

# **Common Terms and Abbreviations**

## **Abbreviations and Glossary for Genealogy** **with helpful Resource Links on last page**

**Abbr.:** abbreviation.

**Abbreviate:** an abstract.

**Abstract:** An abbreviated transcription of a document that includes the date of the record and every name it contains; it may also provide relationships or descriptions (witness, executor, bondsman, son, widow) of the people mentioned. Gives the main points and deletes repetitive language.

**Abt.:** about.

**Administration (abbr. admin., adminisn.):** the process, rather than the record of the management, distribution and other matters concerning the settlement of an estate. The term applies to both testate and intestate estates.

**Administrator:** 1) a manager; 2) a male person appointed by the probate court to collect the assets, pay the bills and settle the estate of one who died without leaving a valid will.

**Administratrix:** a female who administers an estate.

**Adoptive family tree:** a form with spaces for recording both a person's biological and adoptive parents.

**ae:** age.

**African American:** Depending on the time and the tone of a record, African Americans may be listed using a variety of terms including Colored, African, Slave, Negro, Negress, Mulatto, Freedman, Free Person of Color, Black, Quadroon, Octaroon, Afro American and Black American.

Asterisk (\*): Symbol used in some records to denote the person is Colored (African American), i.e. City directories

**Ahnentafel:** a German word meaning "ancestor table." This system of numbering gives each ancestor a number and makes organization and reference easier. Fathers are even numbers, mothers odd. To find a father's number, double the child's number (if you are #1, then your father is #2). Add one to the father's number to get the mother's number (your mother would be #3). A comprehensive ahnentafel gives more than the individual's name, date and place of birth, christening, marriage, death and burial. It should give biographical and historical commentary for each person listed, as well as footnotes citing the source documents used to prove what is stated.

**Ahnentafel Number:** the unique number assigned to each position in an ancestor table. Number one designates the person in the first generation. Numbers two and three designate the parents of number one and the second generation. Numbers four through seven designate the grandparents of person number one and the third generation. As the ahnentafel extends by generation, the number of persons doubles.

1. root individual
2. father (1 x 2)
3. mother (1 x 2 +1)
4. paternal grandfather (2 x 2)
5. paternal grandmother (2 x 2+1)
6. maternal grandfather (4 x 2)
7. maternal grandmother (4 x 2+1)

**Alien:** a citizen of another country.

**Analysis:** written detailed examination.

**Ancestors:** the relatives you descend from directly, including parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on. Your number of ancestors doubles each generation you move backward; for example, you have four grandparents, eight great-grandparents and 16 great-great-grandparents.

**Ancestral chart:** an ancestor chart records the ancestors from whom you directly descend--those for whom you intend to compile a complete and correct family unit. It shows at a glance the progress you have made towards this goal and what remains to be done.

**Ante (abbr. a.):** before.

**b.:** born; birth.

**Banns (of marriage):** publication of an intended marriage, usually announced at a church service a few weeks in advance of the marriage date.

**bpt.:** baptized.

**Baptismal records:** written facts kept by a church official about the baptism of an individual. These usually contain names of parents, date baptized, witnesses, church official performing the ceremony and sometimes other information.

**bc/br:** birth certificate/record.

**Bounty land:** land awarded to attract soldiers to sign up or as payment in addition to or in lieu of wages for military service.

**bp.:** birthplace.

**bur.:** buried.

**c.:** census and circa.

**C or Col:** colored.

**Cemetery administrator/superintendent:** The manager or overseer of a non-religious cemetery.

**Cemetery records:** records of the names and death dates of those buried, as well as maps of grave sites. These records are usually kept by cemetery caretakers. More detailed records, including the names of the deceased's relatives, may also be included. In addition to these paper records, tombstones also can provide information such as birth and death dates and the names of other family members.

**Cemetery vs graveyard:** often used interchangeably. Historic meaning: graveyard is (or was) associated with a Church whereas a cemetery typically is not. A cemetery is traditionally a business where the grounds are much better maintained.

