



Vital Records: The Screws in Genealogical Research

by Terry Moore, CG

Part 1: Birth Records

Be careful of what you wish for, you might just get it. My great-great-grandmother, Ann Elizabeth Netherwood (nee Dingee), married a second time a man whose surname was Hammond. According to my father, she had a son (name unknown) from this marriage who was “an annoying bum, who hung around our house.” I decided to investigate. Annie Hammond was found on the 1900, Kingston, New York census, born May 1853; Ann Dingee was born 3 May 1852. This looked promising. The spouse was Charles Hammond and the son was also Charles, born September 1895. I decided to try to obtain a copy of Charles’ birth certificate.

In New York state, birth records are closed for seventy-five years and then only available to a genealogist if the individual is deceased. Most city or town registrars will not allow the original books to be searched by genealogists; they make a transcription of the record. After the birth record of Charles Hammond, born September 1895, was requested, I received a typed transcript. Charles was born 26 September 1896, his mother was Ann C. Guido and his father was Charles Hammond. I wrote back to the City Registrar and asked if the mother’s name could possibly be Ann E. Dingee. A note from the Registrar explained that the handwriting was difficult to read and it could indeed be Ann E. Dingee and would I please accept the newly typed birth certificate and destroy the first one. Hmm, I did not feel confident that the name of Charles’ mother was Ann E. Dingee or Ann C. Guido—a problem I still have not resolved. But did I get what I wanted? Was I dealing with a nail or a screw?

Vital records are a handy tool for building our family tree. A hammer can be used to put a nail into a board which can often be easily extracted. A screwdriver on the other hand takes more effort to use and a screw holds tighter and stronger. Vital records are the screws in genealogical research, but

they should be used cautiously because screws take more effort to remove.

Fortunately, in North Carolina, we can view the actual vital records; in fact many of the records are online. North Carolina officially began keeping birth and death records in 1913, although sometimes it took decades for everyone to comply with the new law. A few North Carolina cities, like Wilmington and Raleigh, began keeping vital records earlier. Raleigh recorded births beginning in 1890 and deaths in 1885. Wilmington’s birth records began in 1904 and deaths in 1903. Although Perquimans County kept some early vital records between 1659 and 1820, and Pasquotank County between 1691 and 1833, they were the exceptions. These latter records were abstracted by Weynette Parks Haun and the originals are at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh.¹

Vital records help identify people in time by a name, date, place, and relationships. A birth record will usually be reliable for the name of the child, date place of birth, and name of the mother. Delayed birth certificates were also sometimes filed in North Carolina years after a birth took place. To obtain a delayed birth record, an individual needed to provide proof of his birth from records such as a family Bible, military record, marriage record, or an affidavit from an older relative, who may have been present at the birth. The records that were supplied will be listed on the document and delayed births are indexed with the birth records. Birth records can be obtained by writing to the Register of Deeds in the county. Call first to determine how much money should be sent with the request; it is usually twenty-five cents to one dollar and an SASE. If a birth or death certificate is ordered from the state by mail, it currently costs \$15 and generally takes longer to receive.² Some of the birth indexes are on microfilm

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at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh or are available in the individual counties, and some indexes are available on *Ancestry.com*.

As of 15 August 2012, the following North Carolina vital records were available on *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch.org*.

Ancestry

When searching on Ancestry go to the card catalog and choose a specific database, so you know exactly what you are searching.

Images of North Carolina Death Certificates 1909–1975 are available on *Ancestry.com*.

The North Carolina Death Collection 1908–2004, on *Ancestry* is compiled in three parts: first, the county death indexes which are on microfilm at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh (at the bottom of the page is a list of the counties included); second is a statewide index obtained from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Resources for the years 1968–1996; and third is a statewide index from the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics covering the years 1997–2004. There are no images for the second and third parts and only an image of the indexes for the first part.

When opening the search page for “North Carolina, Birth and Death Indexes, 1800–2000,” scroll to the bottom of the page for a list of counties that are included in this database; not all counties are included. This birth index is also available on *FamilySearch.org* for free.

FamilySearch

On the *FamilySearch* homepage under “Browse by Location,” click on “United States,” then on the left side of the page, click “North Carolina.” A list of North Carolina databases will be displayed. A camera icon next to the title indicates there are images of the records. Click on a database to search. Before putting information in the search boxes, take time to click on “Learn more” for a description of

the collection. Know what you are looking at. The county where your ancestor lived, married, or died may not be included in the collection.

- “North Carolina, Deaths and Burials, 1898–1994” at *FamilySearch.org* are mainly entries from the International Genealogical Index, which could come from a variety of sources.
- “North Carolina Deaths 1906–1930” on *FamilySearch.org* are images of death certificates.
- “North Carolina Death Index 1931–1994” on *FamilySearch.org* does not include images of the death certificates.

A nail or a screw? Transcriptions and indexes are the nails in our tree house but the original or actual copy of the original vital record is a screw. But remember, use cautiously.

Notes for Part 1

¹ Weynette Parks Haun, *Old Albemarle County, North Carolina Perquimans Precinct Births, Marriages, Deaths, and Flesh Marks 1659-1820* (Durham, North Carolina: privately published, 1980).

