

Out of the Archives

a newsletter from the Washington State Archives

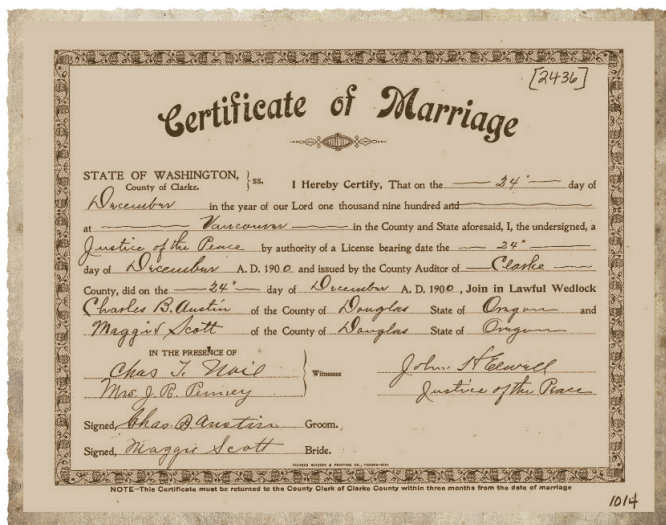
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Office of the Secretary of State

Are You Looking for the Right Marriage Record?

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The most sought after documentation in the Archives is probably the marriage record. Researching your family's past nuptials can be an incredible insight into your ancestry, and lead to myriad genealogical discoveries. You can broaden your search by learning the many forms in which marriage documents come.

The Southwest Regional Archives holds a treasure trove of different types of marriage records. The individual records can include different amounts of information. The type of information can vary greatly from the very basic, with just names of the nuptials, or can be very inclusive, with parents' names, places of birth, ethnicity, place of residence, and names

of witnesses. Researching brides can be very exasperating when the maiden name is not known. Witness or minister information is often overlooked as a strong clue, often it can lead to other family members and the ministers too can point to a church affiliation.

Researchers should not get fixated on the name of the record. They can be called by many names such as: marriage return, marriage statistics, marriage license, marriage certificate, certificate of marriage, marriage affidavit, or marriage register. The records can vary with how much information is recorded on the document. Not all counties use the same document or require the same information. The county and state laws are constantly changing and the records are as inclusive as the laws require. Currently, in the State of Washington you can apply for a marriage license and they are valid for 60 days, and the couple can marry after a three-day waiting period. There is a list of requirements to marry in the state of Washington, which can be located on each individual county's website.

Researchers should keep an open mind about where they might find their marrying couples. The nuptials can be very evasive when it comes to when and where they tied the knot. They can fool us. For example, I had an archive patron

whom was extremely sure her grandmother got married on a specific date in July, in Grays Harbor County, WA. It turned out that her grandmother did not get married on that date in Grays Harbor County; she and her husband took out their license in Thurston County, and were married in Pierce County. She was shocked to find this out because the family story handed down was different.

Some of our border counties see a lot of marriage from over the county or state lines. This can be due to one of the party to be married is under age, too closely related, parents do not approve of the marriage, one person is already married, or difference in religious affiliation. All of these scenarios happen more than one thinks. There is an old tale, from the Scottish town, Gretna Green, of underage marriages across the county line. The term "Gretna Green Marriage" came from the village, famous for runaway weddings. The 1754 English law, *Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act*, was seen as too strict compared to the Scottish Law. The Village of Gretna Green was conveniently two miles over the Scotland Country border. In Scotland, the marriage age was 15, with no waiting, while in England it was 21 and had many requirements. So people took advantage of the lenient Scottish laws. The same idea applies to impatient couples today—people do not want to wait to marry so they will cross a border if they have to.

Once a marriage record is found, you can expand to other records to gather information on a couple. There is the possibility of remarriage due to divorce or death of a spouse. When looking for a record on the digital archives, if you do not find your couple the first time you search, use spelling variances and nick names. Always keep an open mind. When researching a couple it is a good idea to know their age, residence, and sibling names.

Here are some examples of what a person can expect to find in our Digital Archives and in our five different branches of the State Archives. Not every county carries every type of record. It just depends.

Marriage returns typically have the most complete information. They have the required information spelled out line by line.

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MARRIAGE RETURN.

