

California VitalSearch

ONE OF THE FIRST places to check when doing modern California research is the VitalSearch website for California, www.vitalsearch-ca.com. Though it is busy-looking, it is worth taking the time to check out the various resources.

My favorite resources are the Birth, Death and Marriage Indices. On the left-hand column, part way down, you will see the CA Vitals Database Menu. When you click on any of these and then scroll down, you will see a listing of the available resources and whether they are available for free or only for premium members.

For example, if you choose "State Death Indices", you will see a list of available databases followed by an "About This Database" section and the search options available.

To access the free databases, you simply sign up for a free Guest Pass. The only information required is a valid e-mail address. If you want full access to all the databases, with no advertisements and improved search options, you will need to become a Premium member. Premium member prices range from \$24.95 US for 90 days to \$57.95 US for one year.

Whether you are a Guest or a Member, remember that these are indices. You will be able to learn the specifics of dates and counties (and sometimes more); for complete information, you will need to separately obtain the actual certificate. These databases helped me tremendously as I tracked some Californians. I could often get enough information to then search for obituaries or wedding notices or request certificates.

It is important to understand what information (fields) you are able to search and what you can learn. It varies greatly by database. For some of the databases, you can perform a very specific (narrow) search, while for other databases, all you can enter is a surname or a year followed by a surname.

The death index for 1905-29 is

an example of a database for which you enter just a surname. You then see a listing of available index pages. For an uncommon name, I tried Torrey, you see one entry and for a common name like Smith you see 107 entries! When you click on the entry, you then see an image of the actual index page. These are not the clearest images and with some perseverance you can find the death date, state file number and other information.

In contrast, for the 1940-2000 death index, you

For example, those researching Los Angeles County, also have access to the 1901, 1920 and 1930 Directories for the City of Los Angeles, the 1927 and 1931 Directories for Culver City and the 1913-1919 marriages/bride resources.



can include as many or as few details as you have or feel necessary. There are 17 fields and wildcard searches are possible. When you perform your search, you will then receive information on as many of the 17 fields as is available and this information is presented in a large, easy-to-read table.

In addition to the vital records databases, you will also find links to individual counties — these may include additional search options for directories and/or phone books and sometimes local vital records databases.

Here's a secret tip: If you look hard enough, you will find that there is a portal to several databases for other states! It is easier though to access these directly, via www.vitalsearchworldwide.com. Scroll down and you will see a chart of all the databases currently available. Recognize though, that not all of the records listed in this table are unique to VitalSearch; sometimes they are links to publicly available databases.

