



## Illinois Statewide Death Index, Pre–1916 Illinois State Archives

An Ongoing Project of the Illinois State Archives

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The pre–1916 Illinois death index is an ongoing project coordinated by the Illinois State Archives. The sources for this index include original county clerks' death records, such as death registers and licenses. For each death, the index includes the name of the decedent, the date of the death, the name of the county where the death occurred, the place of death within the county, when possible; the age and sex of the decedent and a citation to the original record—volume and page number for death registers or certificate number for death certificates.

### Recordation of Deaths in Illinois

The first legislation in Illinois regarding recordation of births and deaths was enacted in 1819 at the second session of the First General Assembly. [*Laws of Illinois* 1819, p. 233] This law established medical societies to which all physicians were required to belong and made it the duty of every physician to keep a record of births, deaths and diseases occurring within the vicinity of his practice. This record was to be transmitted to his medical society whereupon the record was to be published in the newspapers. This law required no public records of births or deaths to be kept.

In 1843, legislation was passed that provided that a parent could appear before the clerk of the county commissioners' court and make affidavit as to the birth of a child, and the eldest next of kin of a deceased person could similarly appear to make affidavit as to death. [*Laws of Illinois* 1842–43, pp. 210–212] Because this law made recordation voluntary rather than mandatory, virtually no birth and death records existed in Illinois prior to 1877 except in a few scattered counties where the records were very fragmentary.

An act was passed in 1877 creating the State Board of Health and giving it the responsibility for general supervision over the registration of all births and deaths occurring within the state. [*Laws of Illinois* 1877, pp. 208–210] This act required that all births and deaths in each county be reported to the county clerk by the attending physicians or accoucheurs and that all physicians and accoucheurs in the state register their names and addresses with their county clerk. Since penalties for non-compliance with this law were weak, births and deaths were often not reported.

The system of registration of births and deaths was completely revised in 1915 when the state of Illinois was divided into registration districts and the duty of recording births and deaths was placed in the hands of local registrars and subregistrars who were required to report to both the county clerk and the State Board of Health. [Laws of Illinois 1915, pp. 661, 667–669] The local registrars were required to deposit annually with the county clerk of their respective counties complete sets of records for births, stillbirths and deaths registered to them. Each month they were required to transmit to the State Board of Health all original certificates registered to them; copies of certificates or a recordation of the same in a form approved and prescribed by the State Board of Health were to be kept by the local registrars. In 1917, the name of the Board of Health was changed to the Illinois Department of Public Health. [*Laws of Illinois* 1917, pp. 4, 27]

The county clerk was charged with binding and indexing, or recording, and safekeeping of all vital statistics records deposited with him. Since the act of 1877, the county clerk has been required to retain the abstracts and certificates of vital statistics, keep a record of births and deaths, maintain alphabetical indexes to birth and deaths and issue certified copies of certificates upon request. The county clerk has also been required to prepare a register of all physicians and accoucheurs in the county.

## Contents

Death certificates show the name, age, sex, marital status, and race of the deceased; the places of birth, death and burial; the dates of death and burial; the cause of death; the date filed; and the signature of the physician and the registrar.

Death record or register show the name, race, marital status, age, sex, and occupation of the deceased; the date, place, and the primary cause of death; contributing causes and duration; the place and date of burial; the name and address of the undertaker; and the name and address of the physician.

## Abbreviations

Name of Decedent:

- INF — Infant
- REV — Reverend
- SIS — Sister

Age:

- DA — Day
- MN — Minutes
- MO — Month
- SB — Stillbirth
- UNK — Unknown or Unspecified
- YR — Year

City:

- HOSP — Hospital
- PRECT or PCT — Precinct
- TWP — Township

Sex:

- F — Female
- M — Male
- U — Unspecified

## Copies

Copies of death records included in the Pre-1916 Illinois Statewide Death Index may be obtained from the Illinois Regional Archives Depository System if IRAD holds death records for that county or from the county clerk in the county where the death occurred. Copies of death records before 1916 are not available from the Reference Unit of the Illinois State Archives in Springfield.

- Request a Death Record from IRAD — Illinois Regional Archives Depositories (IRAD) hold original death records or microfilm copies for many Illinois counties. The IRAD holdings include death records for slightly more than half of the 102 counties in Illinois. Consult the [Local Governmental Records Holdings Database](#) to see if IRAD has death records for the county and date of the death you are requesting. Type the search term DEATH in the title field to return all death records in the IRAD holdings. If IRAD does have death records for the county you are searching and for the pertinent time period, write the appropriate IRAD depository and include in your letter all of the information on the death given in the Pre-1916 Illinois Statewide Death Index. The [addresses and telephone numbers](#) of the Illinois Regional Archives Depositories are listed in the IRAD section. Death record searches are free, but a small copy fee will be billed for records found. IRAD provides uncertified copies only. Certified copies must be requested from the county clerk.
- Request a Death Record from a County Clerk — County clerks are the official custodians of all death records recorded in Illinois counties. To obtain copies of deaths found in the Pre-1916 Illinois Statewide Death Index, write the appropriate county clerk and include in your letter all of the information on the death given in the Pre-1916 Illinois Statewide Death Index. Search and copy fees will vary from one county to another.

## Quick Link

- [List of counties and date spans currently included in the \*Illinois Statewide Death Index\*](#)
- [IRAD Holdings](#)

