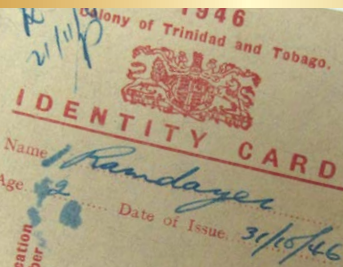




Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago



TRACING YOUR
Ancestral Roots
IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
• AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE •



NATIONAL
ARCHIVES
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Tracing Your Ancestral Roots



Tracing your family history can be absorbing and time consuming but very rewarding. You can find out more about yourself, your family and where you came from. It can be an emotional journey revealing exciting information but it can also unveil disappointing information, for which you should be prepared.

In Trinidad and Tobago, which comprises various races, ethnicities, religions and cultures, the search for family history is influenced by the various ways in which ethnic groups came to Trinidad and Tobago. This is complicated by the mixing of the races. A basic understanding of our history will assist in understanding our various origins and the likely places where the records of our ancestors may be found. It should be noted that the islands of Trinidad and Tobago were administered separately until joining in 1889.



FAMILY HISTORY BEGINS AT HOME

1. Document What You Know

Write down everything you know about yourself and your family – your parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents. Note dates and places for events such as births, marriages and deaths, religion, schools, qualifications, employment. If you do not know dates, try to estimate them.

2. Speak To Your Family

Family members are a great source of knowledge, particularly your elderly relatives. Your grandparents can tell you about their parents which can

provide access to years of early family history. Remember that memories fade and may not be reliable, and may need to be verified by written records. Bear in mind that there may be areas of their lives that they may not wish to talk about, so respect their boundaries. Record the interview if your relatives do not mind. It may be useful for your research and can become a family keepsake for future generations. Note any nicknames, house names or changes in name over time. Compare different versions of an event. Where stories overlap, there is likely to be some truth there.



3. Look For Physical Clues

Look around your house or that of your relatives for any documents, photographs and other memorabilia that may give you clues, for example:

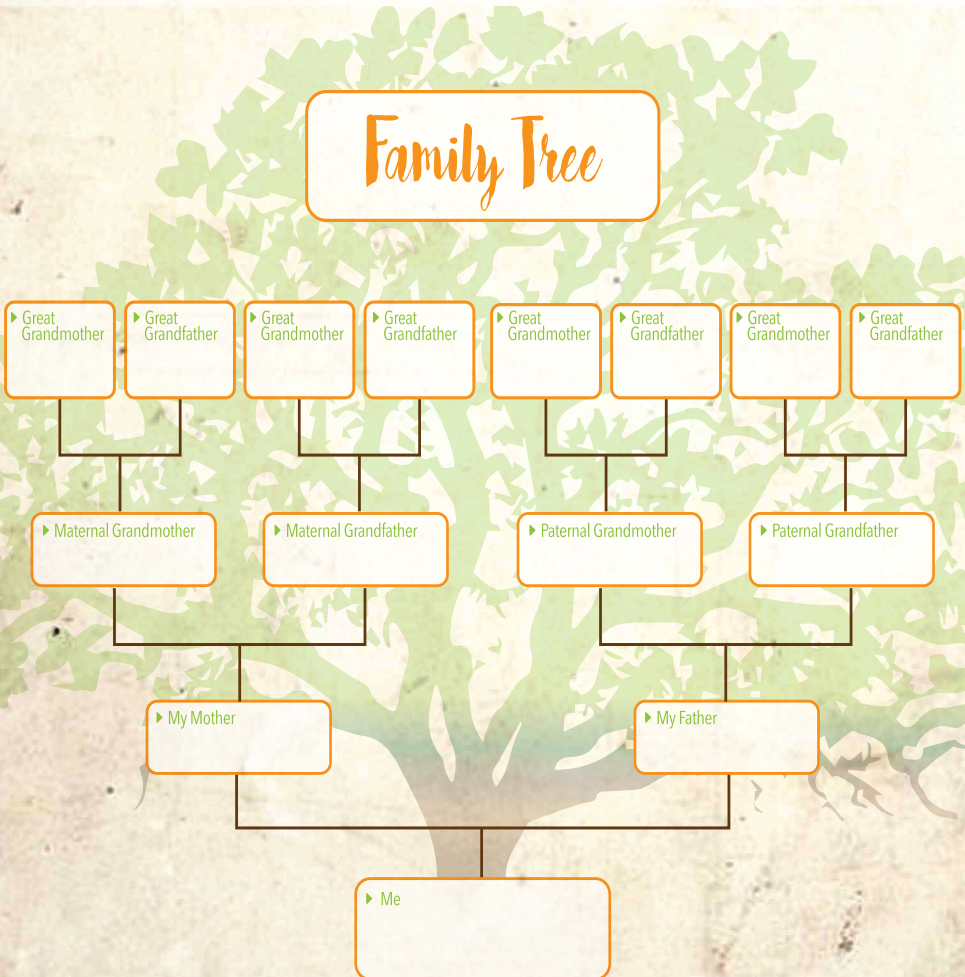
- ▶ Birth, marriage and death certificates (for names, dates and locations)
- ▶ Family bibles, Holy Koran, etc.
- ▶ Passports (for information on nationality, date and place of birth, photographs, etc.)
- ▶ Notices, invitations, cards, programmes and newspaper clippings announcing births, baptism, marriages, deaths or funerals of family members
- ▶ Wills (which may give names, relationships and locations of family members)
- ▶ Photographs (for clues about people, dates and location, and check behind for any written information)
- ▶ Deeds for properties (which may give names and location of properties)
- ▶ Postcards, letters and diaries
- ▶ Medals and other awards (which may give clues on military, education, sports or other achievements).
- ▶ If possible, keep notes and copies of documents where the information came from, in chronological order.

