

Pre-Vital Records — Where's a Person to Look?

Diane L. Richard suggests when the searching gets tough, look at alternate sources for birth, marriage and death data

Living in the South, I learned a long time ago that the registration of vital records (birth, marriage, and death), are mostly 20th century records. That's correct, records produced in the 1900s! It's not like some northern states, who shall not be named, where civil registration has practically been a fact of life.

It was nice to learn, though, that my experience in NC is actually more the norm, given that it wasn't until 1915 that "the national birth-registration area was established, and by 1933 all states were registering live births and deaths with acceptable event coverage and providing the required data to the bureau for the production of national birth and death statistics". Source: Vital Statistics in the United States: Preparing for the Next Century, <http://popindex.princeton.edu/Articles/Weed.html>. This doesn't mean that jurisdictions were not documenting vital events and issuing records earlier and that there were no federal requirements ensuring some uniformity in information to be reported. To this day, civil

registration is NOT a federal responsibility – "legal authority for the registration of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, fetal deaths, and induced terminations of pregnancy (abortions) resides individually with the states (as well as with cities, in the case of New York City and Washington, DC) and with Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas." The same is true for Canada in that vital registration is NOT a federal

responsibility, www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/genealogy/topics/Pages/births-marriages-deaths.aspx.

This means that for many researchers, documenting birth, marriages, and deaths in the 19th and earlier centuries will require a bit more work.

Let's talk about some of the government-created alternative, or sometimes-called substitute, records that you will want to explore. This list is based on extensive research into these events in NC records and the same or similar records were

North Carolina as an Example

Let's talk specifically about the situation in NC

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) holds these records:

Birth, 1913+ | Death, 1930+ | Marriage, 1962+ | Divorce, 1958+

This means that any records created earlier, and you WILL find across-board marriage records starting in 1868, are stored with the county and/or at the State Archives of North Carolina. The local court maintains divorce records, while the local Register of Deeds offices typically hold birth, marriage, and death records.

And, there is a kind of rule of thumb that though compliance was widespread by the 1920s and 1930s, if you don't find birth and death records for someone in NC until World War II, don't be surprised.

Ancestry.com and FamilySearch both have collections of NC vital records; their coverage varies with the collection via Ancestry.com having more depth.

typically created in many communities. These lists do NOT include personal family records such as Bibles, nor do they include church-created records (baptismal, marriage and burial records), nor cemetery records, as it's assumed that you have already checked for these, and obviously, these are great sources for such information. The focus here are local and select federally-created records that might be of help and where people often don't think to look!

Here is a list of "select" places (see Table right) where you might look, and we'll look at some examples of juicy finds from some of these records. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Recognize that you will not always learn an "exact" date of a vital event (though sometimes you will) and you can often learn in what year a person died.

Birth Records ...

Bessie Glover was adopted 18 October 1895 in Wake County (NC) and in the petition, her birth date of 28 February 1881 was provided. We also learn that she was the illegitimate child of Mary Glover and that the mother died on the 9th of August 1882. What great information.

Many children were orphaned when young and it's more typical for such paperwork to give an age (which is still excellent to know) and occasionally, an exact birth date is provided. Turner Goings, a minor, a person of color, was

Birth	Marriage	Death	Divorce
1902 Voter Registration	County Settlement Papers showing marriage licenses issued (Treasurer's & Comptroller's Papers)	Poorhouse & Wardens of the Poor Records	Court Papers – General Assembly, Supreme Court, or County Court Records
City birth indexes and/or certificates [limited]	Newspaper notices	Ledgers (listing women as widows, a funeral for, etc.)	Newspaper notices
Apprentice Records	Directories [gained a wife]	Newspaper notices [community or faith-based]	Name change legislation and/or petitions
School Records	[Federal] Military Pension paperwork	Directories [listed as a widow]	Annulments
Slave & Free Negro Records incl. Bills of Sale	[Federal] Census Records	City death indexes and/or certificates [limited]	[Federal] Census Records
Tax Records		Funeral Home records	
Court Documents		Insane Asylum & related records	
Delayed birth certificates		Coroner's Inquest Records	
Guardian papers for a minor		Probate records (wills, estates, etc.)	
Newspaper notices		Club, Fraternal Society et al publications	
Bastardy bonds		Physician's medical journal or similar	
[Federal] Census Records		Slave Insurance	
[Federal] Military -- WWI & WWII Registration		[Federal] Census Records [mortality schedules, spouse listed as widow, etc]	
[Federal] SS-5 (Registration for Social Security Card)		[Federal] Military Pension paperwork	
[Federal] Freedmen's Bureau Records			
[Federal] Passport & Naturalization Records			

apprenticed in 1861 and he was said to be 12 years old as of the 31st Dec 1861 telling us he was born 31 Dec 1849.

