

FREE PUBLIC RECORDS DIRECTORY

<http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/>

MORE AND MORE municipalities, counties and states are making data accessible via the Internet. To learn what is available for where you are researching, visit the Free Public Records Directory website. You will find links to criminal records, civil court records, marriage records, divorce records, real and personal property records, recorded documents, jail and inmate records, sex offender records, wanted person records and other free public records.

Note that state laws vary greatly in terms of what kind of information can be made public and that the degree to which municipalities and counties are making data available online varies dramatically. Also, many of the efforts to post information online were not started till the late 1990s (or that is the data that is available). Sometimes information goes back to the 1980s and even much further. Some entities are adding older data as time and finances permit.

To start, you type in your zip code or city and state of interest, then you're typically directed to a county level list (since many records are kept at this level). You also have the option to click on a particular state and find state level records before looking at county level records. For each type of record listed, you will find the following:

- Free public records database or lists
- Contact information for public records holder
- Paid access to public records

I checked out Las Vegas ,Nevada and learned that Las Vegas is in Clark County. For Clark County, there is information on: Assessor Records, Recorder/Registrar of Deeds, Census Information Summary, District Courts, Jail and Inmate Records, a link to the Clark County website and more. Clicking on Recorder/Registrar of Deeds brings up the Clark County Recorder web page and we learn that you can search on deeds going back to 1950! Each record type will have free, info or paid indicating that there

is some access to records online or that information about record availability and access procedures is available or that there is a fee-based access service.

What about a less populated and less famous locale? I also checked out Newtown, Connecticut, which I knew was in Fairfield County. Though you are directed to the Fairfield County page, it is clear that Assessor records are handled by each municipality since one finds: Brookfield, CT Assessor Database, Danbury, CT Assessor Database, Fairfield, CT Assessor Database, et al. Otherwise, there is only

Census Information Summary available. So, Connecticut has not yet made available, via the Internet, many of its local records.

And, let's also check out a city — Philadelphia. Philadelphia is in Philadelphia County and there are many, many records available online. There are Assessor Records, Recorder/Registrar of Deeds records, Records Grantor/Grantee Index (a fee service for records from 1976 to the present, and a historical index that has deeds back to 1619!). You can look at the deed indices, organized by century and year and then alphabetically by individual. Many types of court records are available along with police department records

and much more.

The biggest challenge we face when searching through online county records is that most of these databases dare you to figure out what time period is covered. You typically find this out by just doing a search and seeing the oldest record that is displayed. Some of the websites will have FAQs or other information pages to assist you in your search.

As you can see, what is available varies dramatically and you'll definitely want to check out the community you are researching. Like Philadelphia, you might find that some wonderful information is available online! — **DIANE L. RICHARD**



The Free Public Records Directory website.

INTERNET GENEALOGY FEEDBACK

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Almost all the comments are kind; these are nice to hear, but the most useful feedback is critical comments, remarks about specific articles and ideas for future issues.

We don't want you to wait until you see us in person. Let us know how we are doing; we really do read all your comments!

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