

CLERK'S CORNER
VITAL RECORDS-Births
October 15, 2015

Vital records are the official certificates of births, marriages and deaths (hence the term "vital"). Since the 1800's, communities have kept records of births primarily for the purposes of tax collection and military information. Massachusetts was the first state to create a state-wide registry of vital statistics in 1841. Recently, our Commonwealth has begun to digitize the processing of births (2011) and death certificates (2014) in an effort to streamline and integrate all vital event registration across the State. In Massachusetts, there is a Department of Vital Records in the Department of Public Health, www.mass.gov/dph/rvrs, where these records can be found.

While trying to access these records through the state can be costly and slow, it is important to know that a certified copy of each birth is also recorded in both the municipality of occurrence and the municipality of residence. In Wenham, we have original certificates of vitals going back to the 1800's. We also have hand-written town records that show these vital statistics going back even further. Over the past few years, with monies received from the Community Preservation Committee, all pre-1965 vital records in Wenham have been preserved and sealed in archival plastic sleeves to ensure their permanency.

Certified copies of births are needed for many reasons; to prove age and nationality; to receive healthcare; to go to school; to play sports, to be adopted; to protect from under-age work or military service; to marry; to open a bank account; to get a driving license; to obtain a passport; to inherit money or property; and to vote or stand for elected office. In Wenham, certified copies can be requested in person or online for a fee of \$5.00 each.

Until now, Wenham lacked an electronic registry or listing of these vitals which made locating these records and doing genealogical searches challenging and time-consuming. We are currently in the process of creating a spreadsheet database of our town's vital records. We just completed the data input taken from the actual certificates of deaths from 1900 to the present. With the help of several residents, including some who participate in the senior tax work-off program, we are working to add the pre-1900 deaths to our database. A complete birth listing and a spreadsheet of burials in our cemeteries are other projects that are in the works.

The Wenham clerk's office is always looking for residents who wish to volunteer time to help with these kinds of projects. Also, as we look forward to a year full of elections, the Wenham Town Clerk will be holding some trainings for election officers and anyone else who may be interested in potentially working the polls. If interested in volunteering and/or attending a training, please contact the clerk's office at 978-468-5520x1 or dbucco@wenhamma.gov.

Dianne Kaplan Bucco was elected the Wenham Town Clerk April 11, 2014. For more information on the clerk's office, please go to www.wenhamma.gov or to www.facebook.com/WenhamTownClerk or follow @WenhamTownClerk on Twitter.