Some municipalities did institute birth (and death registers) earlier than those mandated by the state. Raleigh NC was such a city and it started registering births in 1890. Unfortunately, though the date of birth, parents names and attending physician or midwife are always

THE CONDITION OF THE ABOVE OBLIGATION IS SUCH, That whereas, the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions for the County of *Wake* at their *May* Term, A. D. 1861, bound unto the said *Wm Carpenter* a certain minor, a person of colour, named *Turner Goings* aged *12 years* ^{2nd Dec. 1861} agreeably to the statutes in this case made and provided: Now if the said *William Carpenter* shall not remove the said

Wake County Apprentice Bonds and Records, A-W, 1770-1860, 1872-1903, Broken Series, CR.099.101.1, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

given, the given names of the child born are few and far between. The sample page for the birth ledger only lists the names of 10 children born between 30 December 1889 and the end of January 1890, with 3 additional births for pre-1890 included – Conrad Robt James, Sarah Ann Davis and Maude McDowell. With the use of other records, the 1900 census for example, it should be possible to corroborate who the child is, unless said child died as an infant or young child.

I don't normally think of court records as the place to find birth records, and, it just goes to show that if such information is needed for a court suit, then it might become part of the public record. An 1821 court document from Northampton County, NC submitted to the Wake County court lists out the names and exact birth dates for the children of Warren Hart Senr – Warren Jr, Benjamin, John, Patsey, Polly, Jincey, Bri???, Rebekah Bidy, Bethenia, Tempy born between 12 Apr 1784 and 22 August 1804. Let's add in the birth dates of the parents and it's a goldmine of information.

Marriage Records ...

Well before across-board marriage records were required in North Carolina, starting in 1868, marriage bonds were taken out and in early records these are sometimes referred to as marriage licenses. Unfortunately, it's not unusual to only find "one" party (the groom) listed as acquiring a marriage license. And, we have to be careful with the assumption that it was the groom as it could have been the bride's father or someone else on behalf of the couple

Wake County, City of Raleigh, Record of Births, 1890-1908, MR.509. 40003, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

who took out the bond/license; in this case, the use of the word "By" might indicate someone other than the groom. Regardless, such a record could indicate that a marriage did take place as we see in a list from Hertford County (NC) which covers 31 December 1787 – 31

Treasurer's and Comptroller's Papers, County Settlements With the State, County Settlements, Halifax – Hillsborough, 1769-1809, Box 12, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

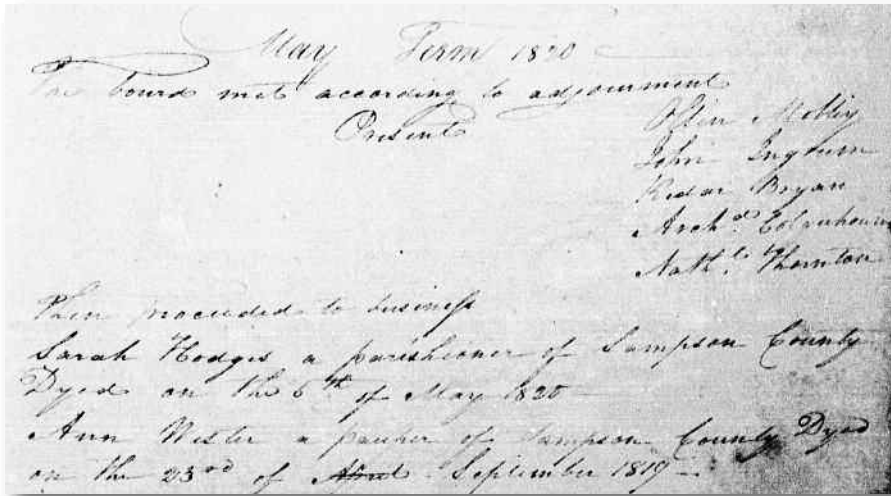
December 1788. Invaluable given that Hertford County is a burnt county as a result of courthouse fires in 1830 and 1862. We learn that these gentlemen, amongst others, took out marriage licenses — Thomas Horn, Benjamin Williams, Edward 30 Eley, Isaac Howill, John Wynns, Cadet Bafs, Jas Harrifs, Jas Lewis, H Partin, By Jo Bridger, By A Gatling, Wright Wiggins, and Paul Valentine.

