

# US Court Records

A basic overview of the different kinds of court records available and when you should look for them.

## Criminal Records

**What they are:** These records are created when a person is charged with a crime. It may be something as simple as not attending church. Don't over look!

**Look for records:** For the time period and area that your ancestor lived in. If they weren't charged with a crime they still may have had something to do with a case, they may have been a witness or a juror.

## Civil Records

**What they are:** These are any case where a person is suing another person. Divorce and probate records are also a type of civil record.

**Look for records:** For the time period and area that your ancestor lived in. You never know if your ancestor liked to sue people or if there was someone who liked to sue them.

## Probate Records

**What they are:** These are the records that come along at the end of ones life. They have to do with the disbursal of assets and the paying of debts. Wills are part of the probate records.

**Look for records:** For the Person you are researching, their Parents (remember the mother especially if the father died first), and Spouse.

## Divorce Records

**What they are:** These are the records that end a marriage, they usually tell you when and where the couple were married. They also list any children that were born to that marriage and are still living. They tell why the marriage is ending, and may include statements made by the couple and the testimony of others.

**Look for records:** When a person is married more than once and you don't know what happened to the first spouse, or if you have some questions about what happened to a spouse.

## Adoption Records

**What they are:** These are records that are made when an adoption takes place. These can be very difficult to get a hold of depending on privacy laws in the different states. However they will give you information on the Adoptive as well as the biological parents of an adopted person.

**Look for records:** If you have someone who was adopted, or think someone could have been.

## Coroner Records

**What they are:** These are made when a person dies under any conditions that may not be considered natural causes. These records can give you information on the person's life as well as their death and have testimony from close friends, neighbors, and family.

**Look for records:** If someone died suddenly, was murdered or committed suicide.

You may find some clues to finding your family in court records on the following websites:

[blacksheepancestors.com](http://blacksheepancestors.com) – Is a free site that gives you indexes to different types of court records for the USA, Canada, and United Kingdom (England). They have a lot of information on prison records.

[usgenweb.com](http://usgenweb.com) – Is a free site that contains lots of information on records in a given area. Don't forget to look at both the state and county pages of the area that you are looking at.

[cyndislist.com](http://cyndislist.com) – This site has links to all sorts of information on genealogy you may find some links to court records in the areas that you are searching.

[google.com](http://google.com) – This search engine can be replaced with your favorite search engine. Try searching for court records for the area you are looking for this will search the entire internet to see what information is available.

\*Don't forget to visit your state archives as well as local historical society's websites for information on finding court records in your area.