

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 481

Brighton, MI 48116-0481

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit #303  
Brighton, MI

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



The following is another article submitted to us by Tim Bennett. As many of our readers/members enjoy researching, we will periodically publish tips/articles on how to research different topics. Tim Bennett is the sixth generation owner of the Warner Homestead farm, located on Buno Road.

**“Research Tips — Vital Statistics”**

Primary source records are often considered the gold standard for acquiring ancestral information as these documents are created at the time of the event they record. Common examples include letters, diaries, and journals. A number of official government documents are also considered primary source. Besides census records, these include birth, marriage, and death records, also known as vital statistics. Not all primary source records are created equally and even vital statistics can show "anomalies".

Like census records, the integrity of data found in vital statistics depends directly on the informant and proper recordkeeping. It would seem that information found in birth, marriage, and death records would always come from close, reliable sources. However, when one Brighton resident attempted to get copies of her birth certificate, she discovered that she had apparently been born on two different dates roughly a year apart between records kept at the county and those held by the state. She decided to go with the latter as it made her a year "younger"! The name of another Brighton family member was different on the birth and death certificates. In this case, the family informant for the death certificate, the father, provided the name that was used throughout his life instead of the actual given name at birth. In another case, the death certificate of one extended family member who had no children was supplied by a neighbor. Even headstones have been found with the wrong dates, conflicting with newspaper obituaries for stones likely placed at a later time.

Registration of birth, marriage, and death records by government entities in Michigan didn't occur as an organized initiative until 1867. This registration process wasn't completely enforced and a new law in 1905 requiring better recordkeeping led to general compliance by 1915. Vital events were recorded in ledgers for deaths until 1897, births until 1905, and marriages until 1925 after which individual certificates were completed at the time of the event. Ledgers of varying availability kept both at the state and county levels are found online through genealogical research services with indexing as well as through state websites such as Michiganology.org.

Not all vital records are freely accessible and some are limited by law to the public. Prior to 1867, researchers must rely on a disparate set of church records and family bibles with some available online. While copies of more recent marriage and death records can be ordered from the county or state, Michigan law limits the availability of records on births within the last 100 years to authorized individuals related to the person in the record.

*References:*

*<https://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/public/michigan/bibs/michigan-vital-records-guide>*