Death Records ...

It is possible to sometimes document exact dates, not even date ranges, in the most unexpected places for the individuals that we might least expect to document – the poor!

How about a poorhouse record that gives you exact death dates in the early 1800s! Wow. It's hard to document any exact death date, even for those with wills, dying at this time.

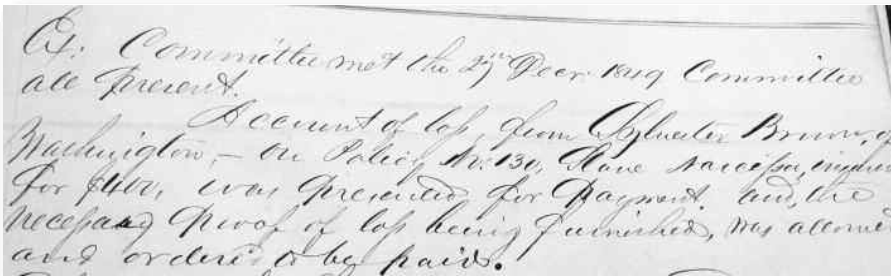
"Sarah Hodges a parishioner of Sampson County Dyed on the 5th of May 1820 ... Ann Wester a pauper ... Dyed on the



Sampson County (NC) Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor (Vestry Minutes), 1785-1824, C.087.90038, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.



Eugene Grissom Papers, Volume 1, 1883-1887, Register of Admissions to NC Insane Asylum, Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.



NC Mutual Life Insurance Co., Raleigh, NC Minutes of Board of Directors and of Executive Committee, 1849-1865, AB 172.1, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

23rd of September 1819 ...”
 Or, did your ancestor end up in an insane asylum and subsequently died there? Unfortunately, not all of those admitted were discharged. Here are a few names of those who died while institutionalized.

- Thos B Haywood, correspondent = Dr. E. B. Haywood (brother), Raleigh, Wake (NC), died Dec 2 1885, Disease of Heart?
- Louisa M Stephenson, correspondent = W.R. Stephenson (Bro(ther)), Raleigh, Wake (NC), died January 20th 1886 of Exhaustion
- W E V Jackson, correspondent = Lilly Jackson (W(ife)), died May 27 1886 of cerebral effusion
- John H Due, correspondent = John T Due (father), died of Epilepsy, Sept. 15th 1888
- Elizabeth D Suit, correspondent = Mrs. Susan Earles, Brookstorin, Vance (NC), died May 8 1888 of Exhaustion

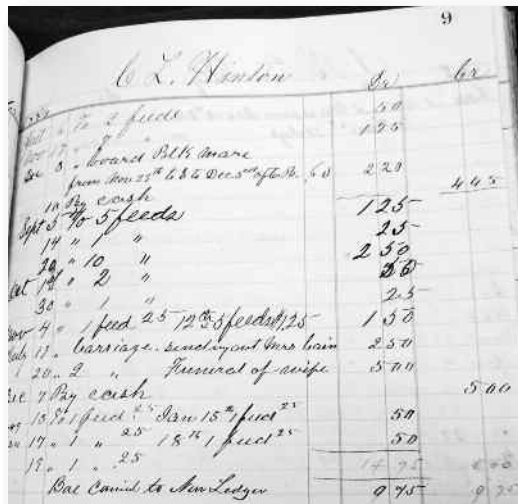
Was your ancestor a slave and insured? Narcissa, slave of Sylvester Brown of Washington (NC), died by 27 December 1849 when a claim was presented to North Carolina Mutual Life, Raleigh, NC.

Mutual Aid societies, fraternal organization and other entities often published information about the deaths of their members. In this example from the New Berne (NC) Lodge of the Knights of Honor, whose membership spanned the country, we find death places, dates and causes.

Maybe your wife died and you needed to rent a buggy to attend her funeral. The ledgers of businesses, including livery stables, physicians,

and others, might provide insight into the happenings in your family – whether someone is ill or has died.

In this ledger, we learned that C. L. Hinton, on 20 July 1888 hired “2 Carriage Funeral of wife”, which tells us that his wife probably died within a few days of this date. In this case, her death was also noted in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 July 1888 with “Mrs. Elizabeth Tate Hinton died yesterday morning at 9 o’clock at her husband’s residence in St. Matthew’s township eight miles east of this city. Mrs. Hinton was the wife of Chas L. Hinton, Esq, and the



NOTICE.—Members failing to pay this assessment on or before January 22, 1883, will stand suspended by the law without action of the Lodge.

