

The ABC's and 123's of Researching Your Ancestor's School Records

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The records of local public schools, universities and school boards have gradually developed into a valuable resource for genealogical information. School records provide a more personal glimpse into our ancestor's lives. They include everything from elementary education through college, professional school, military academies, and special education training. The best part is that even if your ancestor did not attend school, there could still be records available for them. This presentation will show the genealogist just some of the specific school records that could be available and how to find them.

School Census Records

School census records or sometimes they are called scholastic population census are not that prevalent but seeking them out is still something that should be on your to-do list. These school census records were normally taken at the local level and if they survive, could be in any number of places. What could be contained on a school census?

- Name of the student
- Age of the student
- List of schools
- List of teachers

Enrollment Records

Enrollment records can provide great information about your ancestor. Normally when someone enrolled in a school system, they had to fill out paperwork or give information about themselves so that they are officially registered to attend that school. Some information that you can find on these records are:

- Name
- Parents' Names
- Where they lived
- Date of Birth or Age
- Possibly the name and location of previous school if transferring in

Attendance Records

Most schools, whether they are small and rural or larger city facilities, kept a record of student's attendance. These records could have been kept in a ledger and reported on the student's report card. What can a student's attendance tell us about our ancestor?

- Place your ancestor in a time and a place
- An absence could correlate with something in your ancestor's life or family

Subject and Grade Records

In school the students received grades in individual subjects. Some subjects have changed over the years and some of even been dropped all together. The subject grades can be found on report cards, school transcripts or on teacher's ledgers. Your ancestor's subjects and grades can tell you:

- What were they taught in school?
- What subjects did your ancestor do well in or not so well?
- Did your ancestor use what they learned in school during their lifetime?

Yearbooks

Yearbooks are a great resource and should not be overlooked. What can be found in yearbooks?

- A photograph of your ancestor
- Biographies of the students
- The social, academic or sports groups they may have been in

School Newspapers

Some schools, not all, produced a school newspaper to report on the schools and student's activities. These school newspapers were usually written by the students themselves. What can school newspapers tell us about our ancestors?

- Did your ancestor write for the school newspaper?
- Is your ancestor's photo in the newspaper?
- Was your ancestor mentioned in an article in the newspaper?

Local Newspapers

Many of our local newspapers reported on the happenings at the local schools. The news items that you can find in local newspapers are:

- Lists of honor rolls
- Sporting events
- Social Club reports
- Academic achievements
- Senior or graduate photos, lists or announcements

School Photographs

As genealogists we want to have a photograph of our ancestor. Many of us do not have these photographs and are always looking for record sources where we might find those elusive photographs. School photos are a source that just might help you:

- Class group photos
- Yearbooks (sport teams, clubs, etc.)
- School Newspapers

Colleges, Universities, Military Schools, Private Schools

Local public schools are not the only resources for school records. Our many colleges, universities, military schools, and private schools have records too. What can be found at these schools?

- Transcripts (attendance, grades, subjects studied, etc.)

- Thesis or Dissertations written by the student

- School newspapers

My Ancestor Didn't Go to School, There Are No Records

It is a mistake to think that there are absolutely no records available if your ancestor who did not attend school. Even if your ancestor did not attend school, there very well could be records available for them. Here are a few....

Worked for the School

Maybe your ancestor worked for the school system. Not as a teacher but maybe in some other capacity where they offered their services for the local schools.

Some examples are:

- Delivered coal or wood to the schools for the stoves

- Provided handyman work to help repair the schools

- Drove a school bus

School Board Minutes

Most school districts had school boards or an organized group of people who oversaw the operations of the local schools. They made various kinds of decisions that helped to operate the schools. At the school board meetings, minutes or notes were taken to keep a record of what the group talked about or voted on to be done. These are a gold mine for the genealogist. Some information that could be included in these minutes is:

- Hiring laborers to work at the schools

- Purchasing and selling of school property

- Operations of the schools

Sunday School Records

Records of the local church Sunday Schools are not part of the local public schools' records but can be an asset to your genealogy research. Many of our local churches saved and preserved Sunday School Records. These usually come in the form of ledger books. They usually include:

- Teacher's names
- Class attendance numbers
- Class money offerings totals
- Listing of the members of the class

So, Where Do You Find School Records

Now that I hope I have you interested in the possibility that you can find your ancestors in school records, here are some places where you might be able to find them.

-Local School Districts-Many of our local school districts or school boards still hold all the old records such as student records, student transcripts and school board minutes. Contact the local school board or local board of education.

-Libraries-School records can also be found in library genealogy rooms or special collections. Try checking with the local, county and state libraries.

-Archives-Local and state archives have many collections of records related to the local schools. You will need to contact them and ask them what they have in their collections.

-Historical and Genealogical Societies-Many of our local historical and genealogical societies collect historical or genealogical records and they could have school records.

-Universities, colleges, military academies, private schools-These schools should have school and student records, especially for their school.