## **CENSUS RECORDS** – (The U.S. 1890 census burned!)

- Last census released was 1940; start there & work back. There may be variations in names & spelling, ages given, transcription errors; accept mistakes....
- We have Allegan Co. census records on microfilm to 1930; for searchable census, see Ancestry LE (all) & Heritage Quest (partial) & Family Search (partial) for other online census records & actual census images.

## **CEMETERY RECORDS**

- An Ongoing Process: We started with only a few records in 2002, but have made a tremendous effort to collect all available records—by donations, borrowing, & copying records. We now have hundreds of old records.
- Arrangement:** Our cemetery records are arranged by township, then by cemetery name. Each notebook has information on county cemeteries, cemetery locations, and a map of county cemeteries. For each cemetery:
  - a township location map
  - location map & driving directions
  - older records (Ruth Robbins Monteith)
  - Internet records (if we found any)
- Use of Cemetery Records/ Transcriptions:** Tombstones may give birth dates & death dates, show family relationship (beloved Mother...) & many organizational or religious symbols (stump for W.O.W., G.A.R. Union Civil War vets, crosses denoting a specific religion). Taking photos of family stones & nearby ones will help record details, inscriptions, and may help you later interpret your handwritten notes.
- Family Plots:** burials in a plot are *usually* related in some way; record names of all individuals in an obvious plot, even if people are unknown to you. Take photos of nearby stones & group shots showing arrangement of stones and proximity to one another. They probably are relatives you haven’t “met” yet.

**Some cemeteries are privately owned or restrict admittance. Check before trespassing!**



- Arrangement of graves:** Many cemeteries have plot maps, locating graves. Look for recurring names as possible family. Sextons usually have plot maps.

**Transcriptions from Tombstones:** Some cemeteries have no plot map; older stones may be worn, vandalized, or missing; hard copy transcriptions may be the only clues to where a family is buried. They may, however, contain transcription errors. Carvings may be worn/partially buried, the language may not be English, or inscribed information may have been in error. A grave may not contain a body (remarriages).

**Sexton’s Records:** Sexton records vary in quality & accuracy of recorded information. Many records are hand-written, difficult to read, are incomplete, and may be inaccurate. Cemeteries may have unique notations: Mt. Home Cemetery in Otsego Twp. burial dates of Jan 1 were NOT burials on Jan 1, but burials of some date *during* that year.

## **Reburials & Moving Bodies**

- Many bodies at Allegan Co. Poor Farm Cemetery (Fairfield/ Brownell Cemetery) were moved by relatives to Oakwood Cemetery; burial lists are wrong
- Reburial dates may be listed as death dates, & records not show an interment is a reburial. Except really old burials, seek paperwork if a body was moved; search for a paper trail. A sexton, township clerk or county clerk may have the record you seek. Ck dates of 1st burials; check state death records.

**Wills and Estates, Allegan County, Michigan, 1835-1872,** abstracted & typed by Ruth Robbins Monteith, 1956; fully indexed, many family relations mentioned. This may help with locating graves. Check probate records at the courthouse for relatives, locations.

## **PLEAS & PLEASE:**

- Use standard notation, b= born, d=died, m=married, *not* your own short-hand
- Document facts, note possible errors
- OMIT posting info. on *living persons*: date of birth, etc. that might be used for identity theft.
- Consider depositing a copy of you family history with our library if your family tree has a branch in our county, or deposit in another library or genealogical institution. We and family history seekers of the future will be grateful.**



## **DID YOU LOOK INTO...**

- Journals, diaries, letters, photo albums, scrapbooks, family Bibles, medical records, wills, probate, estates
- Funeral notices, obits, memorial/ funeral cards, death records, cemetery records, school records
- Marriage & birth records, census, military & service records, draft lists, social organizations
- City & county directories, phone books, local history files, local library/historical society files

**Allegan District Library**  
331 Hubbard St., Allegan, MI 49010; 269-673-4625  
Our home page: [www.alleganlibrary.org](http://www.alleganlibrary.org)  
Open M-Th 10-9, F & Sa 9-5:30; closed Su  
**Linda Koch, B.A., M.A., M.L.I.S.**—Reference, Adult Services. Genealogy & Local History Librarian  
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# Starting Family History Research at Allegan District Library

An aunt says that great grandpa, Joe Allen, may have died in Allegan. You decide to search your murky family history. HINT: Do *not* start with Joe! Start with you & your immediate family, then work backward.