New Berne Lodge No. 443, Knights of Honor.
J. C. Harrison
 New Berne, N. C., December 23, 1882.

Deaths Nos. 3811 to 3878 inclusive, and Assessment No. 110 on death No. 3879.

No.	NAME OF MEMBER.	AGE	LOCATION.	AGE	Date of DEATH.	Amount Paid.	CAUSE OF DEATH.
3811	LEVI ABBOTT	20	Nashville, Tenn.	43	Feb. 20, '80	\$11 00	General Paralysis
3812	SOLOMON P. KEY	2380	Breckinridge, Colo.	43	Aug. 12, '83	63 60	Inflammation of the Stomach
3813	S. M. BUSTER	1364	Hernando, Miss.	47	Sept. 7, '82	23 00	Bright's Disease
3814	WOOD TINKER	368	San Francisco, Cal.	36	Oct. 5	54 00	Accidental Drowning
3815	JAMES H. SMITH	1740	Louisville, Ky.	26	" 24	94 00	Railroad Accident
3816	GEO. S. MINOTT	212	Boston, Mass.	50	" 21	26 00	Cancer of Neck
3817	JOHN UNDERWOOD	472	Richmond, Va.	22	" 21	7 00	Phthisis Pulmonalis
3818	WALTER P. TYLER	3096	Australia, Miss.	34	" 21	41 00	Malarial Haematuria
3819	EDWARD ELDREDGE	2457	Durant, Miss.	42	" 21	23 00	Apoplexia Cerebri
3820	R. M. MORPHY	1368	Newark, N. J.	31	" 23	55 00	Consumption
3821	IRLIEU SHERK	585	Malden, Mass.	25	" 23	81 90	Fyemic Abscess of Liver
3822	FRED. J. PLUMMER	354	Plymouth, N. H.	43	" 23	43 00	Accident in Saw-mill
3823	MOSES P. SMITH	753	Neosho Falls, Kan.	46	" 23	52 50	Paralysis
3824	SAMUEL MICHENER	1885	Minneapolis, Minn.	51	" 23	1 00	Meningitis
3825	WM. MULLIKEN	587	Chicago, Ill.	30	" 23	79 00	Consumption
3826	CARL ARNDT	1409	Wheeling, W. Va.	35	" 24	16 00	Suicide by Poison
3827	WM. S. TIPPETT	424	St. Louis, Mo.	41	24	24 00	Rheumatic Pericarditis
3828	LOUIS BUCKNER	457	San Francisco, Cal.	45	" 25	77 00	Phthisis Pulmonalis
3829	CHARS. V. DOLBER	1067	Fremont, Ohio	42	" 25	107 50	Spinal Congestion
3830	PAUL KNEER	852	Trenton, Ill.	51	" 25	55 00	Phthisis Pulmonalis
3831	HENRY WEBER	1536	Richmond, Va.	36	" 25	33 50	Typhoid Pneumonia
3832	JOHN T. PEROR	394	Delphos, Ohio	23	" 25	40 00	Phthisis Pulmonalis
3833	ADOLPH EBERENZ	1787	La Porte City, Ia.	24	" 25	24 00	Pneumonia
3834	M. CLIFFORD PRAY	2150	Stockton, N. Y.	28	" 25	73 00	Apoplexy
3835	ARTHUR J. WICKETT	1130	Salisbury, N. C.	45	" 27	38 00	Softening of the Brain
3836	R. G. SANDERS	1067	Franklin, Mo.	37	" 27	79 00	Bilious Dysentery
3837	CHAS. A. GORDON	775	Memphis, Tenn.	31	" 28	83 00	Pneumonia
3838	THOS. E. PITT	2121	Cuba, N. Y.	44	" 28	94 00	Suicide by Hanging
3839	FRANK WENZEL	366	Boston, Mass.	27	" 29	90 00	Edema Glottidis
3840	JOHN A. GROVE	553	St. Louis, Mo.	24	" 29	29 00	Hematis
3841	C. E. HILL	201	Neosho, Mo.	49	" 29	21 00	Consumption
3842	H. F. BOSCHER	361	Racine, Wis.	25	" 29	89 00	Killed by Tug Boiler Explosion