**Census substitutes:** are those name lists derived from tax lists, directories, military lists, land ownership lists, voter registration lists, Church records, School lists, Ship's records, Prisoners, and other compilations of names or residents for an entire state, one or more counties of a state, or one or more towns of a county.

**Census:** a census is an official, complete count of the population in a particular area. In addition to counting the inhabitants of an area, the census generally collects other details, such as names, ages, citizenship status and ethnic background. The US government began collecting census data in 1790, and

has done so every 10 years since then. Selected states have conducted their own censuses over the years.

**Circa/c.:** about.

**Citation:** a reference to a source. Includes the source information along with details specific to that reference, such as page number, volume, or film number. The link that connects a source to our conclusion.

**City directory:** published annually as an aid to business establishments, these books list alphabetically the inhabitants of a town. Also listed are residents' addresses; street and house number. Early directories listed occupations of the inhabitants. Boarders were listed with a special abbreviation to distinguish them from family members.

**Cluster genealogy:** studying your ancestor as part of a group, or "cluster," of relatives, friends, neighbors, and associates. The cluster approach can help you find (or confirm) details you might miss by looking only at an individual ancestor.

**Codicil:** a supplement to an addition to the will; it may explain, modify, add to, subtract from, qualify, alter, restrain, or revoke provisions in the existing will.

**Collateral relative/relationships:** are relationships between individuals who descend from common ancestors but who are not related to each other in a direct line. Collateral relationships include your siblings, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins.

**Conscription:** (or drafting) is the compulsory enlistment of people in some sort of national service, most often military service. Conscription dates back to antiquity and continues in some countries to the present day under various names.

**Consideration:** the amount of money or other value exchanged for land.

**Consort:** wife, husband, spouse, mate, companion.

**Curtesy:** the life estate to which a man is entitled under common law upon the death of his wife.

**d.:** died.

**D.A.R.:** Daughters of the American Revolution.

**d/o.:** daughter of.

**db.:** deed book.

**dbid:** data base id.

**dc/dr:** death certificate/record.

**Deed:** (also called a conveyance and an indenture). Document whereby title in real property (land) is transferred from one party to another.

**Derivative citizenship:** exclusively embraces the citizenship of (1) foreign-born alien minors, and (2) alien women married before Sept. 22, 1922.

**Derivative sources:** material produced by copying an original or manipulating its content; e.g. abstracts, compilations, databases, extracts, transcripts, translations, and authored works such as historical monographs or family histories.

**Descendent lists:** start with a distant ancestor, listing the names of all children, grandchildren, greatgrandchildren and so forth, for a specified number of generations.

**Direct evidence:** relevant information that seems to answer the research question or solve the problem all by itself.

**div.:** divorce/divorced.

**dp.:** death place.

**Documentation:** the process of citing your sources of family history information. Thorough documentation makes it easier for you to keep track of the details and sources you've already research; it also allows other researchers to verify your findings.

**Dower release:** usually found at the end of a deed. The clerk questions a wife, separately from her husband, if she is of her own free will agreeing to the sale and gives up all right to that land.

**Dower:** a life estate which a widow has in one-third of all the lands of her late husband for the support of herself and her children.

**Dowery:** the property a wife brings into the marriage, called "portion" in modern terms.

**Emigration:** is when an individual leaves their home country to live in another country (records in country left).

**Enfeoff:** transfer of land from owner to purchaser.

**Entail:** a common English practice which reserved the entire inheritance to the eldest surviving male heir and it could not be sold or given, even a part of the inheritance, to anyone who was not on a list which specified the line of heirs. Any heir who wished to dispose of the inheritance had to get an act passed by the state before he could make any land deals, sell worn out lands, move his labor force, etc. To restrict the inheritance of land to a designated line of heirs.

**Enumeration district maps:** show the boundaries and the numbers of the census enumeration districts, which were established to help administer and control data collection.

