



DIGGING DEEPER: VOTER REGISTRATIONS

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Voter Records & Registration

Voter registration records can be valuable to researchers, especially if they show birth dates, residences, and more. You may also use them to discover differences between men-of-the-same-name and find the dates of immigration and courts where your ancestors filed their naturalization papers. Ancestors voted between census years, and registrations may indicate where a person moved from or to.

[Genealogical Identifiers Found in Voter Registrations](#)

Many of the following *may* be found in voter registration and voter records:

- Name(s) and aliases, some full names
- Age and birth place
- Marital status
- Identifying marks
- Current residence and previous residences
- Number of years at residence
- Property
- Country of nativity
- Immigration date
- Court of naturalization for immigrants
- Political affiliation
- F.A.N. Club (see Bibliography, 9)
- Signatures

[Limited Voter Rights](#)

The right to vote was hotly debated since Revolutionary times. Women, African-Americans, Native Americans, people of Asian descent, and some religious groups were disenfranchised at one time or another from being allowed to vote. The laws varied from state to state. The last page of the syllabus is brief history of voter's rights laws, but the specific laws in your ancestor's area should be investigated.

Types of Voter Records

[Voter Registration Books & Lists](#)

Like many other early records, the earliest registrations of voters were recorded in ledger books. These are often separated by voting/election district or ward. Most were organized alphabetically by first letter of the surname.

Voter records may also be known as Electoral Rolls, Electoral Registers, Election Judges Books, Voting Registers, Registry of Voters, or Great Registers. Another term, "poll book" or "poll list" is common to the United Kingdom, but the term is sometimes used in the U.S. as well for voter registration ledgers.

Dig Deeper: Look at the first pages of any registry books for instructions to election officers that may help you analyze the information in the records more efficiently. Also investigate the backs of each register for unusual items, such as discharges from Alms Houses, Registration Oaths, or other notes about someone being able to vote after having been denied.

Voter Turnout Lists

Although rarer, these records are lists of the actual votes cast, by whom and for whom. They may also be termed as poll lists. Early lists from the 1700s may have been published; an example is *A Copy of the Poll List ... for the City and County of New-York...1761* and is online at [Ancestry](#). Many are not published, and can only be found in a town, city, county, or state repository. For example, the Baltimore City Poll Books are available through the [Baltimore City Archives](#) (a subsidiary of the Maryland State Archives) and run from 1804 through 1889 ([series BRG 11](#)). Although some books are missing from this series, they can be very valuable for a time when censuses did not record the names all the adult males in each household.

In times when it was difficult to compile and compare records, you may find that your ancestor's zeal to vote may have induce him to cast his ballot in more than one place in the city. Or you ancestor simply voted in the next district from where he lived because it was more convenient. Take time to check the other district voter lists surrounding your ancestor's own residence.

Voter Registration Cards

More modern records of voters were recorded on large pre-printed cards. These cards generally have more information than the registers. The sample on the right shows the voter's name, age, occupation, political affiliation, nativity, year of naturalization and the court naturalized in. They may have been used on a regular basis to identify each voter in an effort to avoid voter fraud (see the "Voting Record" at the lower section of the sample).

Be sure to check the backs of each card for more information.

HOWARD COUNTY - REGISTRATION OF VOTERS																								
LAST NAME (PRINT)			CHRISTIAN NAME (PRINT)			MIDDLE NAME OR INITIAL (PRINT)			AFFILIATION															
GRAHL			GEORGE			W.			REP.															
RESIDENCE STREET OR ROAD (PRINT)			POST OFFICE ADDRESS (PRINT)			SWORN OR AFFIRMED	AGE	COLOR	SEX (M/F/OTHER)	OCCUPATION														
LANDING RD			EIKRIDGE			Yes	67	W	M.	FARMER														
NATIVITY		TERM OF RESIDENCE		CAN READ		DATE OF APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION		CHALLENGED																
GERMANY		5 5		65		Yes		APRIL 22		52														
PLACE OF BIRTH		PRECINCT OR DISTRICT		COUNTY		STATE		DATE OF APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION		CHALLENGED														
GERMANY		5		5		65		Yes		APRIL 22		52												
NATURALIZED		DATE OF APPLICATION		COURT		QUALIFIED VOTER (YES/NO)		IF NOT QUALIFIED, WHY?																
Yes		1906		Baltimore		Yes																		
SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT FOR REGISTRATION						MARK		SIGNATURE OF REGISTRATION OFFICER																
George W. Grahl								Charles I. Prindell																
VOTING RECORD: INSTRUCTIONS AS ELECTOR VOTES. RECORD FACT OF VOTING WITH LETTER "V" IN PROPER SPACE BELOW.																								
YEAR	1942	1944	1946	1948	1950	1952	1954	1956	1958	1960	1962	1964	1966	1968	1970	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986	
SPECIAL ELECTION																								
PRIMARY ELECTION																								
GENERAL ELECTION																								

