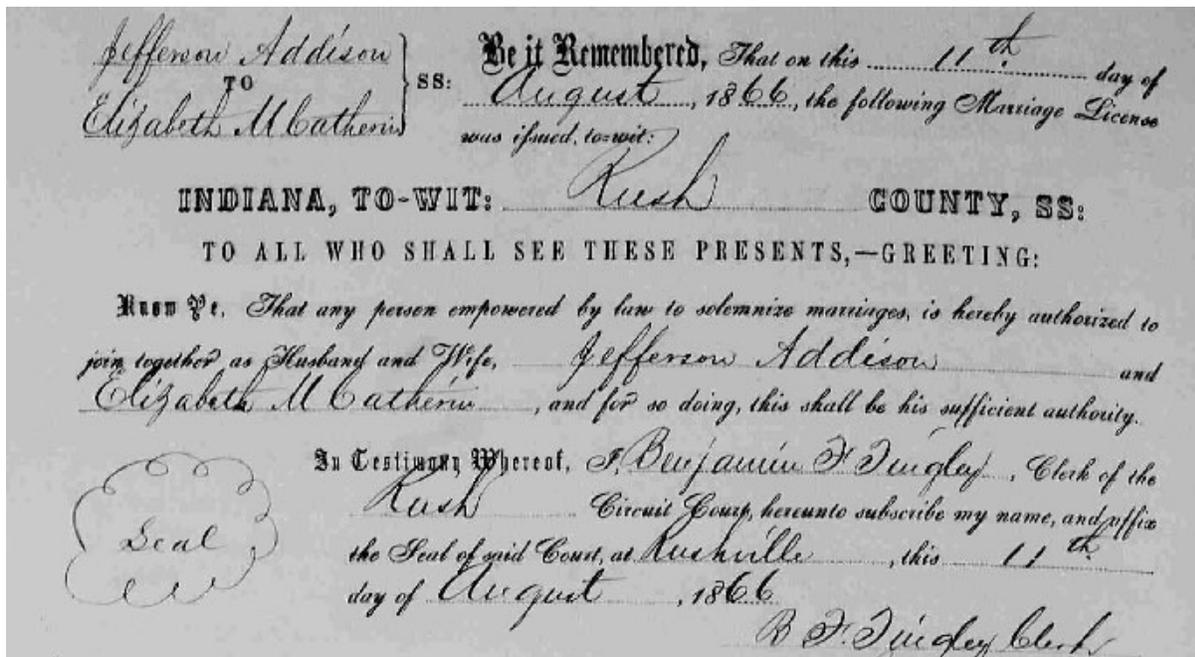


# IN-GENious!

## FINDING INDIANA MARRIAGE RECORDS

By MEREDITH THOMPSON



A Rush County marriage license from 1866

Vital records—births, marriages, and deaths—are considered the building blocks of genealogy research. Though Indiana became a state in 1816, births and deaths were not recorded until 1882 (and even then, it was not widely practiced until the 1900's). Marriage records, however, were among the earliest records to be kept—several counties in Indiana have marriage records dating back to the county's formation. There are actually several types of marriage records to look for.

### MARRIAGE LICENSES

Marriage licenses (like the example above) are what many researchers think of when they think of marriage records. Licenses are issued by the county's Clerk of the Circuit Court and usually contain the name of the bride, the name of the groom and the date the license was issued. Early licenses were often just handwritten entries in a book; in the 1850's and 1860's, the use of pre-printed forms became more commonplace.

For marriages that occurred between 1838 and 1940, the license could only be is-

**FINDING INDIANA MARRIAGE RECORDS (continued)**

sued in the county where the bride had been a resident for the previous 30 days. Sometimes early licenses also noted the county of residence for the bride and groom, which can provide clues to the groom's migration.

The residency requirement was waived in 1940—after that date, couples could apply for a marriage license anywhere. Some counties compensated by charging a higher license fee for applicants who were not residents.

1940 was also the date when Quakers were required to get a marriage license from the county; before that, they were exempt. So if you are searching for an ancestor's pre-1940 marriage and they were Quakers, you may not find a marriage license for them in the county clerk's office—but you will probably find it in Quaker records.