**Enumeration district:** area that could be covered by a single enumerator (census taker) in one census period. Divisions of each county and some large cities used to make census taking more efficient and accurate. For large cities, the boundaries of enumeration districts often match those of wards or precincts.

**Enumerator:** a paid Census taker assigned by a District Marshall.

**est. div.:** estate division made.

**est. sale:** estate sale.

**Estrays:** cattle, slaves, or convicts who appear to have left their domicile by escaping or straying away.

**Et alii (et al):** "and others"

**et ux:** "and wife" **et vir:** "and husband"

**Executor:** a person named in a will to settle the estate of the testator.

**Executress, Executrix:** a female named in a will to administer the estate.

**Extant:** in existence.

**Extract:** a quotation or part of a written document as opposed to an abstract which sets out certain facts or sections.

**f/o.:** father of.

**Family group record (or sheet):** a form which presents genealogical information about a nuclear family - a husband, a wife, and their children. Usually includes birth dates and places, death dates and places, marriage dates and places, occupations, cause of death, names of other spouses as well as source citations. The use of family group sheets from the beginning will make the compilation much easier.

**Family pedigrees:** refer to family group sheets that are linked in a computer system. When you access an individual's family group sheet in a linked pedigree, you also access all of the records that are linked to that individual.

**Fee simple:** an estate in land which has the potential of lasting forever. The owner is entitled to the property to do with it as he wishes.

**Feme, feme convert, feme sole, fem sole trader:** a female: e.g. "A fem convert was a married woman and a fem sole was a widowed, unmarried, divorced, legally separated or presently unmarried woman, or a married woman who, through prenuptial agreement or other action at law, could act and contract – 'be a free trader' – in her own right." A feme sole trader was a woman who traded on her own account, either by custom or because she had no husband.

**Fieri Facias (fi. fa.):** "cause to be done." A court order tells a court officer or sheriff to raise money from the sale of possessions belonging to the person who owes the court money.

**Five-generation chart:** basically, your family tree. The five-generation chart has five columns reading from left to right. Column one (a single box) contains your vital information. Column two contains the names of your parents and their vital information. The third, fourth and fifth columns have four, eight and sixteen lines, respectively, for you to list the names and vital information of everyone through your great-great-grandparents.

**fn.:** father's name.

**Freedman:** a male released from slavery; an emancipated person.

**Gazetteer:** a geographical dictionary; a book giving names and descriptions of places, usually in alphabetical order.

**GEDCOM:** GENEalogy Data COMMunications, or, the universal file format for genealogy databases that allows users of different software programs to share their data with others.

**Genealogy:** the study of a family's history; the process of tracing ancestors back through time.

**Goods and chattels:** the most comprehensive description of personal property.

**Grantee:** the buyer or receiver of property.

**Grantor:** the seller of property.

**Gregorian calendar (new style):** devised by Pope Gregory to correct accumulated errors in the old (Julian) calendar. It was accepted by Great Britain and her colonies in 1751 and the 2nd of September 1752 was chosen as the day which would be followed by the 14th of September. [see Julian calendar]

**Headright:** a method of encouraging settlement of the colonies by granting a certain amount of land per person brought into the colony.

**Immigration:** is when an individual goes into a new country to live (records in new country).

**Indirect evidence:** relevant information that cannot, alone, answer the question; rather, it must be combined with other information to arrive at an answer.

**In-law:** In the 17th century this could refer to a step-relationship between two people. A son-in-law could refer to a step-son and not the husband of his daughter.

**Inmate:** 1) in an early tax list this term means a boarder, roomer or renter of land who is taxable for personal property; 2) a person may also be an inmate in a home for the aged, etc.

**Instant (abbr. inst.):** within the same period of time. A term used to mean the current close date. A popular nineteenth century spoken and written English meaning 'of this month.' E.g. if someone wrote, 'John died on the 5<sup>th</sup> inst.' the phrase can be translated as 'John died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of this month.' It would never mean 'of the previous month.' [See ultimo and proximo]

**Intestate (abbr. intest.):** when a person dies without a will he dies intestate.

**inv.:** inventory of estate.

**Julian calendar:** calendar named for Julius Caesar and used from 45 B.C. to 1582, called the "Old Style" calendar; replaced by the Gregorian calendar.

