Finding U.S. Birth Parents

Adoption Laws

Before World War II, almost half of all adoptions were done privately, and sometimes there were few records involved. Adoption records in most states were open to the public or to "interested parties." After WWII, many states began regulating adoption more strictly, offering greater privacy protection to birth parents and evaluating prospective adoptive homes more closely. In the last several decades the adoptees rights movement has lobbied to open access to birth and adoption information to adoptees. The accessibility of information continues to vary from state to state.

Records

There are several records relevant to birth parent searches: birth certificates in state or city repositories, case files of adoption agencies, and records of the court that approved the adoption. To learn whether you can access case files and court records, contact the agency that handled the adoption. To search State statutes for issues related to adoption, see the website of the Child Welfare Information Gateway, **www.childwelfare.gov.**

If you have identified your birth parents and would like to conduct genealogical research on their families, please see for our fact sheet on "Starting Your Family History Research."

Research

Here are some suggestions for finding birth parents:

- Visit the website of the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse at **http://www.adoption.org/adopt/national-adoption-information-clearinghouse.php** The site includes information for adopted people from birth to adulthood, including access to adoption records, searching for birth relatives, and a directory of adoption professionals, including representatives of state government, attorneys, and reunion registries. You may also contact the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse at 330 C Street, SW, Washington, DC, 20447, phone (703) 352-3488 or (888) 251-0075, fax (703) 385-3206, e-mail naic@caliber.com.

- Contact the agency or lawyer that handled the adoption and request non-identifying information about the birth parents. This information can include facts about birth parents' health history, physical description, education, and religion.

- Contact the International Soundex Reunion Registry. This free, non-profit service connects birth parents and adoptees with matching information, with mutual consent: P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, Nevada 89702-2313, (777) 882-7755, **www.isrr.net**

- If you spent time in an orphanage, visit the web site of the Hebrew National Orphan Home Alumni, **www.kesh.com/hnoh .**

Jewish Adoption Agencies

For cities other than New York, contact the local Jewish Family and Children's Agency. The Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies website provides a list of all JFCA's, at **http://ajfca.org/**.

As mentioned above, adoption practices and legislation vary from state to state. New York State law allows the release of non-identifying information only, such as the parents' age at the time of the adopted child's birth, their religion and ethnic or national heritage, occupation, etc.

Louise Wise Services

Louise Wise Services was the most recent successor to several other adoption organizations, including the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee and the Jewish Girls Service. Louise Wise Services is now defunct as well. Spence-Chapin now holds the adoption records for private adoptions finalized through Louise Wise Services. Records for children adopted from foster care are stored at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Records Warehouse.

Spence-Chapin
6 East 94th Street
New York, NY 10128
(212) 369-0300
www.spence-chapin.org
Contact: Alisha Zukerman (212) 360-0287
azukerman@spence-chapin.org

NYC Administration for Children's Services
150 William Street 18th Floor,
New York, NY 10038
(877) 543-7692
Outside NYC: (212) 341-0900
Contact for records: Ed Greer (718) 499-3773

Jewish Childcare Association (JCCA)

The Jewish Childcare Association is the successor to:

Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Asylum
Children's Day & Night Shelter
Children's Services Bureau
Childville
Daughters of Zion Hebrew Day Nursery
Fellowship House
Girls Club of Brooklyn
Gustave Hartman Home
Hartman-Homecrest
Hebrew Benevolent & Orphan Asylum Society
Hebrew National Orphan Home
Hebrew Orphan Asylum
Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society
Home for Hebrew Infants
Israel Orphan Asylum
Jewish Children's Clearing Bureau
Jewish Youth Services of Brooklyn
Wayside Day Nursery

JCCA
120 Wall Street
New York, NY
(212) 425-3333
Contact: Leona Ferrer

For Further Reading

- Askin, Jane. *Search: A Handbook for Adoptees and Birth Parents* (Oryx Press, 1999)
- Carp, E. Wayne. *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Harvard University Press, 1998)
- Gravelle, Karen and Susan Fischer. *Where are My Birth Parents?* (Walker & Company, 1993)