

**TRACING**

**NEW ZEALAND**

**BIRTH, DEATH & MARRIAGE**

**RECORDS**

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This guide is to give those with family links in New Zealand an idea of some civil registration sources that are available.

## **NEWSPAPERS & INDEXES TO BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DIVORCE & DEATHS**

### Papers Past

Many New Zealand Newspapers up to 1945, digital copies can now be found and searched on Papers Past  
The link to this site is on the Lost Kin Research links page

NEW ZEALAND HERALD (AUCKLAND) These are transcripts from over 320,000 cards of Death & Anniversary Notices which cover the period 1934 -1970

WANGANUI CHRONICLE (WANGANUI) Index Births, Deaths & Marriages 1845 - 1940

WANGANUI HERALD (WANGANUI) Index Births, Deaths & Marriages 1845 - 1940

HAWERA STAR (HAWERA) Extracts of Births only 1882 - 1982

FIELDING STAR (FEILDING) Extracts of Births, Deaths & Marriages 1882 - 1922

HAWKES BAY TIMES & HERALD (NAPIER)  
Index of Births, Deaths & Marriages 1860 - 1872

LYTTLETON TIMES (CHRISTCHURCH) Extracts of Births & Deaths 1851 - 1880

LYTTLETON TIMES (CHRISTCHURCH) Transcripts of Marriage Notices 1851 - 1880

THE PRESS (CHRISTCHURCH) Obituaries Index for the period 1876 -1894

OTAGO WITNESS (DUNEDIN) Index for Births, Deaths & Marriages 1882 - 1891

These are some of the known published indexes but there are many unpublished indexes.

To find these indexes you need to consult the following publications;

\* *Union List of Newspapers before 1940* D.R. Harvey, National Library of N.Z. 1985.

\* *Union List of Newspapers preserved in libraries, newspaper offices, local authority offices and museums in New Zealand* D. R. Harvey, National Library, Wellington, N.Z. 1987.

### **Intention to Marry Files**

The files tell how long each partner in a prospective union had been living, where he or she was currently living prior to a marriage licence being sought. Where minors sought to contract marriage, there is mention of the parent or guardian who gave permission for the wedding to go ahead.

For the period-1856 - 1920 Archives New Zealand, Wellington, hold the files. They are indexed to the year 1880 only. After 1920 the files are not indexed.

## **Index to the Registrar-General's births, deaths, and marriages**

The indexes start in 1840 and continue to 1990. A researcher who has found a relevant entry should then apply for a printout copy of the original certificate. Note a certified copy (typed document) does not show all the information found in the registers

### **Births**

Birth fiche entries are listed in alphabetical order of surname within each year, the names of males and females being interfiled. In earlier years details were entered by hand, and later typed on a typewriter. In recent years entered via computer.

Maori births were not officially registered until 1913. Separate registers and indexes were compiled from 1913 - 1961 after which all birth registrations were combined.

An **adoption** can be recognised because it is hand-written and there is a *slash part way through the number*. An adoption record is, in theory, off limits to all but the child and parents involved. Note not all hand-written relate to an adoption. The parents of an ex-nuptial child may have married with the result that the child is entered with a new surname. It may be that the original entry was incorrect and a second entry was required.

Post - 1960 births have the mother's Christian name **except** those involving an adoption.

**Important: Please note that at no stage is the full names of both the parents recorded on the indexes to New Zealand births unless the birth has been re-indexed and older than 100 years**

### **Marriages**

Marriages between migrants and Europeans, and European and Maori appear throughout the microfiche. Note: registrations for the Maori people were compiled in separate registers from 1911 - 1952.

In the earlier fiche, the men whose surnames start with 'A' are followed by the women whose surname start with 'A' and so on through the alphabet. There is no cross-reference between husband and wife. The husband and the wife are each allocated the same reference number. The New Zealand Society of Genealogists has compiled an index for the period 1840 – 1920. This index matches the husband and wives via their allocation number. A number of errors were also found for this period and were published in the NZSG Magazine, Index Supplement Nov/Dec 1994.

From 1947 the grooms are gathered together in one alphabetical list followed by the brides in another alphabetical list.

From 1957 each entry has beside it the surname of the partner. The entry can then be matched against the partner's surname, as each spouse will have the same allocation number.

**Important: Please note that the full names of the bride and groom are not recorded on the indexes to New Zealand marriages unless the marriage has been re-indexed and older than 80 years**

## **Deaths**

Entries are listed alphabetically within each year.

Entries are in alphabetical order of surname with the males and females interfiled.

In the early colonial period, deaths were not recorded for missing people, presumed dead where there was no visible body. In later entries these types of deaths can be recognised in the register where the entry has a slash through the number. War deaths in many instances have a slash through the number where a body was not found.

War Deaths are recorded separately for the periods 1914 - 1918 & 1939 - 1945.

Note: Some war deaths for the period 1939 - 1945 may be found in the normal death index.

Funeral Director Forms: These are used by the registrar to register the death and are only kept for five years from the date of death.

**Important: Please note that at no stage is the full names of both parents recorded on the New Zealand Death indexes.**

## **Birth Certificates**

Births were registered from 1848, though some births as early as 1840 were subsequently registered. Certificates prior to 1876 provide the name, sex, date and place of birth, the parent's names, mother's maiden name, and father's occupation. From 1876 the age and birthplace of the parents and the date and place of the marriage were added. From 1916 the age and sex of previous children of a marriage were added. (This is available on request)

### **New Zealand Illegitimate Births 1877 - 1925**

A private index compiled by Mr Derek Griffis from police gazettes of mothers seeking maintenance from the alleged fathers of their illegitimate children - children both born and yet-to-be-born. In total there are 1800 unmarried mothers in the file. With some 2000 babies involved, over 80% of who would have been born between the years 1900 - 1925.

