



British Time Line

Parish Registries 1538 – 1947

1538 – King Henry VIII orders church parishes to begin recording christenings, marriages, deaths, and burials to generate revenue.

1558 – Queen Elizabeth insists upon a new parish record entry system and destroys previous records.

1653 – 1702 - Registrars are appointed, William the III creates a font of revenue from duties on births, marriages, and burials which contribute to funds for the war against France.

1812 - The Sir George Rose Act of 1812 is set forth, much confusion ensues, and records pile up and are burned.

1836 - The Birth, Death and Marriage Act brings an end to registry income for the Church of England.

1874 & 1898 - Two Acts implement the medical requirement of death certification, and allow persons other than priests to perform and register marriages.

1910 - The first typed indexes are created.

1926 – Registration of stillbirths and re-registration of illegitimate children is set forth if the parents marry.

1947 - The short birth certificate is presented.

Civil Registration and Census Development

In Great Britain & America

-by Wendy Wilson Spooner

Genealogists know the value of parish registries, censuses, and civil registrations, but when did this type of record keeping begin? King Henry the VIII, a well-known name within British history books, ruled a tempestuous reign - a reign that produced the instigation of parish registers.

Seeking to produce a male heir to the throne, the volatile monarch married six different women - with divorce on his mind. Marriage dissolution was forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church, causing disputes between the Pope and England's king. The explosive issue led to severed ties with Rome, the closure of Britain's



monasteries, and greater regulation over England's newly transformed church. King Henry the VIII appointed himself Supreme Head of *The Church of England*, and by command of the monarchy (in 1538), Lord Thomas Cromwell ordered churches to begin parish registries of christenings, marriages, deaths, and burials. Through each recorded event, the parish registers generated a fee of which King Henry the VIII funded England's battles - as well as his lavish life-style (Morrill, 2000: 226).



<https://archive.org/details/billnyescomichis00nyebrich>

Two decades later, in 1558, Queen Elizabeth commanded that all priests transcribe parish entries in one synonymous fashion. Many did not comply. The Queen was emphatic and consequently commanded the destruction of previous records (in some regions) to ensure implementation of the novel system (Sharpe, 2011).

Changes in Registration between 1653 - 1812.

The year 1653 brought additional change through the passing of an act directing churches to appoint *registrars*. Births, deaths, and burials were now suitably recorded by these newly selected record keepers. Next, William the III created another font of revenue during his reign, wherein duties were paid on births, marriages, and burials to subsidize the war against France.

The Sir George Rose Act of 1812 was set forth to produce registration improvement and to implement a common system of recording births and deaths. After much confusion and incomppliance among outlying parishes, postage incurred massive returns at post-office institutions, creating an enormous pile-up of records, which greatly



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inconvenienced the establishments. Consequently, a bonfire was stoked and the records were burned, resulting in a tragic loss of time, labor, and genealogical evidence (Hansard: 1833).

Registration History between 1836 – 1947.

Britain's *Birth, Death and Marriage Act* of 1836 brought an end to the control (and the income) that *The Church of England* held over vital event registration. New legislation did not come about easily; however, although *The Act of 1874* did adjust some of the deficiencies of the original legislation, along with adding the requirement of medical death certification.

WANDSWORTH UNION.

ST. JOHN'S HILL INFIRMARY,
ST. JOHN'S HILL, NEW WANDSWORTH, S.W.

STEWARD'S OFFICE.

To Mr. J. Ireland

11th Oct., 1924

I regret to inform you of the death of Rosabella Ireland
aged 74 yrs an Inmate of Block 4 Ward of this Infirmary, at 7:35 p.m. on
Thursday, the 10th day of April, 1924, and request that you
will call at my office between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. (Sundays excepted) to make arrangements for the funeral.

Please fill in the form attached, informing me if you wish to remove the body for burial.

If a private funeral your Undertaker must produce this Notice at my Office, and remove the body in a properly covered conveyance, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 11 a.m., or from 3 to 4 p.m. on or before, the day of, 19..... and state the Cemetery in which the body is to be interred. In all cases where it is intended to have a private funeral, the Certificate of Death, which has to be produced to the Registrar, can be obtained upon application to the Medical Superintendent.

(c) www.workhouses.org.uk LEONARD EVANS, Steward.
L. Evans

Next In 1898, provision was made for individuals other than ministers to now become performers and registrars of marriages. Then in 1910, the first typed indexes became available.



American Development

1790-2010

1790 – First official United States Census taken U. S. Marshals judicial districts.

1840 – Responsibility for census taking transferred to the newly established Census Office.

1860 – Census was carried on just before the Civil War exploded.

1910 – Census was taken during World War I.

1940 – Census conducted during World War II.

1950- 2010 – Censuses change throughout the years, questions varying in the inclusion or exclusion of occupation, age, education and religious questions.

A few years later, 1926 brought the registration of stillbirths, as well as the re-registration of illegitimate children - if their parents later married. Finally, in 1947, Britain's short birth certificate was permanently implemented (National Archives: 2012).

Census Taking and Civil Registration of Britain.

All throughout the centuries, census taking developed alongside civil registry. In 1086, William the Conqueror ordered the creation of the *Domesday Book*, a thorough inventory of land and property records, consuming countless years to complete. In 1279, King Edward brought about a vast inquiry of landholders, which was arranged by the hundreds - called *The Hundred Rolls*.

While Britain was reluctant to officially adopt a regular census, Tudor and Stuart times required bishops to take on the task of counting families within the dioceses. Starting in 1811, the census undertaking was met with a threefold population growth in England and Wales, beginning at 8 million, and growing to 32 million over the next 100 years.

From 1911 on, scientific breakthroughs and key world events (along with social change), markedly affected the British population structure. The 1951 census became vastly important

by recording twenty of the most unsettling years in British history. In 1991 a poll tax impacted the census returns to come in at a highly successful rate of 98 percent. Most recently, the completed 2001 British census took up 40 miles of linear storage space, housing 15,000 reels of microfilm, and for the first time since 1841, paper records were destroyed and promptly recycled (200 Years of Census: 2011).

Parallels of Census Development between America and Britain.

Fulfilling census requirements in Britain and the United States has been a complex process since the operation began. Just as Britain carried on census taking during turbulent periods, the United States of American did as well. According to the U.S. Census Bureau during the first count in 1790, tempestuous events were already underway - or soon would be. The United States Post Office was yet to be established, federal troops were sent to the Appalachian region to put an end to the "Whiskey Rebellion," and the U.S. Navy was launched to protect American merchant ships from pirates in the Mediterranean. The 1860 census was carried on just before the Civil War exploded, and the 1910 and 1940 censuses were conducted during both World Wars I and II.



American organizations (as those of Britain) changed over the years that were obliged to accept census taking duties. The U.S. Congress in 1790 assigned responsibility to the

marshals of the United States judicial districts. Responsibility was then transferred via an *act of 1840* to the newly organized centralized census office. Next the *General Land Office* took over, and as the census organizations changed, census content changed as well. Variations involved the inclusion or exclusion of occupation, age, education and even religious questions. The 2010 United States census questionnaire was the shortest in history, marking only ten queries ranging from gender and race, to owning or renting a dwelling (United States Census Bureau: 2013).

In conclusion, British parish records and civil registries, as well as censuses of both the United Kingdom and the United States, will continue as valuable record sources to those researching family histories. Knowing the history of the creation of these records will assist researchers in locating these types of sources. Knowing the content change of the records throughout time will assist the researcher in expanding family histories.



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