Finding Clues and Evidence Regarding Marriage

**Marriage Index** - Whether online or in a book at a library/archive, these provide dates and the location of marriage. Since these records are indexes that are most likely entered from marriage certificates, you always have to keep in mind that transcription and typing errors can occur.

**Marriage Certificates** - This is the best document for establishing date and location of the marriage. Usually, they are completed and signed by the person performing the ceremony.

**Marriage Licenses** - These are tricky because they do not evidence that a wedding actually occurred, so further research is required to ascertain that fact. Please notice that on many licenses, the document indicates the number of previous marriages for each individual.

**Cemetery Records** - Although dates and location of marriage are not included, many times husband and wife are buried next to each other. This can be a good clue for research.

**Draft Cards** - The applicant enters a contact person and often parenthetically enters the word "wife." No marriage dates or locations are listed, but at least an indication will be provided that they were married, and the given name of the wife will be helpful for further research.

**Naturalization Records** - Exact marriage dates are included.

**Military Records** - For next of kin information, the spouse's name and contact information is included, if not the actual dates and location of marriage.

**Pension Applications** - Military or not, evidence of marriage is required for beneficiary certification, so a copy of the marriage certificate is required.

**Census Records** - You won't find marriage dates in census records, but an "M" or "S" will indicate if they are married or single. You may also find a "W" for widowed, or "D" for divorced. Often, an "M1" or "M2" will indicate whether they are on their first or second marriage. Questions such as "years married" or "age at first marriage" are helpful for tracking down marriage dates.

**Immigration and Travel Records** - Often the "Married or Single" question is included, which will provide a timeline.

**Death Certificates** - Marital status is included as well as the name of the surviving spouse, but not the date of marriage or how many years they were married.
Church Records - Just as churches maintain birth and christening records, marriage records are also often available.

Personal Bibles - Many families recorded marriage date information in the family bible.

Marriage Licenses and Other Announcements in the Newspaper - Marriage license announcements, as well as weddings and engagements, can be found in newspapers. This will frequently be found in the vitals section, society pages, women's sections, as well as the local interest sections.

Passport Applications - The name of a married woman's husband is included for early 20th century passports, but no other marriage information.

Divorce Records - Dates and locations of marriage are included in divorce records. Divorce indexes are usually not as detailed, as they do not include the actual marriage date, but only the number of years married.

Wills and Probate Documents - Although dates and location of marriages are not often included, the name of the spouse is typically available.

Cohabitation Registers - Created to identify and legitimize marriages and children born to those in slavery.

Personal Records – These include wedding invitations, photographs and programs; also family letters that may mention attending a relative's wedding ceremony.

Dowry and Pre-nuptial Documents - The name of the spouse and often date and location of marriage is included in these documents.

City Directories – Many directories include the spouse's name as a parenthetical, such as the wife of the husband, or a widow with the name of the husband mentioned.

Land Records and Tax Assessments – These are helpful occasionally, and will sometimes list the name of a spouse.