

Researching Ohio Adoptions

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What is the law in Ohio regarding adoption records?

In the state of Ohio there are three sets of laws, pertaining to three time periods, regarding access to adoption records containing identifying information.

Pre-1964

Persons who were born and adopted in Ohio prior to January 1, 1964 have access to their Vital Statistics file which contains their original birth certificate and the court papers pertaining to their adoption. The adoptee must file a special affidavit with the Ohio Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics (<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/vitalstatistics/legalinfo/adoptpri.aspx>) along with two forms of identification and a fee of \$20.00. This process can be completed through the mail. Lineal descendants of the adoptee may also access this information in the event that the adoptee is deceased; this process must be completed in person. Identifying information is sealed to birthparents, birth siblings and all others.

1964 – 1996

Identifying information is closed to persons who were born in Ohio and adopted between 1964 and 1996. In 1996, Ohio created an affidavit system (sometimes referred to as a registry). Through this system a birthparent or birth sibling may file an Authorization for Release with the Ohio Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics (<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/vitalstatistics/legalinfo/adoptfnl.aspx>). The adoptee, upon reaching age 21, may petition the Probate Court to check if there is a release on file. If there is a release or if the birthparents are determined to be deceased, the judge may release identifying information. The Probate Judge also has the authority to release information to the adoptee upon the showing of "good cause."

Post-1996

In 1996 the law changed to a standard of openness unless otherwise specified. At the time of surrender, the birthparents are asked to sign a form stating that: yes the birth certificate will be open, or no the birth certificate will be closed. If the birthparent is not present to sign the form, the birth certificate will be open. "Open" means that the adoptive parents when the adoptee is age 18, and the adoptee when s/he is age 21, will have access to the original birth certificate upon request. The birthparent is also asked to choose whether first names, photos and other items will be shared. <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/vitalstatistics/legalinfo/adoptaft.aspx>

Non-identifying information

In Ohio, "identifying information" is defined as: first name, last name, maiden name, alias, address, telephone number, social security number, place of employment, and other numbers used to identify the person. "Non-identifying information" includes social and medical history and everything not listed as identifying information. Non-identifying information is available in most cases to adult adoptees who were adopted prior to 1996 (and sometimes to birthparents), although the law is vague in this area. The 1996 law streamlines and clarifies the process for adoptions from that year forward.

Getting Started

- *Adoption Searchbook: Techniques for Tracing People* (1981) – aisle **5B**.
- *Faint Trails: A guide to Adult Adoptee-Birth Parent Reunification Searches* (1986) – aisle **5B**.

See Also

- *The Adoption Reunion Survival Guide: Preparing Yourself for the Search, Reunion, and Beyond* (2001) **History & Humanities Division, 362.73 B154ad**.
- *Lost and Found: The Guide to Finding Family, Friends, and Loved Ones* (2003) – **History & Humanities Division, 363.2336 D924Lo**.
- *The Ultimate Search Book* (2000) – **History & Humanities Division, 363.2336 UL47**.

Electronic Resources

- The Adoption Network of Cleveland Search Workshops as well as guidance and support during your research. They can be reached by telephone at 216.881.7511 or on the web at www.AdoptionNetwork.org.
- Search on-line Registries such as <http://www.adopteeconnect.com/> and consider adding your own profile.
- If you were born after 1964, consider filing a petition with any County Probate Court to search the Ohio Adoption Registry. For more information see <http://www.pregnantpause.org/adopt/ohregis.htm>.
- Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet Relating to Adoptions <http://www.cyndislist.com/adoption.htm>.