Accessing Voter Records

Online

Check multiple places: [Ancestry](#), [FamilySearch Catalog](#), [USGenWeb](#), Google, and other free and subscription-based genealogical websites. State archives are increasing their digital collections and many are including voter records. A directory of U.S. state archives is found online through the [Council of State Archivists \(CoSA\)](#).

County Courthouses & State Archives

Voter registration records are not often researched, and demand has not been high enough to put these at the top of digitization project lists. Most of them are likely to still be in their original format at the town, city, county courthouse, or state archive. Many of these repositories have online catalogs to help you find what you are looking for. **Be aware that some early voter registrations may be buried in county court books.** Although not often indexed, you should take time to investigate the county court records where your ancestor lived.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN VOTER REGISTRATION LAWS

DATE	LAW
Pre-1776	White male property owners only allowed to vote. Many Jews, Quakers, and some Catholics excluded from the vote or running for election.
1776-1828	Many states denied vote to persons based on religion
1777-1787	Women lost the right to vote in New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and then every other state except New Jersey.
1790	Naturalization Act of 1790 – white men born outside the U.S. allowed to become citizens and then granted voting rights
1792-1838	Free black males lost the right to vote in northern states including Pennsylvania and New York
1792-1856	Property qualifications gradually abolished across the country (white men only). Tax-payer qualifications still existed in some states.
1800s	Native Americans denied right to vote
1807	Women lost the right to vote in New Jersey.
1838	Female heads of households allowed to vote in Kentucky
1869	Wyoming first state to allow unrestricted suffrage to women
Ratified 30 March 1870	15 th Amendment – granted African-American men of legal age right to vote; “right of citizens...to vote shall not be denied ... on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Some states and districts imposed “Jim Crow” laws such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and intimidation to continue to refuse voting rights. Women of all conditions were excluded.
1879	Native Americans recognized as “persons” in the U.S., not necessarily citizens
1882	Chinese Exclusion Act – Chinese and other people of Asian descent barred from citizenship, and therefore voter rights and representation
1887	Dawes Act – Native Americans born on reservations were citizens of their own tribes and not American citizens. Allowed to become citizens if they gave up their tribal affiliations (right to vote still not guaranteed)
1896	Women’s suffrage allowed in Utah, then Idaho
1910-1911	Women allowed to vote in state of Washington and later in California
1912-1913	Women’s suffrage granted in Arizona, Kansas, and Alaska territory
1914	Women allowed to vote in Nevada and Montana
1917	Women’s suffrage allowed in New York, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. Arkansas and Rhode Island allowed limited voting rights to women.
1919	Michigan, Oklahoma, and South Dakota granted unlimited women’s suffrage
18 August 1920	19 th Amendment - Women granted the right to vote by Federal mandate
1924	Indian Citizenship Act – All Native Americans granted citizenship; many states restricted right to vote through property requirements, economic pressure, and violence.
1943 – 1952	People of Asian descent gradually allowed right to naturalize.
1961	Residents of Washington, D.C., granted right to vote in Presidential Elections
23 January 1964	24 th Amendment - Poll tax outlawed as voting requirement in federal elections
August 1965	Voting Rights Act of 1965 – Prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, or language minority group for American voters.
1 July 1971	26 th Amendment - Voter age lowered to eighteen
1984	Mississippi last state to finally ratify the 19 th Amendment