Weynette Parks Haun, *Old Albemarle County, North Carolina Pasquotank Precinct (County) Births, Marriages, Deaths, and Flesh Marks & County Claims 1691-1833* (Durham, North Carolina: privately published, 1981).

² Department of Environmental, Health and Natural Resources, Vital Records Section, PO Box 29537, Raleigh, North Carolina 27626

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Part 2: Marriage Records

“Love and marriage” did go together like a “horse and carriage,” but sometimes proof of the marriage can be difficult or impossible to locate. Marriage bonds or banns were required in North Carolina from 1741 through 1868. Parties to be married either filed a marriage bond in the bride’s county of residence with the clerk of court or posted banns in a church for three weeks announcing the intended marriage. Marriage banns are not included in the marriage bond index as these records are owned by the respective churches and are not public records.

The statewide North Carolina Marriage Bond Index 1741-1868 was compiled from the original marriage bonds in possession of the North Carolina State Archives in 1978 and is available to researchers on microfiche at the State Archives, on *Ancestry.com*, and on *FamilySearch.org*. Not all North Carolina marriage bonds were included in this index. Some were not in possession of the Archives when the index was created, and some bonds have just not survived. Be sure to look at the original bond. The bond can be used as evidence that a marriage bond was taken out and from this we assume that a marriage took place. If an entry is not found in the index, it is not evidence that a marriage did not take place in North Carolina, because the index is not complete.

The Granville County marriage bonds were obtained by the Archives after 1978 and a separate index to them is available in Brent Holcomb’s *Marriages of Granville County, North Carolina 1753-1868*.¹ Some of the Montgomery County marriage bonds have been included in the microfiche index but others were found after the index was compiled. They are listed separately in an abstract of Montgomery County marriage bonds compiled by Debbi Blake.² For example, the Montgomery County marriage of Calvin Macon and Mary Ann Boyd in 1867 is not listed in the North Carolina marriage bond index but is found in the separate Montgomery County index.³ The marriage of Isaac Macon and Martha Jane Dunn, 1865,

however, is in both indexes. Copies of bonds have been found filed in other miscellaneous places. For example, the marriage of James Birkhead and Charity Muse in July 1790 was not listed in the North Carolina Marriage Bond Index⁴ but a record of the marriage was noted in a North Carolina Supreme Court file.⁵

The North Carolina Marriage Bond Index is a useful tool. Instead of searching for marriage bonds county by county, a search can be made on a statewide basis. If a marriage bond is not found for a couple, a North Carolina marriage should not be discounted. Use this great index, but exercise care in your conclusions.

On occasion, marriages can be found in the county marriage register and not with the bonds themselves. Sometimes the marriage registers begin early in the county while other counties begin after 1868. The registers and bonds usually do not include the names of parents, but marriage licenses after 1868 usually do. Check the register to determine the date of the marriage, then the marriage licenses, often organized by date, to discover the names of parents. The marriage licenses after 1868 are available on microfilm at the North Carolina State Archives and most of the originals can be found in the individual County Clerk’s or Register of Deeds office.

FamilySearch.org

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“North Carolina Marriages, 1759-1979,” on *FamilySearch.org*, includes entries primarily from the International Genealogical Index.

Images of Davidson County, North Carolina Marriage Licenses 1867-1871, and death certificates 1914-1984, are available on *FamilySearch.org*.

Images of “North Carolina County Marriages 1762-1979” include licenses, marriage applications, marriage bonds, marriage certificates, marriage packets, and cohabitation registers, at *FamilySearch.org*.

Ancestry.com

When searching marriage records on *Ancestry*, just as on *FamilySearch*, it is best to know if the records needed are included in the collection.

- Under the search tab, click on “Card Catalog”
- Next, click on “Birth, Marriage, Death”
- On the next screen click on “USA”
- Click on “North Carolina”
- Click on “Marriage and Divorce”
- At the top of the list you will find “North Carolina Marriage Bonds, 1741-1868,” and “North Carolina Marriage Collection 1741-2004.”
- Click on “North Carolina Marriage Collection 1741-2004.” Scroll to the bottom of the screen and each county covered in this collection with the years covered is listed.

Notes for Part 2

¹ Brent Holcomb, *Marriages of Granville County, North Carolina 1753-1868* (Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1981).

² Debra A. Blake, *Montgomery County, North Carolina Marriage Bonds* (Raleigh, North Carolina, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1995). (Also found in the 1996 and 1997 North Carolina Genealogical Society Journals.)

³ Debra A. Blake, *Montgomery County, North Carolina Marriage Bonds* (Raleigh, North Carolina, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1995), 38.

⁴ North Carolina Marriage Bond Index 1742-1868, Groom’s Index fiche no.3, page 615, 1113, North Carolina State Archives search room, 109 East Jones St., Raleigh, NC. Attachment 5

⁵ James Birkhead and Charity Muse, marriage record (1790) North Carolina Supreme Court Files, Case no. 2580, James Birkhead et ux vs. Mildred Colson et al, June 1838, North Carolina State Archives Search Room, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina. Attachment 6