3843	W. SANDYBAKER	579	Milwaukee, Wis.	49	" 29	75 00	Consumption
3844	ALBERT L. JARNAGIN	2496	Little Rock, Ark.	49	" 29	120 00	Dysentery
3845	F. F. LOVELL	363	Corsicana, Texas.	41	" 29	30 00	Typhoid Fever
3846	WM. GRIEBLING	579	Fremont, Ohio	29	" 30	29 00	Typhoid Fever
3847	J. W. GAY	452	Keokuk, Mo.	33	" 30	55 00	Pulmonary Phthisis
3848	GEORGE FERRIS	962	Salisbury, N. C.	29	" 30	69 00	Cancer of Liver and Mesentery
3849	HERMAN MARK	852	Wilmington, N. C.	29	" 30	57 00	Paralysis of Heart
3850	CHAS. V. BARKER	1071	Moingona, Iowa.	38	" 30	39 45	Typhoid Fever
3851	R. C. MYERS	434	Opelika, Ala.	45	" 31	22 00	Gastro-Intestinal Congestion
3852	HUGH COMMON	1311	Sylvan, Texas.	36	" 31	77 70	Cardiac Disease with Dropsy
3853	THOS. J. RUTLEDGE	269	Jonesboro, Tenn.	45	" 31	44 00	Congest'n of Stomach & Bowels
3854	S. T. BURN	2465	Newton, Ga.	36	Nov. 7	46 25	Meningitis
3855	WM. T. ELAM	533	Newington, Mo.	40	" 11	55 00	Remitt'nt Fev. & Infl. of Bowels
3856	J. H. ROWELL	1861	Saline, Mich.	48	" 11	95 00	Lupus
3857	WM. P. OVERALL	1997	Hustonsville, Ky.	37	" 2	31 00	Killed by Lightning
3858	WM. SCHAFFER	688	Omen, Texas.	43	" 2	42 00	Phthisis
3859	RICHARD W. BRADLEY	233	N. Baltimore, Mich.	38	" 2	15 00	Bilious Remittent Fever
3860	E. MORGAN	398	Blackwater, Fla.	28	" 2	60 00	Chronic Gastritis
3861	LUTHER S. PARKER	1963	Homer, Ill.	47	" 3	78 00	Consumption
3862	EMANUEL JACOBSEN	2592	Brazil, Ind.	49	" 3	54 00	Pneumonia
3863	WM. DOUGHERTY	1421	Evansville, Ind.	41	" 4	36 00	Paralysis of the Heart
3864	JOSEPH LENHART	676	Baltimore, Md.	42	" 5	38 00	Malarial Fever
3865	GEORGE LOY	640	Austin, Texas.	40	" 5	222 60	Nervous Exhaustion
3866	M. E. REINHARD	273	Clinton, Mass.	52	" 5	97 50	Consumption
3867	J. F. OATMAN	1802	Knightsville, Ind.	51	" 6	61 20	Bright's Disease
3868	ALEX. MCGRACHEV	193	Fall River, Mass.	47	" 6	26 00	Intussusception of Bowels
3869	ISAAC J. NICOSON	2150	Henderson, Texas.	29	" 6	14 00	Cerebral Congestion
3870	EBRIJAM BOOMER	345	Willis, Texas.	43	" 7	54 00	Apoplexy from Chron. Alcohol
3871	R. C. PERKINS	840	Rockingham, N. C.	37	" 7	190 00	Bright's Disease
3872	R. F. COCHRAN	2626	Cambridgept, Mass.	50	" 8	19 00	Suppression of Urine
3873	WM. J. MCRAE	1610	Tallula, La.	43	" 8	56 00	Consumption
3874	HENRY JAMES	282	Boston, C. D. Mass.	24	" 9	67 00	Bright's Disease
3875	MARCUS FEIST	2542	Baltimore, Md.	31	" 9	73 00	Pneumonia
3876	J. M. MILK, JR	192	Greenville, Miss.	40	" 9	92 30	Typhoid-Pneumonia
3877	C. L. MCCOLLUM	275	Rushville, Ind.	48	" 10		
3878	GUSTAVE WITKOWSKI	723					
3879	S. F. GREGG	906					