And regardless of what county the marriage ceremony is performed in, the completed marriage license is supposed to be returned to the county in which it was issued. So if the license was issued in Boone County but the ceremony actually occurred in Indian-

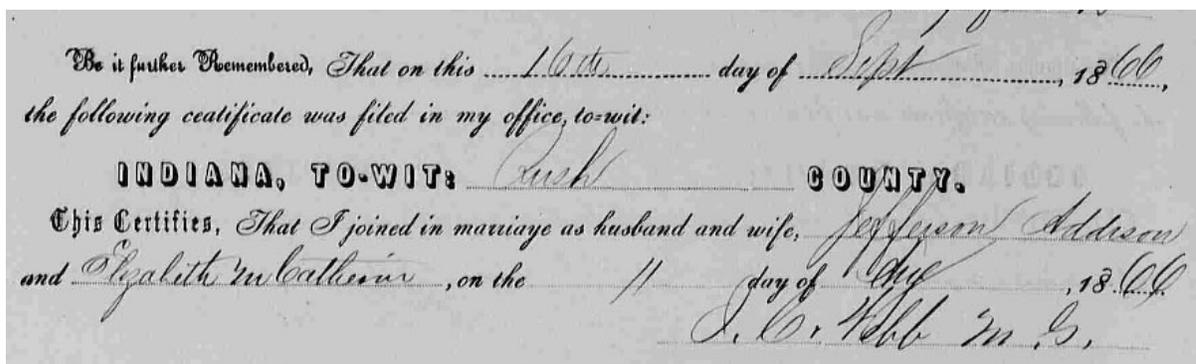
apolis, the license would still have been filed in Boone County, not Marion County.

There are exceptions to this rule, however. For example, the September 2006 issue of *Indiana Genealogist* had an article about a couple of marriage licenses that were issued in Delaware County and Hancock County in 1862, but were actually filed in Marion County.

**MARRIAGE RETURNS**

The marriage return (see example below) is an often-forgotten part of the marriage record. Usually found with the marriage license, it included the name of the person performing the marriage ceremony and the date the ceremony was performed (which could be several days after the license was issued).

Not all marriage licenses were returned. Sometimes this was because the prospective bride and groom had changed their minds about getting married, but sometimes it was because the minister or Justice of the Peace forgot to return it to the county clerk or



**A Rush County marriage return from 1866**

FINDING INDIANA MARRIAGE RECORDS (continued)

Application is Thereby Made for a License for the Marriage of  
*Martini J. Goldsmith* to *Wilma J. Gibson*

UPON THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF FACTS RELATIVE TO SAID PARTIES:

MALE	FEMALE
1. The full Christian and surname of the man is <i>Martini J. Goldsmith</i>	1. The full Christian and surname of the woman is <i>Wilma J. Gibson</i>
2. Color <i>W.</i> 8. Where born <i>London, Ky.</i> (Town, County, State or Country)	2. Color <i>W.</i> 8. Where born <i>Bloomington, Ind.</i> (Town, County, State or Country)
4. When born <i>Nov. 16 - 1931</i> (Day, month and year)	4. When born <i>July 14 - 1939</i> (Day, Month, Year)
5. Present residence <i>Indianapolis</i>	5. Present residence <i>Madisonville, Ind.</i>
6. Present occupation <i>Office</i>	6. Present occupation <i>None</i>
7. If no occupation, what means has the male contracting party to support a family?	
8. Is the male contracting party of nearer blood kin to the female contracting party than second cousin? <i>No</i>	
9. Full Christian and surname of father <i>Francis Howard Goldsmith</i>	7. Full Christian and surname of father

A Hamilton County marriage application from 1950

the county clerk lost it.

MARRIAGE AFFIDAVITS

Even though the average life span was much shorter back in the 1800's, there were still some strict age standards. A woman had to be at least 18 years old to get a marriage license; a man at least 21 years old. If either (or both) were younger than that, they were supposed to file an affidavit with the license. An affidavit could be from a parent/guardian, giving their permission for them to marry, or it could just be a male resident (though not necessarily a relative) vouching for them.

An affidavit could also appear in various formats. Sometimes it was a pre-printed form that was separate from the marriage license (see example on right), but other times it was just a handwritten note from the parent/guardian.

On this *3rd* day of  
*July* A. D. 1878  
 before me, FRANK H. WOLKE,  
 Clerk of the Allen Circuit Court, in the  
 State of Indiana, personally came  
*August Guillaume*  
 who, being duly sworn, upon his  
 solemn oath saith that he is acquainted  
 with *John Devaux*  
 and  
*Laura Keiv*  
 and has reason to believe, and verily does  
 believe, that they are of lawful age to  
 marry without the consent of their  
 parents or guardians, and that he knows

An Allen County marriage affidavit  
from 1878

**FINDING INDIANA MARRIAGE RECORDS (continued)**

**MARRIAGE SUPPLEMENTS**

Beginning in 1882, supplemental information was supposed to be recorded along with each marriage, namely the parents of the bride and groom, and the age of the bride and groom at their next birthday. This information was not recorded with every marriage, however, and even if it did, it may not have been kept. If it survived, this supplemental information is often found in a separate location from the marriage licenses.