**Kindred:** blood relatives.

**LDS:** The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church).

**Lease:** agreement between landlord and tenant to transfer title for a specified duration only.

**Library:** contains a collection of books, periodicals, films &/or recordings for people to read, borrow, or reference.

**Lineal:** in a direct line from an ancestor. e.g. parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. This would not include aunts, uncles, etc.

**liv.:** living.

**Mausoleum vs Columbarium vs Crypt:** Mausoleum and Columbarium are often used interchangeably. Historic Meaning: Mausoleum is for caskets containing the whole body whereas a Columbarium is for cremated remains in an urn. A Crypt is a stone chamber or vault beneath the floor of a burial vault.

**m./mb./mc./ml./mr.:** married/marriage bond/certificate/license/record.

**Metes-and-bounds survey system:** method of surveying when land that has been chosen indiscriminately. Tract lines are established by measures and boundaries (for example, particular trees, adjoining landowner's lines, waterways).

**Military records:** beginning with the American Revolution, records of military service have been kept in one form or another by the federal government. Military records fall into two basic categories - compiled service records and veterans' benefits - and can include volunteer records, pension and bounty land warrant applications, draft registration cards and military discharge papers.

**mn.:** mother's name.

**mo/o. or m/o.:** mother of.

**Mortgage:** a conditional transfer of legal title to real property as a security for payment of a debt.

**Mortality schedule:** a section of the federal census listing information about persons who died during the census year.

**Mulatto:** A person of mixed heritage, mostly used for the offspring of African and European parents.

**National Archives and Records Administration (NARA):** The United States' archive of all federal records, including census records, military service rolls and pension applications, passenger lists and bounty-land warrants. In addition to the primary archives in Washington, DC, NARA has a branch in College Park, Md., and 13 regional facilities across the nation. [Including Georgia]

**Naturalization:** naturalization records document the process by which an immigrant becomes a citizen. An individual has to live in the United States for a specific period of time and file a series of forms with a court before he or she can become naturalized.

**Nee:** born, used to denote a woman's maiden name, i.e., Anne Gibson nee West

**Negative evidence:** an inference we can draw from the absence of information that should exist under particular circumstances.

**Octaroon:** A person who is 1/8th black.

**Original sources:** material in its first oral or recorded form.

**Partition:** division of property owned by two or more persons in common.

**Patent/grant:** an instrument by which a government transfers title to a designated tract of vacant land to a private person or corporation.

**Pedigree chart:** a chart showing a person's ancestry, sometimes called "Ancestor" or "Lineage" Charts. Starts with one individual (usually yourself) and includes parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc. in a lineage format detailing relationships for a specified number of generations (typically four or five generations). There is space for full names, dates and places of birth, marriage, and death for these direct ancestors.

**Pedigree:** a person's ancestry, lineage, family tree.

**Pension (military):** a benefit paid regularly to a veteran (or his widow\surviving children) for military service or a military service-related disability.

**Periodical Source Index (PERSI):** a print and online index to more than 2000 genealogy and local history periodicals published in the U.S. and Canada between 1847 and 1985. PERSI is a project of the Allen County Library in Fort Wayne, Ind., and available through HeritageQuest Online (access through a subscribing library).

**Petition/application:** request by individual to governmental authority to take up land.

**Plat/survey:** an officially prepared map of a parcel or tract of land drawn to an identified scale and used to describe the land in recorded transfers of title. Can also describe unofficial map of tract drawn for research purposes.

**Plat:** a drawing that shows the boundaries and features of a piece of property. In genealogy, platting refers to creating such a drawing from a metes-and-bounds or legal land description as a surveyor would have done.