The above Assessment, No. 110, having been called to the Supreme Treasury, you are hereby notified to pay Assessment No. 111 within thirty days from date of this notice.

Received for Dues, \$ _____
 Rec'd Pay't Jan 11th 1883
 You are in arrears for Dues, \$ _____

W. B. BOYD, Reporter.
Jas W Waller
 Financial Reporter.

Livery Stable Accounts, Dec 1885-Nov 1888, W.C. McMackin, Raleigh, NC, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

daughter of Dr. J.F. and Julia E. Cain, of Durham ...” This entry is consistent with the livery entry found.

Did your ancestor die an unnatural death? Was a coroner’s inquest held? In this case, it was determined that on 25 December 1750, William Taylor drowned and no foul play was involved. Sometimes the coroner’s records give not just a death date, but it might be concluded that a murder occurred or that a trial is warranted as the death was suspicious.

Divorce Records . . .

When a divorce is suspected and a file cannot be found, check the newspaper! Though not all marriages headed for divorce ended up in the newspaper, some did! Solomon Todd petitioned for divorce from his bride Milberry in 1824. She was found to not be an inhabitant of the state and the notice had to be published for 3 months. The same was true for Elizabeth Myatt in 1817 when her wayward spouse Bennett Myatt was found to no longer be in NC.

Interestingly, Solomon after the initial 3 months when his bride did not come forth, then placed a subsequent notice, same newspaper, 6 August 1824 where he stated: “To Milberry Todd. Take Notice, that I shall, on the 1st and 2d days

Knights of Honor, Assessments Lists of the New Berne Lodge No. 443, J. C. Harrison Collection, New Bern-Craven County Public Library, <http://newbern.cplib.org/research/index.html>.

Who say upon their oaths that William Taylor
 the twenty fifth day of Decemb: Anno Domini
 1753 appeared at Edgecomb County aforesaid, to
 wit, going in a Conuice from Elizabeth Johnstons
 to the aforesaid William Taylor, in the County
 aforesaid, by the way between the aforesd William
 Taylor, and Elizabeth Johnstons, near the Road the
 Conuice Turned Over the aforesd William Taylor
 then and there, Drowne, so the Jurors aforesd

LEFT: Secretary of State, XVIII Recordkeeping (Misc), Coroners Box 1, Coroner's Inquests, 1738-1775, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC. RIGHT: Solomon Todd vs Milberry Todd, Petition for Divorce, The Raleigh Register, 22 June 1824, page 4.

State of North-Carolina.
 Wake County.
 Superior Court of Law, Spring term, 1824.
 Solomon Todd, }
 vs. } Petition for Divorce.
 Milberry Todd. }
 ¶ Appearing to the satisfaction of the Court
 that the defendant, Milberry Todd, cannot
 be found and is not an inhabitant of this State;
 it is ordered by the Court, that notice be giv-
 en in the Raleigh Register and Star by adver-
 tisement, for three months, to the said Mil-
 berry Todd, that she appear at the Superior
 Court to be next held for the county of
 Wake, at the Courthouse in the City of Ra-
 leigh, on the first Monday after the fourth
 Monday of September next, then and there
 to answer, plead or demur, to said petition.
 Witness, Ransom Hinton, Clerk of our said
 Court, at Raleigh, the first Monday after the
 4th Monday of March, A. D. 1824.
 48 R. HINTON, Clk.

of September, next, at the Court-house in the City of Raleigh ... proceed to take depositions of sundry persons ... in evidence in the suit now pending in the Superior court of Law ... wherein I am Plaintiff and you are Defendant."

This divorce got more interesting, when I found an 1816 petition by Solomon Todd where he states that "his wife Milberry Todd left him in 1810 to live with Henry Culpepper, with whom she has had two children. Todd is requesting

relief". <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll3/id/1273/rec/1>. The original paperwork came from the records of the General Assembly Session Records and Nov.-Dec. 1816, Box 3: folder "Petitions - Divorce and Alimony" and the back has the notation "Indefinitely postponed". Divorce was very challenging to get at the time and Solomon's may not have been granted. Wake County records do not include a record that the marriage was

dissolved. More research would be needed to determine the outcome.

Hopefully these examples will illustrate that there are many, off-the-beaten track places where you can search for sought after information about the births, marriages, and deaths of your ancestors. As the tip of the iceberg, have an awareness that any extant record group which matches the time and place when your ancestors lived, just might provide you a needed detail. ☞☞

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& 8 More Vital Record Alternatives, <http://vita-brevis.org/2015/04/8-more-vital-record-alternatives>

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DIANE L. RICHARD has been doing genealogy research since 1987. She is currently editor of *Upfront with NGS, North Carolina*

Genealogical Society Journal and *Wake Treasures (Journal of the Wake County Genealogical Society)* and a professional genealogy and family historian researcher, speaker, and writer. She can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com.

(Or scan the QR code with your mobile phone or tablet device.)