4. Organize Your Family Tree

Your family tree is a diagram of how all your ancestors are related to one another (See below). It should be arranged starting with your name and your immediate family. Vertical lines show relationships between parents and offspring and horizontal lines link all siblings from one set of parents. If you are married, your spouse sits alongside you. You may know little about some of them but this will help to identify your information gaps and guide further research. Update your family tree after you receive any new information from your research.

At the end of this process, you should aim to have the following information on your relatives:

- ▶ Official names used by the church, school or state
- ▶ Places – you need to know the name of the village or town in which they lived and related district/ward.
- ▶ Dates – or at least estimated dates based on ages.
- ▶ Ethnicity – understanding your ethnicity will help decide what sort of records to look for and when.



SEARCHING OFFICIAL RECORDS

Once you have collected as much information as you can, you are ready to start searching for more concrete evidence that will help fill information gaps in your family tree. You may find other sources of information in the official records of government, churches, cemeteries, archival institutions, libraries etc.

Note however, that not all records may have survived due to poor recordkeeping, care and storage, and disasters such as the fire at the Red House in 1903, which destroyed a large amount of the country's records. Also, not all records created during colonial times (Colonial Office records) are available locally. Some are kept at the National Archives of countries which governed Trinidad and Tobago at one time, such as Britain and Spain.

▶ Government Records

Births, Marriage & Death Records

Registrar General's Department

The Registrar General's Department is responsible for records of Births, Adoptions, Marriages and Deaths, as well as Land Titles, Wills, Letters of Administration and Company records. This is a good place to start your search. It should be noted that civil registration started in 1848 for Birth, Marriage and Death records. Prior to that it was recorded by the religious authorities, but it was mainly a record of baptism and marriages and some burials. The Church of the Immaculate Conception's records begin with baptisms in the year 1784 and Trinity Cathedral's records begin with baptisms in the year 1801.

Requests can be made for copies of birth, marriage and death certificates at the Registrar General's Department for which a fee is charged for the search as well as a copy of the certificate. If you do not have exact information on the document required, you can pay for the Registry to search the manual records. Each search form will allow you to search three years in one district. After the paperwork has been submitted for the

search, it will take about six weeks to obtain results and this information can then be used to order the relevant certificates.

Information required to complete the forms are: name of person, date of birth, father's name, mother's maiden name and place of birth. For copies of death certificates, you would require the name of the person, date of death and place of death. Information required for marriage certificates are names of groom and maiden name of bride, date of marriage, place of marriage and type of marriage (civil, Hindu, Muslim, Orisha etc). It should be noted that Muslim marriages were not recognized until 1936, Hindu marriages until 1946, and Orisha marriages until 1999. Prior to these dates, children of the union were considered illegitimate.

Blue Books

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, National Library and Information Systems Authority (NALIS), West Indiana and Special Collection, Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

A good start for tracing family members who were colonial civil servants are the Blue Books. They list all public employees and provide information on position, date of appointment, by whom appointed and annual salary.