**Poll tax:** a fixed tax levied on each taxable individual, usually white males over a specified age, usually 21 years. Also called a 'head tax.'

**Post (abbr. p.):** after.

**Presents:** Literally, “this document or instrument.” The term “by these presents” is used to designate the instrument or document in which the phrase itself occurs.

**Primary information:** details provided by someone with firsthand knowledge of the information reported, such as a participant in an event or an eyewitness.

**Primary source:** a record or other source created at the time of a particular event. A primary source is always the original record - for example, birth and death certificates are primary sources for those events. But an original record is not always a primary source: For example, a death certificate isn't a primary source of birth information.

**Primogeniture:** a principle of English common law that provided that the eldest son inherited the property. Example: A system of inheritance in which land passes exclusively to the eldest son. Until the Industrial Revolution this system severely restricted the freedom of younger sons, who were often forced into the military or the clergy to earn a living.

**Probate records (prob. rec.):** records disposing of a deceased individual's property. They may include an individual's last will and testament, if one was made. The information you can get from probate records varies, but usually includes the name of the deceased, either the deceased's age at the time of death or birth date, property, members of the family, and the last place of residence.

**Progenture:** a direct ancestor.

**Proof arguments:** the paper or writing by which we present our case for a conclusion, particularly when direct evidence has not been located.

**Proximo (abbr. prox.):** latin meaning ‘of or in the next month’ or the future. E.g. a newspaper notice published October 5<sup>th</sup> 1919, “Married exactly half a century the eighteenth proximo, legal process is now on file for the separate of G. B. Alcorn, or Tattnall County, and his wife, a resident of this city. The husband has filed suit for divorce against his wife whom he married on November 18, 1869, and from whom he was informally separated four years ago...” [see instant and ultimo].

**Public land:** land originally owned by the federal government and sold to individuals.

**Pvt.:** private.

**Quadroon:** A person who is 1/4th black.

**Quit claim:** does not necessarily indicate that the grantor has clear title, but that he releases all title, interest, or claim to the property.

**Quit rent:** a rent paid by a tenant of a freehold estate which discharges him from any other obligations or rents, usually just a token payment.

**Realty:** relating to land. The most comprehensive term for real estate appearing in old deeds is ‘lands, tenements, and hereditaments.’

**Release:** a document by which a person gives up, to another, his right to something in which he has a just claim.

**Relict:** a widow. Sometimes used, but rarely, to describe a widower.

**Repository (archive):** is an accumulation of primary source historical records that have been accumulated over the course of an individual’s or organization’s lifetime.

**S.A.R.:** Sons of the American Revolution.

**s/o.:** son of.

**Secondary information:** details provided by someone with secondhand or more-distant knowledge of the person, event, or situation. Hearsay, tradition, and local lore all represent secondary information.

**Secondary source:** a record created after an event occurred, such as a biography, local history, index, oral history interview or computer database. Original records also can be secondary sources for information about earlier events - for example, a marriage certificate would be a secondary source for a birth date because the birth took place several years before the time of the marriage. Use the details you find in secondary sources as clues until you can verify them in original records.

**Seisin (or seizin):** the possession of a freehold or free simple estate. An old feudal term

**Sexton:** a person/manager paid to care for a church and/or cemetery, to toll the church bell, dig graves, etc.

**Soundex:** a system of coding surnames based on how they sound, which was used to index the 1880 and later censuses. The Soundex system is useful in locating records containing alternate surname spellings. Soundex cards are arranged first by Soundex code, then alphabetically by given name, then (if necessary) alphabetically by place of birth.

**Sources:** are artifacts, books, digital files, documents, film, people, photographs, records, recordings, websites, etc., however obscure or informal, from which we get our genealogy information.

**State land:** land originally owned by a state or another entity, rather than the federal government.

**Stepfamily tree:** a form for recording stepfamilies in your ancestry.

**Surety (or security):** a person who makes himself liable for another person's debts or obligations should the first default or fail to abide by a court order.