**MARRIAGE APPLICATIONS**

Beginning in April 1905, the Indiana State Board of Health provided all the county clerks with a standard marriage application form (see example on page 48). It asked several questions that are valuable to researchers, such as the birthdate and birthplace of the bride and groom, how many times they had been previously married, and the names of their parents.

**HOW TO FIND MARRIAGE RECORDS**

Unlike with birth and death records, Indiana did not keep marriage records on the state level until fairly recently. Before 1958, the county clerk's office had the only copy of their county's marriage records. Unfortunately, over the years some counties' records have been lost or damaged.

Beginning in 1958, the state required the county clerks to send a copy of their marriage licenses to the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) as they were returned. The ISDH does not perform searches of these mar-

riage records, but the Indiana State Library (140 N. Senate Ave., Indianapolis IN 46204; <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us>) has their Indiana marriage index for 1958-2003 on microfilm.

The Indiana Genealogical Society and the Genealogical Society of Utah recently began the Indiana Marriage Indexing Project. When completed, the result will be an online index for Indiana marriages 1790-1957, with links to digitized images of the records. Volunteers have already indexed over 100,000 records.

Until that is complete, there are many other resources for finding your ancestor's marriage. In the 1930's, the Work Projects Administration (WPA) hired white-collar workers to index the records in the county courthouses. Their work was halted by the United States' entry into World War II, but not before they had created marriage indexes for these counties: Adams, Allen, Bartholomew, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Cass, Clark, Clay, Clinton, Daviess, DeKalb, Delaware, Elkhart, Floyd, Fountain, Franklin, Fulton, Gibson, Greene, Hamilton, Hancock, Harrison, Hendricks, Henry, Howard, Huntington, Jackson, Jasper, Jay, Johnson, Knox, Kosciusko, Lagrange, Lake, La Porte, Madison, Marion, Martin, Miami, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Newton, Orange, Owen, Parke, Perry, Pike, Posey, Pulaski, Putnam, St. Joseph, Shelby, Spencer, Starke, Sullivan, Tippecanoe, Vanderburgh, Vermillion, Vigo, Warren, Warrick, Washington, Wayne, Wells and White.

These WPA indexes are widely avail-

**FINDING INDIANA MARRIAGE RECORDS (continued)**

able in both printed and microfilm format, as well as online, including websites in the Indiana portion of the USGenWeb Project (<http://www.ingenweb.org>). These indexes can be a great resource, but researchers should be aware that the indexes may not be comprehensive (or free from errors).

Local genealogical societies and libraries have also done a great job at creating marriage indexes for their areas. Check the IGS website (<http://www.indgensoc.org>) for their contact information.

Several counties have also had some of their marriage records (in their various formats) microfilmed. This microfilm is often available at the Indiana State Library, as well as through Family History Centers. Local libraries may also have a copy of the microfilm.

Finally, don't forget to look online—here are just a few of the growing resources:

**ALLEN COUNTY**

<http://www.friendsofallencounty.org>  
Allen County marriage index early 1990's to present (click on "Fort Wayne and Allen County, IN Databases" section)

**BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY**

<http://www.bartholomewco.com/archives/index.php>

**LAKE COUNTY**

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~innwigs/>  
Northwest Indiana Genealogical Society—Index to Lake County marriage books for 1837-1920 (click on "Online Archives" section)

**MARION COUNTY**

<http://www.civicnet.net/apps/civil/marriage/index.jsp>  
Marion County Clerk's Office—Marion County marriage index 1925-present

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY**

<http://www.cdpl.lib.in.us>  
Crawfordsville District Public Library—Montgomery County marriage index 1888-1941 (click on "Local History Department" section)

**ST. JOSEPH COUNTY**

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~insbags/>  
South Bend Area Genealogical Society—St. Joseph County marriage index 1927-1954 (click on "Maps & Databases" section)

**VANDERBURGH COUNTY**

<http://www.willard.lib.in.us>  
Willard Library—Vanderburgh County marriage index 1920-1979 (click on the "Search Databases" or "Genealogy" sections)

**VIGO COUNTY**

<http://marriage.vigo.lib.in.us/marriage/>  
Vigo County Public Library—Vigo County marriage index 1914-1951

**WAYNE COUNTY**

<http://www.co.wayne.in.us/marriage/retrieve.cgi>  
Wayne County Clerk's Office—Wayne County marriage licenses 1811-1903