Censuses & Other Listings

Colonial Office Lists / Civil Lists

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

Censuses usually provide statistical information on the population but there are a few which lists names, such as the census of 1851, available at the National Archives. Others such as the 1823 Return of the American Refugees (Merikins) are available in colonial office correspondence.

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

The annual Colonial Office / Civil Lists (1869-1980) provide information on government employees along with their salary.

Colonial Office Correspondence

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago (also CO 295 on microfilm), UK National Archives

Colonial Office correspondence (despatches/letters and reports) received by the Colonial Office from the Governor of Trinidad or Tobago are other records which may be of value in tracing family history. The correspondence may include petitions, reports such as the report and biennial Return of the State of the American Refugees (Merikins), land grants, and correspondence concerning the repatriation of military personnel who had been discharged overseas. Until 1951, each colony had separate original correspondence series. For Trinidad, the series is CO 295 (1783-1951). For Tobago, there are two series, CO 285 (1700-1873) and CO 321 (1874-1888), the latter referring to Tobago's union with the Windward Islands. After 1888, when Tobago is joined to Trinidad, the series CO 295 is used.

Land Records – Grants, Deeds, Assessment Rolls, Cadastral maps

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Registrar General's Department, District Revenue Offices, Survey and Mapping Division



In early colonial times, ownership of the land was vested in the Crown by right of discovery and settlement. The Crown granted land to prospective proprietors to assist in developing the colony. Under the Cedula of Population, the Spanish granted land to the French planters and this was recorded in the Land Grant. Under British rule, the authorities required returns to be made of lands granted, purchased or rented.

Assessment rolls are one type of return, which indicate taxes paid on the land. They are listed by counties and wards. They list the name of the owner of the land, the boundaries surrounding it, the size of the parcel of land, and the total house and land tax to be paid. Most of the assessment rolls are available at the warden offices, now called District Revenue Offices, while others are available at the National Archives.

Land deeds and cadastral maps are also good sources of information on family history as they indicate details of land ownership. The former are available at the Registrar General's Department and the latter at the Survey and Mapping Division.

Military Records

Chaguaramas Military Museum, UK National Archives

The Chaguaramas Military History and Aerospace Museum is a one-stop resource on Trinidad and Tobago's military history. There are some lists of nationals who would have served in the World Wars. Other official records of West Indians who would have served in the military services and in the merchant navy, are available in the records of the UK National Archives.

Newspapers, Gazettes and Journals

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, National Library and Information Systems Authority (NALIS), West Indiana and Special Collection, Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine



There are numerous newspapers and government gazettes that were published throughout the history of Trinidad and Tobago, which are excellent sources

for information related to obituaries, passenger lists of ships arriving and leaving, court case proceedings, notices of forfeiture of property, location and directors of businesses, and licences granted to them, as well as reports on meetings and events, such as legislative council meetings, town hall meetings. Some of the earliest newspapers include the Trinidad Royal Gazette, Port of Spain Gazette, San Fernando Gazette, Tobago Gazette, Trinidad Guardian and the Catholic News. There are also several community newspapers and journals dedicated to ethnic groups, labour, natural history and religious denominations which are rich sources for family history.

Wills and Letters of Administration

Probate Registry

Wills and Letters of Administration can be requested at the Probate Registry of the High Court in the Hall of Justice. Records begin in the year 1903. A copy of the death certificate is usually required to order the relevant documents. Records held at the archives of the High Court will take about three to four weeks for the files to be sent to the Probate Registry Department and then a certified copy can be ordered over the counter on the same day.

Yearbooks

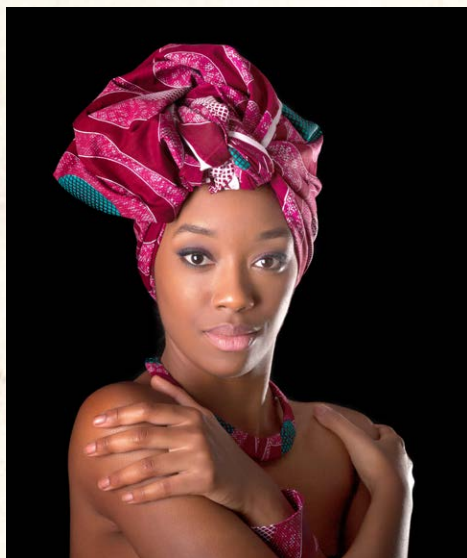
National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, National Library and Information Systems Authority (NALIS), West Indiana and Special Collection, Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Yearbooks contain a variety of valuable historical information from official records and reliable sources, on estate lists and owners, obituaries, businesses, churches, clubs, and other related social and economic activities in the colony from 1882-1969.