**Testate:** when a person dies and leaves a will, he dies testate.

**Testator:** the person making a will.

**Testatrix:** a female who makes a will.

**Teste:** witness.

**Transcribed:** a record compiled or copied from an original record or from a record which has been compiled previously.

**tw./tn.:** town.

**twp./TWP.:** township.

**Ultimo (abbr. ult.):** latin which means "last." This word is used frequently to indicate the preceding month (week, etc.); e.g. a mortuary notice printed September 8, 1876 reads, "Mr. Samuel K. Griffith, formerly of Marietta, died in Warren County, MD., on the 19th ult., in his 57<sup>th</sup> year..." meaning that he had died on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. In his "57th year" means that he had not yet reached his 57th birthday and was still 56 years old.

**unk.:** unknown.

**Vital records:** the most basic information available for a person; these statistics found in vital records include birth (abbreviated b), marriage date and place (abbreviated m), divorce date and place if applicable (abbreviated div) and death date and burial place (abbreviated d and bur).

**Warrant:** an order to a surveyor to identify and measure a parcel of land to be granted to the warrant holder. Warrants were given under colonial and state land-grant systems and also as bounty for military service.

**Widow's relinquishment or dower release:** wives were interviewed apart from husbands so that the recorder might verify their intent to forego their claim for dower in the future as a widow. This is often recorded in court records and establishes proof of a marriage.

**Will:** a document in which a person outlines what should be done with his or her estate after death. The legal process to see that those instructions are carried out is called probate.

**Witness:** a person who sees an event and signs a document attesting to its content being accurate. Although family members often served as witnesses, don't assume that witnesses on a record are relatives - friends, neighbors, and business associates also commonly served as witnesses to documents.

**wp.:** will proven.

**ww.:** will written.

**X:** what the signer of a document would often write if he/she could not write his/her name. A witness would typically label this, "his mark."

**Correct Abbreviations: Postal Abbreviations for States:**

Alabama AL	Indiana IN	Nebraska NE	South Carolina SC
Alaska AK	Iowa IA	Nevada NV	South Dakota SD
Arizona AZ	Kansas KS	New Hampshire NH	Tennessee TN
Arkansas AK	Kentucky KY	New Jersey NJ	Texas TX
California CA	Louisiana LA	New Mexico NM	Utah UT
Colorado CO	Maine ME	New York NY	Vermont VT
Connecticut CT	Maryland MD	North Carolina NC	Virginia VA
Delaware DE	Massachusetts MA	North Dakota ND	Washington WA
Florida FL	Michigan MI	Ohio OH	West Virginia WV
Georgia GA	Minnesota MN	Oklahoma OK	Wisconsin WI
Hawaii HI	Mississippi MS	Oregon OR	Wyoming WY
Idaho ID	Missouri MO	Pennsylvania PA	District of Columbia DC
Illinois IL	Montana MT	Rhode Island RI	

**Tip:**

Remember to write dates as day - month (3-letter abbr.) - year (4-digit) ex.: 20 Nov 1620.

**Correct Abbreviations: Months of the Year:**

January Jan	April Apr	July Jul	October Oct
February Feb	May May	August Aug	November Nov
March Mar	June Jun	September Sep	December Dec

Online Resources:

<http://thelawdictionary.org/>

<http://www.constitution.org/bouv/bouvier.htm>

[https://books.google.com/books?id=R2c8AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=R2c8AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) [Black's Law Dictionary, 2nd ed, 1910]

<https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/glossary/>

<http://www.cyndislist.com/dictionaries/>

**Helpful Resources:**

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*. Third edition. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2015.

Morgan, George G. *How to Do Everything Genealogy*. Fourth edition. New York: McGraw Hill Co., 2015.

NGS Special Publication No. 90. *Paths To Your Past: A Guide To Finding Your Ancestors*. Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2009.

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*. Third edition. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000.

NGS Special Publication No. 99. *Creating A Winning Family History*. Revised. Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2010.