



# The Kalamazoo Valley Heritage

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## November KVGS Program

Ardis Pierce and Wayne Loney, the speakers at the November 19, 2007 KVGS meeting, have been volunteering at the Kalamazoo County Clerk's Office for many years, and are experts on Kalamazoo County vital records. They shared insights about these documents and vital records in other states in their talk entitled, "Vital Records in Michigan and Beyond."

Marriage records, kept in Michigan since 1837, are open to all researchers, and are computerized in Kalamazoo County from 1982.

Michigan death records, kept from 1867, are also open for research and are scanned in Kalamazoo from 1982.

Rules for accessing birth records in Michigan (recorded since 1867) are more complex. If the birth was 110 or more years ago, you are entitled to know the contents of the record, although you cannot personally examine the index or the birth ledger. If the birth was less than 110 years ago, you must prove that the person is deceased and that you are an heir (relative), in order to learn the information. Proof must be in the form of birth, marriage, and death documents.'

Special vital records in Michigan include the following situations:

- Illegitimate and stillborn births may be recorded in Lansing, not in the county of birth.
- Birth indexes and some birth records are available on microfilm at the Kalamazoo Public Library and through the Family History Library. These microfilms were created prior to current privacy laws.
- Underage ("secret") marriages may be recorded in Probate Court, not the Clerk's Office.

- Special death indexes exist for Foreign Deaths (Kalamazoo resident who died outside of the county) and deaths within the City of Kalamazoo. The Foreign Death Index (through about August 2002) is available on the KVGS web site.

Ardis and Wayne emphasized some "tips" about searching vital records:

- Vital records may exist at the state, county, township, and city levels. If you cannot find a record at one level, try another. Also, these records may contain different information.
- Copy all information on the vital record, including names of wedding witnesses.
- Be sure to record all information necessary to cite your source.

The extensive handout for the talk included many web sites where you can access vital records for other states. One site new to many of us was <http://search.labs.familysearch.org>, a "not ready for prime time" site of the LIDS Family History Library, which currently includes digitized death certificates for some years for Georgia, Ohio, Utah, and West Virginia.