1. Date of license *June 11, 1906*
2. Full name of groom *Chas. W. Morris*
3. Age last birthday *24*
4. Color (a) *White*
5. No. of groom's marriages *First*
6. Residence *Kossil, Oregon*
7. Birthplace (b) *Harrisburg, Penn.*
8. Occupation *Book Keeper*
9. Father's name *Jos. H. Morris*
10. Mother's maiden name *Abigail C. Peters*
11. Full name of bride *Fannie Viola Smith*
- Maiden name if a widow _____
12. Age last birthday *20*
13. Color (a) *White*
14. No. of bride's marriages *First*
15. Residence *Wenatchee, Wn.*
16. Birthplace (b) *Gladwin Co. Mich.*
17. Occupation _____
18. Father's name *A. G. Smith*
19. Mother's maiden name *Emily L. Russell*
20. Date of marriage *June 13, 1906*
21. Place of marriage *Wenatchee, Wn.*
22. By whom married, and official station *J. R. Rufus
Pastor M. E. Church*
23. Names of witnesses and their residences:
 - No. 1 *Grace Smith*
 - No. 2 *Bennett M. Rees*

NOTE.—(a) State color distinctly, so race may be known, as White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Mixed White and Indian, etc.
(b) Give state or foreign country, so nationality is plainly shown.

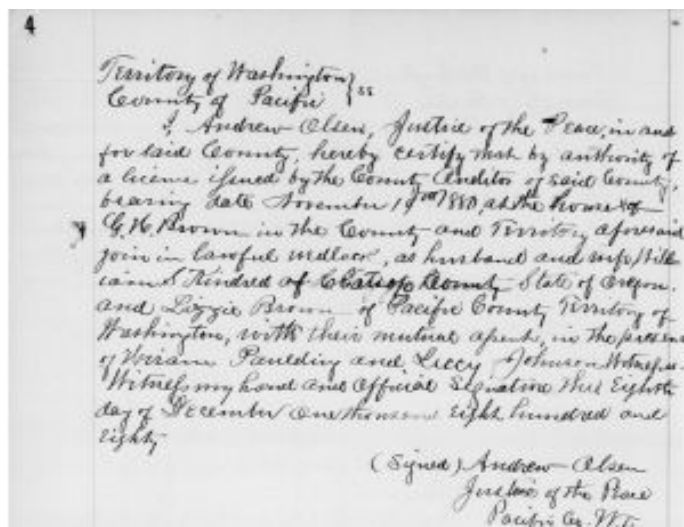
Register of Marriage Statistics is another marriage record which usually has complete information on both bride and groom. This record sometimes includes ages, number of previous marriages and occupations of the couple.

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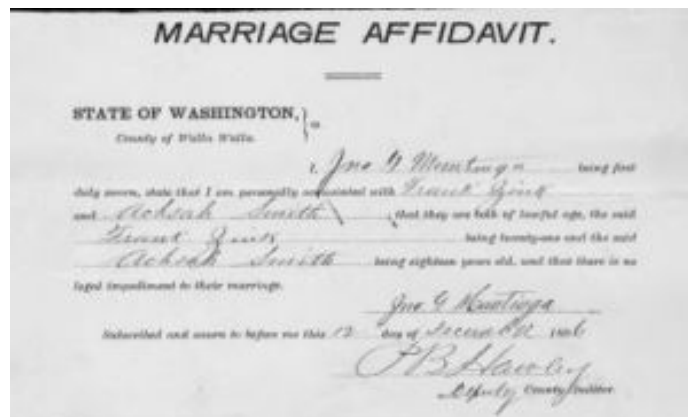
Register of Marriage Statistics for

AFFIDAVIT NO.	DATE OF LICENSE			FULL NAME OF GROOM AND GROOM'S RESIDENCE AND PLACE OF BIRTH (a)	AGE OF GROOM	COLOR OF GROOM	NO. OF PREVIOUS MARRIAGES	RESIDENCE OF BRIDE	NATIONALITY OF BRIDE (b)	INTERVIEWED BY
	APPROX.	DAY	YEAR							
1	Dec	26	1901	A. J. Thompson	27	W	1	Bella, Missy	Madison	Household
				Miss. Lillian Smith	20	W	1	Bea	Chicago	Household
2	Dec	26	1901	C. J. Smith	20	W	1	Baylen, Paul	Missouri	Household
				Miss. A. B. Anderson	20	W	2	Bea	Illinois	Household

Territorial records which are hand written do not follow consistent formats. They usually have minimal information such as bride, groom, person conducting the ceremony, and the location of the marriage.



Here is an example of a **marriage affidavit** with date, marriage couple, witness attesting to age of nuptials and person recording. Witnesses to a marriage can be very important when trying to put a family link together and are quite under-used.



More contemporary **certificates of marriage** can also include witnesses and signatures of the nuptials.

