

Chicago Records Go Online!

RESEARCHING YOUR ANCESTORS in Chicago and Cook County can be a bit arduous. You can wait months to find out if a vital record exists and to obtain a copy of it. Finally, a website has been created that will change all that, <http://www.cookcountygenealogy.com/>

Ultimately, this site will contain: Birth certificates that are 75 years or older, marriage certificates that are 50 years or older and death certificates that are 20 years or older.

Most, though not all of these, are fully searchable. Keep this in mind, especially if you do not find the documents you are looking for, and you are certain they are in Cook County.

Also note that the Chicago Fire of October 8 1871, destroyed all Cook County vital records prior to that date. After some rebuilding, record keeping resumed in 1872.

To search the website, you must register first. There is no cost to do this. You can also do a free search to check if the records you need exist.

However, the records themselves are not free. Each record costs \$15, plus an additional credit card fee of \$1.75 which will be charged to your total order — not for each certificate. Once you pay for the records you want, you will be able to view and download the original records, not transcriptions, onto your computer.

The file will be in a compressed .zip format, and when expanded, will be in a .tif image format. If you don't have software to "unzip" these files, such as WinZip, already installed, free trial versions are available online from

various software companies.

Once downloaded, this file can be viewed, saved to your computer or printed. Do note that the image will bear a watermark that states, "For Genealogical Purposes Only."

When you search, you can put in any combination of: Last Name, M.I., First Name, Year Range or Record Type (Birth, Marriage or Death). Or, if you already know the year and file number, you can enter those.

A useful feature of the search is that you can enter either the last

This means researching uncommon or commonly misspelled surnames can be a challenge. And, given the incomplete state of what's available, the relevant document may not yet be indexed.

Once you find a relevant record, you can click on the record to add it to your shopping cart. A nice feature is that for some marriage records, the husband's record is also added to the cart. This is a good way to confirm that you have the correct "union." However, it will not always work that way.

When I found the entry for Anna Bobeyka, it pulled up the same entry for Theodore Ozark, her spouse. For Anna's sister, Jean Bobeyka, a search yielded only her marriage record and not her spouse's. When I went back to the search engine and entered the file number and year I had found for her, her husband, Joseph Skord, was revealed.

Anyone who has researched records in Cook County, and has experienced the frustration of waiting months to receive a vital record, will appreciate the ease of using this new service. For the regular price of a record, plus the credit card service charge, it's hard to beat getting a document in minutes versus months. And, if you can't find the record you need, you still have the option to submit a Genealogy Request Form via mail and they will manually search for the certificate.



The screenshot shows the 'Search Cook County Genealogy' interface. It includes search fields for Last Name, M.I., First Name, Year Range, and Record Type. Below the search fields is a table of results. The table has columns for Full Name, Record Type, File Number, and Event Date. The results listed are for various individuals with the surname Owczarek, including birth, marriage, and death records.

Full Name	Record Type	File Number	Event Date
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Death	473679	10/18/1900
OWCZAREK, ALBERT	Death	4027797	10/17/1900
OWCZAREK, ANELA	Death	4002021	11/08/1902
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Birth	4007000	12/28/1901
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Birth	4018100	4/12/1904
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Marriage	2303009	5/9/1905
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Birth	4043414	8/10/1907
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Marriage	2304475	1/14/1908
OWCZAREK, ANNA	Birth	4000041	7/28/1911

A sample of the results for a search on the name Owczarek.

name, or the Soundex code for the last name to find a relevant entry. Though information is provided on converting a surname to Soundex, I like to use the Rootsweb Soundex Converter found at <http://resources.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>.

Not all records are included in the search function yet. When I was researching the Owczarek and Bobeyka families, I had several certificates in my possession for births, marriages and deaths that I could not locate on the website. The only options for searching name variants are to try each variation you can think of, or each unique relevant Soundex code.