



Delving deeper

#3: New Zealand childhood data

There is a range of data available about children but children, like women, are often hidden players in records. Once children have been born and their births registered, there is little recorded until they start school.

The exceptions surround stillborn, early death and adoption. If the child concerned was a still birth, there was no requirement to register the birth. Many old families had their own silent graveyards where such babies were buried, whether or not they had official graveyards. Once a baby breathed, registration was required, even if there was an early death. How well this was policed is not known. However, if the baby was buried in a family plot in a cemetery, there should be cemetery records for the burial.

Adoptions are much harder to trace, particularly where there is no formal documentation. Many early families had informal adoptions, especially to family members who could not have their own children. Another very common occurrence was for an illegitimate baby from an elder daughter in a family to be brought up by the biological mother's parents as the youngest child. In many cases, the registration of that baby was also under the biological grandparents' names rather than the mother's or father's. In such adoptions, it is almost impossible to work out who the father may have been. Family Bibles may give a clue as to just who the biological mother may have been but with the perceived shame associated with being an unwed mother, many family Bibles simply perpetuate family myths.

There are documents available for legal adoptions. Information on what can and cannot be released can be found on <http://www.dia.govt.nz>.

School Records

School Admission registers are a valuable source of information as they can list the date of birth (or age), full name, parent's or guardian's name and address, previous school attended, child's class at the time of enrolment and expected destination of a child leaving the school. Inspectors' Reports, class lists and Education Board records contain less detailed information, but may be the only record that has survived. Many have been deposited at Archives New Zealand Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch, or the Hocken Library in Dunedin. Archives New Zealand, Auckland office, has a collection of material from Native (Maori) Schools.

School magazines and jubilee booklets may contain useful information about pupils, teachers, the school and its locality and these should be available in libraries and museums.

NZSG's Kiwi Index CD is a good place to start. An updated version with many new records is due for release in 2015 and will be known as the Kiwi Collection. NZSG also has school records housed at FRC. School Records Officers can provide a research service of records housed in the NZSG collection.



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Newspapers are also wonderful sources of information on school activities and achievement. Of particular interest, especially if your ancestor was bright or able in a particular field, are the prize lists for school activities and academic achievements. Many of these lists are available through <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>.