

Vital Statistics ^[1]

Vital Statistics

by Kyle S. Kendrick, 2006

North Carolina recognized the need for birth and death records during the [colonial period](#) ^[2]. A colonial act of 1715 required county officials to register births and deaths in their jurisdiction "till there be a clerk of the Parish Church." But the law was never taken seriously and few births were actually registered. In 1767 [Governor William Tryon](#) ^[3] noted that only two counties in the North Carolina colony, [Perquimans](#) ^[4] and [Pasquotank](#) ^[5], showed evidence that they had attempted to register births.

By 1879 county superintendents of health were required to make monthly reports of vital statistics to the State Board of Health. A subsequent measure enacted in 1881 directed all persons listing property for taxation to present the township assessor with the number of births and deaths in his family from the previous year. However, since this measure did not apply to citizens who did not own property, it excluded a large segment of the population. After the turn of the century, there was an increasing need for legal proof of birth and residence for a variety of reasons, such as social security programs and passport applications. Consequently, the [General Assembly](#) ^[6] responded with the statewide [Model Vital Statistics Law](#) ^[7], requiring county officials to register all births starting in October 1913.

Under this statute, a newborn had to be registered within five days of birth by the physician or midwife who assisted in the child's delivery. If an attendant was not present, it became the duty of the father or mother to report the birth. The 1913 law required that additional information be included with the birth record, including the date of birth, full name of the child, length of pregnancy, and birth weight and sex of the child. The certificate also had to list information about the parents, such as their full name, residence, race, education, age, birthplace, and occupation, as well as the number of living and dead children previously born to the mother, whether the parents were married, and if the mother had had a blood test for syphilis. The certificate was to contain the attending physician's signature and the name of the registrar. Citizens born before 1913 who needed legal proof of birth could apply for a delayed birth certificate at their local [Register of Deeds Office](#) ^[8] in the county of their birth.

The 1715 act was also not enforced with regard to death statistics, and once again only Perquimans and Pasquotank Counties made any effort to register deaths. Nearly 200 years passed before substantial legislation was adopted to record deaths. In 1909 a statute required the registration ^[9] of deaths occurring in cities with populations of 1,000 people or more, although [Raleigh](#) ^[10] and [Wilmington](#) ^[11] had already begun keeping vital records in 1885 and 1903, respectively. Registrars, appointed by local officials, were directed to issue a death certificate within three days of death or removal. Every month copies of the certificates were forwarded to the [State Register of Vital Statistics](#) ^[12]. As part of the Model Vital Statistics Law passed by the [General Assembly in March 1913](#) ^[13], all deaths were to be recorded by the county registrar beginning in October of that year. In most counties the local Register of Deeds records deaths, although in some counties the local [Health Department](#) ^[14] performs that duty.

Additional Resources:

Sources for North Carolina Vital Records: <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ghl/resources/genealogy/vitalrecords.html> ^[7]

State Register of Vital Statistics: <http://vitalrecords.nc.gov/> ^[12]

Subjects:

[Governmental programs](#) ^[15]

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From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[17]

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Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/vital-statistics>

Links

^[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/vital-statistics> ^[2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/colonial-period-overview> ^[3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/governors/tryon> ^[4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/perquimans> ^[5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/pasquotank> ^[6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/general-assembly> ^[7] <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ghl/resources/genealogy/vitalrecords.html> ^[8] <http://www.ncard.us/> ^[9] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-laws-and-resolutions-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-of-...1905/4113811?item=4119574> ^[10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh> ^[11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/wilmington> ^[12] <http://vitalrecords.nc.gov/> ^[13] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-laws-and-resolutions-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-of-...1913/1956418?item=2109063?item=2100324> ^[14] <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/> ^[15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/governmental-prog> ^[16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/kendrick-kyle-s> ^[17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->