## **Start by learning HOW to do a Family History search**

Look for beginning genealogy books, such as **Genealogy 101, Complete Idiot’s Guide to Genealogy...** & visit [www.CyndisList.com](http://www.CyndisList.com) – teaching links for beginners, see Library of MI genealogy - click “Resources for Genealogists,” then “How to research your family at the Library of Michigan – Great Tips, and FREE!

## **Ask the RIGHT questions.**

- Questions are unproductive if they’re the *wrong* ones or if important ones are not asked. Educate yourself to become good interviewer; use prompts, checklists.
- It is O.K. to do a preliminary interview to get facts, names of relatives, places born or lived, dates remembered, names of relatives, spouses, burial locations, military service, etc., but you’ll get better results if you know what you are doing. Use a standard form and at least leave the door open for a follow-up interview .

**Set up your files and obtain needed forms.** Forms may be downloaded and printed from the Internet; Pedigree charts are NOT enough; put together a kit:

- Pedigree Charts (~family trees), Family Group Record sheets; Interview & Research logs, Research Question Sheets, Source Notes; tape recorder for interviews....
- Notebooks & files to hold documents, photos, maps
- Pencils, small pencil sharpener, magnifier, camera (to photograph tombstones, relatives, old residences, & to copy documents), extra floppy disks, \$1 bills & change.
- Sturdy carrying case for materials, set aside for genealogical research, trips, maps, copies of documents.

**Proceed slowly and carefully:** take time and learn HOW to research & document the information you find before you search in depth.

- **Do not rush into bad research** or settle for instant gratification. Allow time to examine books, documents, & records, search microfilm, & document everything!
- **Keep a research diary**, a log of dates, places visited, and research done at a place; you may need to revisit.
- **Record negative results:** help prevent repeating search efforts and looking at the same place twice for info. when memory of that earlier search is dim.
- **Early errors may invalidate later research.** Information may later be useless if you have no idea where it was found, or you did not check for supporting documentation. Your nice family trace back to 1300 may have had a detour sixty years back, and you traced someone else's ancestors!
- **Decide what can be done using resources close at hand**, as on your/ your local library's computer, using on-line census records, Ancestry Lib. Ed., etc.
- **Decide WHERE you need to go** to get needed records or how you will contact persons to get those records. E-mail is a wonderful tool!
- **Plan trips to maximize what you hope to find;** check hours open & rules for genealogists; check holiday days open. Take change, \$1 bills. Be prepared for security checks, searches, allow time for parking, waiting to use copy machines.

### **You aren't really ready until you've consulted your best source—you (and your family)**

- Write down everything YOU know: names, births, places lived, relatives; put "?" in for unknown facts.
- **Interview your family** and/or oldest family friends & neighbors *in depth* about your immediate family, then go from present to past, finding data about nearest family members first. This is a starting point.
- **Distant Relatives:** Ask family members for addresses or locations of possible relatives; write or phone/ E-mail; send queries; someone may have done family research already or may be able to help you with clues or missing information; recheck everything!
- **Try to put a tentative family history together**, but knowing that "facts" given to you may contain errors. At least you'll have a framework to start. Above all, read and become informed. You hope to create an accurate family history to pass down to future generations. Plan your research, document your findings, follow the rules, and you'll have a family history record to be proud of—for generations to come!



