

Danish Church Records: Finding Ancestors through Witnesses

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Family History Library

Witness research can be a difficult research strategy to conduct but it is one of the best research strategies for solving brick walls and other similar problems in Danish research. There are two main uses for witness research: finding parents and previous generations, and searching for individuals who have disappeared (such as siblings, aunts and uncles, etc.). Each of these research objectives use a similar strategy.

Some Facts

Before talking about strategy, it is important to understand a few facts about witnesses:

- Witnesses were usually family members, close friends of the family, or someone of high status closely acquainted with the family.
- It was the witness' job to make sure the child was raised in the Christian faith if something ever happened to the parents.
- There is usually only 2 witnesses for a marriage.
- The number of witnesses for a christening has changed through time. Before 1683, there was no limit of witnesses; however, after the *Danske Lov* of 1683, the number of witnesses for a christening was limited to 5. Another significant change came with the *Dåbsforordningen* of 1828, which stipulated that there could be no fewer than 3 witnesses.

The Strategy

Witness research strategy comes in 4 steps:

Step 1: Gather the birth/marriage records

- Before you can research using witnesses effectively, you need to gather the birth/marriage records. If searching for parents of an individual, gather the individual's children's records (or the grandchildren of the unknown couple). If searching for an individual forward, gather the birth/marriage records of nieces and nephews, or other relatives.

Step 2: Extract the Witnesses

- Once you have gathered all of the records, extract the names of each witness, along with their residence, and any other identifying information (such as relations, occupation, etc.). Tip: use a program such as Microsoft Excel, or OneNote, to organize the extracted information.

Step 3: Analyze and Identify

- After you have extracted all the information about each witness, analyze the information and identify possible relatives/leads. Ask yourself "Do any of these witnesses have similar surnames to my individual?", "Is there any descriptive clues, such as residence, that would indicate a relationship?", If the individual you are searching for is female, ask, "Could she be represented as 'so and so's wife' rather than her own name?", and many other questions like these.

Step 4: Research the Witness

- The next step after analyzing and identifying is to research the witnesses that you identified as possible relatives/leads. You will need to follow proper research strategies in order to do this. One of the best steps to start this research is to look for the witness in the closest census.

Basic Words to Know

Danish	English	Danish	English
Af	Of	Indsidder	Renter
Alle	All	Kirke	Church
Dåb, Døbt	Christening	Kone	Wife
Faddere	Witnesses, godparents	Pigen	Unmarried girl
Forloverne	Witnesses, Engagers	Skrædder	Tailor
Fra	from	Snedker	Cabinet maker
Gaardmand	Farmer	Trolovelse	Engagement
Hjemmedøbt	Christened at home	Ungkarl	Bachelor
Hustru	Wife	Vidner	Witnesses
Huusmand	Cottager	Viede	Marriages
i	in	Væver	Weaver

Further Your Learning!

If you wish to learn more about Danish genealogical research, visit the following websites:

- ❖ FamilySearch Wiki, Denmark portal page, <https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Denmark>. This website has research tools, how to helps, learning articles and much more!
 - Every place name gazetteer
 - Danish to English, English to Danish word list
 - Website Links
- ❖ FamilySearch Learning Center, <https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/home.html>. This website has a variety of educational videos you can watch to learn how to do the research. Of most interest for Denmark are:
 - 5 Minute Genealogy, 21 episodes
 - Scandinavian Research, 1 video
 - Reading Scandinavian Gothic Handwritten Records, 3 videos