



Getting started

#3: key life events- New Zealand civil registrations

Genealogists usually search for key events in an ancestor's life to provide a framework for their research and context to any information they can find. Essentially, that means we look for births, marriages and deaths, (often called vital records), before we can delve into the details of our ancestors' lives.

In New Zealand, the registration of European births and deaths began in 1848, with marriages commencing in 1856. The registration of Maori births, marriages and deaths did not begin until 1911. If you are searching for key life events before these dates, it is unlikely that there will be any written records in New Zealand.

It should be noted that birth and death entries from 1876, and marriage entries from 1880, contain more information than entries recorded before these dates. The Maori and European marriage registration systems were not combined until 1952 and the birth and death systems in 1961.

When a birth, marriage or death took place, the details were registered at a local or district registry office and a copy sent on to the Registrar-General's office. This also applies to marriages performed by a civil celebrant. Marriages performed by a minister of religion will have details recorded in the individual church's marriage register as well as at the Registrar General's office.

The indexes of historic births, marriages and deaths can be searched on-line at: <https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/Home/> Hard copy indexes can also be found at the FRC library, many public libraries and from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Please note that there are privacy restrictions on which records can be searched, usually depending upon the number of years since the key event occurred. Details of these search timeframes can be found on the site above.

Few details, apart from the name, are available on this index without paying a fee for either a certificate or a printout of the record so it pays to be fairly certain you have the right person/s before requesting the details. For instance, the index of a birth will give only the name of the child, a year and the names of each parent. The index of a marriage will give names of both the bride and groom and a year. The index of a death will give only a name, a year and an age if it was recorded. A folio and/or district key number may appear alongside the entry in the index. These numbers indicate the area where the event took place and can be helpful in locating both family members known to be in particular regions and eliminating those outside a specific region.

NZSG members can access data explaining these district keys from the website or from either Lowrie, Neill and Wood, 1990 *District Keys to the NZ Registration*



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Indexes. 1848-1920, NZSG, Auckland or NZSG, 1997 District Keys to the NZ Registration Indexes. 1921-1955, NZSG Auckland. Both indexes are available from the library at FRC.

Registration requirements changed over time so not all records have the same range of information. Printouts, rather than certificates, usually give much more detail.

That detail can sometimes be misleading or inaccurate. It must be remembered that the people giving the information to the registrar told that person only what they wanted them to know. If, for instance, a man wished to claim he was single and aged 27, he could because there were few mechanisms to check the validity of the information. On a death certificate, the person who held the accurate information is dead, so only second hand information could be recorded. It pays to double check.

Members of NZSG can search for key life events using one or more of the CDs produced by the society. These are available from the website shop or the FRC.

There is a range of CDs covering life events. While the Kiwi Index may seem like a good place to start, the marriages and burial locator CDs provide a wealth of information. Details on these CD allow you to eliminate a range of possibilities and narrow your search down to probables. Often, the detail will also allow you to narrow down locations. Using these CDs before applying for certificates and printouts will save you money.

NZSG also hosts a collection of certificates. Initially, these certificates were donated by members as surplus to their own requirements but subsequent indexing and cross referencing has made this collection invaluable to researchers.