## **Adoption**

In 1881 the first Adoption Act was passed and provided for the legal adoption of a child under the age of 15 years. This was increased to 21 years in 1939. A magistrate made an adoption order for Europeans and by the judge in the Maori Land Court for Maori people. From 1881 - 1915, access to the original birth entry was not restricted and the entry remained the official source of information for issuing a birth certificate to an adoptee. In 1940 all pre 1916 adoption records were transferred to the Central Registry.

From 1915 changes to legislation provided for the re-registering of the adoptee's birth under their new adoptive name. In 1924 further restrictions were placed on obtaining certified copies of the adoptees original birth certificate. From 1955 no personal inspection of an original entry for an adopted person has been permitted.

## **Adoption**

The Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 allows a person who is adopted and who has reached 20 years of age access to their original birth record under Section 4 of the Act. The original certificate will provide date and place of birth, sex and original names. In some instances the certificate will have details on both the birth parents. If details of the birth parents are not recorded they may never have been registered in the first place or a **veto** has been placed by the birth parents. Sometimes the person placing the veto has left a letter of explanation, and request to the registrar should ask for this information plus any other non-identifying information that they may have.

## **Marriage Certificates**

Marriage records date from 1854, but registration was not compulsory until 1856.

Prior to 1880 the certificate produced will show date and place of marriage, full names and conjugal status of bride and groom plus their occupations. From 1880 additional information found on certificates include birthplace, residence and usual residence of each party, occupation of father, maiden name of mother.

A post-1880 marriage that ended in divorce will have a notation recorded on the document held at the Central Registry which will show, name of the court, date of decree. If the divorce occurred outside New Zealand then a notation would not be recorded. In post 1880 marriages a widower will often have included the date when his **first wife died**. A widow will usually carry the surname of the first husband. A divorced man will have included the date when his divorce became absolute. A divorced woman will have the same.

**Note:** In the early years of the 20th century divorced women often reverted back to their **maiden name**. When they married for the second time although the names of their parents were recorded, nothing is shown detailing their former married name.

Births, Deaths & Marriages NZ used to produce two certified marriage certificates - **RG 12A & RG118**. A RG 12 A provided all the details minus the information concerning the parents that was produced only on the RG 118. The registry will issue a **marriage certificate showing parents if specifically requested**.

## **Circumstances under which marriage was allowed / disallowed**

An ordinance of the Governor in 1855 established that males could marry at and after the age of 14 while girls could marry at and after the age of 12. The consent of parents or guardians was required for people under the age of 21. When consent from the parents was not possible, a couple could make application to a magistrate to be allowed to marry.

The 1933 Marriage Amendment Act stated that "A marriage between persons either of whom is under the age of 16 years shall be void". However anyone who was married prior to the new legislation below the age of 16 were protected." Nothing in this section shall affect any marriage solemnised or contracted before the passing of the act". The marriage of a man to his deceased wife's sister was legalised in 1881 while the marriage of a woman to her deceased husband's brother was legalised in 1901. The 1881 and 1901 acts were retrospective, enabling couples to legalise already de facto situations and give legitimacy to children of such liaisons.

Marriage to the niece of a deceased wife or the nephew of a deceased husband was legalised in 1929.

## **Divorce records**

The first New Zealand law allowing people to obtain a divorce was passed in 1867 and was similar to the 1857 English act. The grounds for divorce was adultery on the part of the husband or wife but only if their were additional aggravating circumstances.

From 1898 the wife no longer needed to prove that there were additional circumstances beyond her husband's adultery. As well, grounds were extended to include failure to comply with a decree for the restitution of conjugal rights and desertion for five years. In 1919 this was reduced three years.

From 1928 the grounds were further extended to include habitual drunkenness for four years coupled in the case of a husband with habitual cruelty or habitual failure to support. In the case of a wife coupled with the neglect of domestic duties, seven years for attempted murder of a child, detention in a mental hospital for seven years or more.

The regional offices of Archives New Zealand in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin hold the divorce registers in many instances. **Restrictions apply as divorce files are closed for 100 years.** An application needs to be made to the High Court in area the divorce took place for permission to gain access to files and also for relevant file numbers. The content may contain correspondence, which gives a great deal of information about the family involved.

### Index

The National Divorce Index only gives names only is held by the Wellington High Court

Documents held by the court include:

- The Petition
- The Decree Nisi
- The Decree Absolute
- Any written judgment

### ***Divorce Information Extracted from New Zealand Truth Newspaper Series 1 1946 – 1966 - Note some pages were found to be missing***

Published c 2000

Fields include

- Surname
- First names
- Occupation
- Place (where from)
- Designation
- Grounds
- Witness
- Decision
- Date of Truth Issue & Page Number

## **Death Certificates**

Pre 1876 death certificates have the date of death, full name, sex, age, occupation and cause of death.

Post 1876 certificates also include the place of birth and length of residence in New Zealand, the names of the deceased's parents, father's occupation, and mother's maiden name. The district where married, age at marriage, name of spouse, sex and ages of living children, date of death and place of burial.

From 1912 the age of the surviving widow.

From 1972 the date of birth of the deceased

A folio reference with the letter "Z" means that two death certificates are recorded on the same page.

**Note: New Zealand Death certificates do not show the names of the children of the deceased.**

## **District Keys to the New Zealand Registration Districts**

The district keys to registration districts consist of eight volumes and help one to establish where in New Zealand births and deaths up to the year 1955 were registered. There are no volumes for marriages.