- **Record Family Stories:** names & dates are NOT a family history. Family stories enrich the names; names become people; and stories place an individual into his/her time in events in history. Stories also provide clues that may help your search. While telling about meeting outlaws Bonnie & Clyde, my mom related where she lived as a young girl, names of neighbors, and what life was like for her, growing up in a rural setting at that time.

### **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE- CLUES?**

**NAMES** - Joe, Joseph, Josiah? Jr.? Sr.? Nick-name? Middle name? Spelling variations? Check books for other surnames (last names) that apply.

**BIRTHPLACE & FAMILY** – birthplace, date, what is known about parents, ancestors, siblings, cousins, step-siblings? Someone may know who has an old family Bible with family records, also, check online.

**WIFE & MARRIAGE** - Wife's full name, maiden name, birthplace, parents? When & where were they married? Same community? Any relation to Joe? 1st wife, 2nd wife, divorce, widow?



**CHURCH RECORDS** - Religion? Baptismal, confirmation, marriage, Godspeed, transfer, funeral...? Part of a migration of church families into a community? Buried in a church cemetery? Deacon? Sunday school teacher? Membership lists?

### **MIGRATION** -

- Did his family stay at his birthplace? If not, where did he/they go during his birth, marriage or death? Where did they move to & when? Check census, tax & voting rolls, city & rural directories, cemeteries, church records....When did he arrive in Allegan? Was he in a city or rural? If 1831-1850, ck pioneer records. If more recent, ck. plat books, phone & city directories.
- Did he stay in one place or move in the county? Did he move to N. D. & later come back here?

### **OCCUPATION/ SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS** -

- If a grocer, consult city directories for stores.
- If a farmer, ck plat maps & land atlases for places.
- If in a union, a Woodman, in a music club, look for membership lists, news articles, officers, records.

**MILITARY** – draft registrations, service records  
• Revolutionary, Black Hawk, Civil, ...1812, WWI, WWII, Korea, Viet Nam, Gulf War, National Guard or others; burial in national cemeteries?

- We have Allegan County WWI Draft cards on microfilm & Ancestry LE: hair/ eye color, body build, address in 1916/18...
- Our Civil War Veterans notebook has indexed lists of county vets, widows, pensioners, G.A.R., burials... MI Soldiers Home Obits, 1899-1938 - (4 vol.) General Pritchard Civil War Collection (32 shelf feet), & we have purchased military genealogy books; look around libraries



### **PLAT MAPS/ LAND ATLASES** – landowners:

- We have 1864, 1873, 1895, 1913, indexed & recent plat maps & farm directories (most indexed)
- Find family farms; see maps to find dates owners changed, get dates to search records, census.

### **CITY DIRECTORIES** –Allegan city & some rural -

- vary in content; often cross-listed by street, phone #; some give all names, occupations, workplace, ages children, home ownership
- ads by businesses; church pastors, club & social organization officers; some rural route listings....

### **CROSS-LISTING DIRECTORIES** -

- Bressers (1983-present) has Kalamazoo Co., Otsego, Plainwell, Watson, Heath, Allegan Twps.;
- Polk (2000-present)= Holland & all of Allegan Co.
- Lists residents, address, rent or years ownership,
- Find living persons, descendants with same surnames, & possible relatives.

### **MICROFILMED NEWSPAPERS** – lots of info

- Various Allegan city newspapers from 1856-now; indexed deaths & marriages 1856 to 1890s; obits 1978-2002; a few obits are indexed for 1901-1906, 1948-1954; various parts other years.
- Older newspapers contained few obits; brief death notes in rural correspondence are clues to locations of farms, death dates, and possible kinfolk.

### **MARRIAGE RECORDS**

- See county clerk; an *application* for a license may have more data than a record in some states. Info. includes names of bride, groom, parents of each, place of marriage, ages, birth dates, addresses, witnesses, etc. Look for clues in church records and newspapers— they may tell where the young couple is making their new home— or if the marriage took place in the home of a family member or in a family church. Some marriage records give parents' names and birthplaces. Later papers may have photos, newsy articles. Many are online at FamilySearch