GOVERNMENT RECORDS RELATED TO ETHNIC ANCESTRY

► African Ancestry

African Enslavement Records



National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago (also T71 on microfilm), UK National Archives, Ancestry's online database, National Library and Information Systems Authority (NALIS)

Slave Registers- After the end of the Slave Trade in 1807, a registry of enslaved Africans was set up in Trinidad in 1813, the first in the Caribbean, and later in Tobago, as a means of keeping check of the "lawfully enslaved." The Trinidad Registers (1813-1838) and Tobago Registers (1819-1834) provide information on enslaved Africans and their owners. Name, age, gender, colour, country of origin, place of residence of the enslaved Africans as well as the name of his/her owner, are provided. Trinidad slave registers record family names and was arranged by family while Tobago's registers only record a single name. Some registers are arranged

according to plantations and some are arranged as unattached slaves, those not assigned to a plantation but to individual owners. Most of the slave registers have been digitized and are available via a database at www.ancestry.co.uk with free access after registering.



Slave Claims- The system of enslavement was fully abolished on 1 August 1838 and a sum of £20 million was provided to compensate slave owners in the British colonies. The records of the Slave Compensation Commission, arranged by colony, contain information which was used to compensate slave owners.

Report of protectors of slaves- (CO 300/19-33 on microfilm – 1824-1834) - The Protector of Slaves was established in 1824 to look into the welfare of slaves in Trinidad. The reports (1824-1834) include information on punishments, criminal cases, births, deaths, marriages, free baptism and manumissions.

Slave Deeds- This collection, available at NALIS, consists of four sets of Land/Slave Deeds, 1768 – 1819, three of which are related to the Rosebank and Sandy Point Estates in Tobago and Camden Estate, Couva.

▶ *Indian Ancestry*

Major Indian Indentureship Records



National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Indian Caribbean Museum

After the system of enslavement ended, plantation owners petitioned the Crown to address the labour shortages. Eventually, approximately 147,000 indentured labourers were brought from India between 1845 to 1917 to work on the plantations. Their arrival was documented across several registers. These include:

General Registers which contain the name of the immigrant, number, father's name, sex, age and estate to which he/she was assigned. Information is arranged chronologically and by name of ship.

Emigration Certificates of those emigrants arriving on a specified ship and in a particular year. Over 150 ships undertaking more than 300 voyages, arrived from India. This certificate provides the most detailed information on each immigrant: name, caste, depot number, father's name, sex, district and village (after 1859 only), occupation, next of kin, marital status, height and any identifying body marks.

Estate Registers which include the names of immigrants located on a particular estate, father's name, ship on which he/she arrived, date of indenture, amount paid to the immigrant.

Registers of Remittances to India show monies sent by indentured Indians to their relatives and friends in India, for whom more detailed addresses are given.

Other useful registers include the Register of Immigrants Returning to India, Register of East Indian Marriages and Marriage Declarations, Register of Bounty Immigrants, and other miscellaneous registers.

▶ *Chinese Ancestry*

Chinese Indentureship Records



National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

After the end of the system of enslavement, about 2,500 Chinese indentured labourers were brought in to help address the labour shortage in Trinidad. Covering the years from 1852 to 1866, these records are a compilation of indentureship contracts. They indicate the immigrant's name, the Province of China from which they originated, the ship on which they arrived in Trinidad, terms and condition of the contract, and the date on which the contract was signed.

In addition to the Chinese indentured labourers, larger numbers of free Chinese migrants came in the 1900s to join relatives or to escape poverty and war in China. This group was augmented by another

group of Chinese from Guyana, who had completed their indentureship. The search for information related to this group is however more challenging. Gravestones with Chinese language characters may be useful in tracing family ancestry as they often record the Chinese names of your ancestors, and the ancestral district and village from which the deceased came. These characters are crucial in tracing your family back to China. There is a section of the Woodbrook Cemetery, Mucurapo Road, Port of Spain where persons may be able to find clues to their ancestors.

Online databases such as ancestry.com and familysearch.org offer immigration records and a collection of traditional family history books called jaipu/zupu. These books can record your family's history across centuries although many vanished during a century of war and attacks by early communists.

