Researching Ohio Adoptions

Special Collections Division
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What is the law in Ohio regarding adoption records?
It depends on what type of file you are requesting (state or local), what details about the people involved in the adoption process you're seeking (identifying vs. non-identifying information), and your relation to the adoptee (if you're the adoptee or you're a descendant).

There are two types of adoption records and each provides different levels of information:
1) State records are held in Columbus by the Ohio Department of Health Vital Statistics (ODH) and
2) Local records, held by adoption agencies, attorneys, and/or County Probate Courts

Before your search for records begins, it's helpful to know how the information you're seeking is defined by the law. By Ohio law, *non-identifying information* is available to specific individuals connected to an adoption that was finalized in or before 1996.

Non-identifying information is sometimes called social/medical history or family history. This information is usually given by the birth mother at time of placement. The detail of non-identifying information in an adoptee's record depends greatly on if the birth mother knows and discloses it. The family history can include general information about the birth parent(s)/family, like ages, physical description, occupation, and details about birth mother's family of origin (siblings and extended family members) without providing names.

Other non-identifying information about the birth family might be included such as their heritage and ethnic background, educational level, general physical appearance, religion, occupation for birth siblings and extended family members. Description of circumstances that led to the adoption, like cause of death of the birth parents might be included. Similar information might be included about the birth father, and be given by birth father, but usually the birth mother provides this information as well.

Requesting access to State (ODH) adoption records

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Bureau of Vital Statistics in Columbus houses birth and adoption records of persons born in Ohio and adopted anywhere in the United States. Effective March 20, 2015, adult adoptees (minimum age 18) and/or their lineal descendants (children, grandchildren, etc.) may submit an application for a copy of their ODH adoption file.

An ODH adoption file contains the adoptee's original birth certificate and may contain other items such as adoption finalization papers. These files may contain identifying information, so *only* the adoptee and their lineal descendants can request it with the proper documentation.

Follow the link below for instructions on how to request an ODH adoption file:
https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/vital-statistics/adoption-file-information

Requesting access to Local adoption records

Adoption agencies, attorneys, and/or probate courts also hold adoption records. However, these records are usually restricted as they contain identifying information. *Identifying information* is defined as: first name, last name, maiden name, alias, address, telephone number, social security number, place of employment, and other numbers used to identify the person.

- The laws governing these agencies and regarding the release of *identifying* information they keep *did not change in 2015*. Adoption agencies, lawyers that handle adoptions, and probate courts who maintain adoption files are still restricted when providing identifying information of adoptees, adoptive parents/families, and birth parents/families.

For further details regarding access to these files, it is best to consult an adoption professional.

This guide is based on information provided in [Raising Awareness: Ohio Law Regarding Adoption Files and Non-Identifying Information](#) by Traci Onders, Adoption Network Cleveland. Retrieved on December 2022. For further information, please contact:

The Adoption Network Cleveland
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Fairhill Partners Collaborative Campus
Cleveland, OH 44120
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Recommended Electronic Resources

The Adoption Network Cleveland
www.AdoptionNetwork.org

Adoption Network Cleveland's Search Assistance program

Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet Relating to Adoptions
http://www.cyndislist.com/adoption.htm.

How to Research Orphaned and Adopted Children in Your Genealogy
By Sunny Jane Morton and Judy G. Russell
https://familytreemagazine.com/birth-families/adoption/researching-orphan-children-genealogy/

Ohio Department of Health Adoption File Information
https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/vital-statistics/adoption-file-information

Ohio Adoption Registry
http://www.pregnantpause.org/adopt/ohregis.htm.