▶ Portuguese Ancestry

Portuguese Immigrant Records



National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Regional Archives and Madeira Public Library, West Indiana and Special Collection, Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

These are available through publications of the Madeira Archives, and can be viewed at the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago. They include two volumes,

(in Portuguese) of indices of passport applications covering 1872-1900 and 1901-1915 respectively. The records in those volumes have been digitized and are being continuously updated online at their website: <http://abm.madeira.gov.pt/en/home/> which is bilingual. Records of the St Ann's Church of Scotland, which now includes the records of the Greyfriars Church of Scotland, are also valuable sources. Their microfilmed records are available at the West Indiana and Special Collection of the UWI Library.

▶ Other Records

Religious / Church Records

Before civil registration was introduced, births, marriages and deaths were recorded by religious authorities. Church registers recorded baptisms, rather than births, and burials rather than deaths. There are many religions in Trinidad and Tobago, so you may contact their places of worship about their records, if they have survived.

In the Catholic Church, records of baptisms, marriages and deaths are ordinarily maintained by the parish that created them and requests for this information can be made at the relevant parish. The contact information can be found at the website of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain: <http://catholictr.org/>

Archival Records

There are other records which are not available in Trinidad and Tobago but which would be valuable for tracing family history. They are housed in other national archives including those of the United Kingdom; Seville, Spain; Madeira, Portugal; France; Caracas, Venezuela and India. Some of these records may be accessed online via their websites.

Where To Find Records

► Government Records

National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

Cor. New and St. Vincent Streets,
Port of Spain.

Tel. (868) 623-2874

Email: enquiries@archives.gov.tt

Website: www.natt.gov.tt

Registrar General's Department (Civil, Land and Company Registry)

Registration House,

72-74 South Quay, Port of Spain

Tel. (868) 624-1660 / (868) 625-9971

Website: www.legalaffairs.gov.tt/

Survey and Mapping Division

118 Frederick Street, Port of Spain /

#1 Wrightson Road, Port of Spain

Tel. (868) 625-0427 or (868) 627-9201/4

Probate Registry

1st Floor, Hall of Justice

Knox Street, Port of Spain

Tel: 868-223-1060, 868-62-TTLAW /

868-628-8529

Email: cpiu@ttlawcourts.org

Website: www.ttlawcourts.org

Other government offices with possible sources of information include City, Borough and Regional Corporations, and the District Revenue Offices.

► Libraries in Trinidad & Tobago

National Library and Information Systems Authority (NALIS)

Abercromby Street, Port of Spain

Tel (868) 623-9673, (868) 624-1130

Email: nalis@nalis.gov.tt

Website: <https://www.nalis.gov.tt/>

West Indiana and Special Collection

2nd. Floor, Alma Jordan Library

University of the West Indies

St. Augustine

Telephone: 662-2002 Ext. 83506, 84244

E-mail: wimail@sta.uwi.edu

Website: [http://libraries.sta.uwi.edu/ajl/](http://libraries.sta.uwi.edu/ajl/index.php/caribbean-resources/west-indiana)

[index.php/caribbean-resources/west-](http://libraries.sta.uwi.edu/ajl/index.php/caribbean-resources/west-indiana)

[indiana](http://libraries.sta.uwi.edu/ajl/index.php/caribbean-resources/west-indiana)

► Religious Institutions

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain

Archbishop's House

27 Maraval Road

Port of Spain

Tel: 622 2691

Website: <http://catholictt.org/>

Anglican Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago

2 Hayes Street, St. Clair

Tel. 622-2863 / 622-7704

Email: diocesansecretarytt@gmail.com

Website: <http://theanglicanchurchtt.com/>

Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago (Archives)

PO Box 187, Paradise Hill,

San Fernando, Trinidad W I

Email: pctt@tstt.net.tt

Website: <http://www.pctt.org.tt/>

Indian Caribbean Museum

Waterloo Road

Carapichaima

Tel. 673-7007

Email: icmuseumtt@gmail.com

Website: www.icmmt.org

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NATIONAL ARCHIVES


OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

105 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain
Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies

Tel. (868) 623-2874 / (868)-625-1591

Fax: (868) 625-2689

Email: enquiries@archives.gov.tt

 National-Archives-of-Trinidad-and-Tobago

 www.natt.gov.tt