

# Stayin' Local: Overlooked City and Town Records



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*Genealogists use records created by federal, state and county governments, but often miss out on city and town records which are closer to home.*

Although city and town governments may take a variety of forms, public proceedings, such as city council or town meetings are generally readily available. For example, most issues of the *Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago* are available online.

- Older issues (1866 – 1963) via the Internet Archive  
[https://archive.org/search.php?query=newberry "chicago \(ill\) city council"](https://archive.org/search.php?query=newberry%20chicago%20(ill)%20city%20council)
- Newer proceedings (1981-current) are on the city's website,  
<https://chicityclerk.com/council/journals.php>)

Local governments can be made up of many departments and commissions. Such departments may include:

- Board of Education
- Board of Election Commissioners
- Department of Health
- Department of Planning
- Department of Public Works
- Fire Department
- Park District
- Police Department

In addition to their own internal department records, they often submit annual reports to the primary governing body. Examples of these include:

- *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Board of Education*
- *Annual Report (Board of Education)*
- *Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the Sanitary District of Chicago*
- *Report of the Board of Police*
- *Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission*

(Note that the exact names of the reports will vary over time and from location to location.)

In addition to proceedings and reports, another source for information about government employees may be Civil Service records. Information about the residents of the city or town might be found in records such as:

- Local taxes
- Business licenses
- Burial permit indexes
- Building permits
- Municipal court records
- Coroner records
- City census records

Local records may be held in city offices, local archives, historical societies and libraries. For larger cities, look for neighborhood collections at the local library or historical societies. Online sources include:

- City/town website (also try Clerk's office, FOIAA information)
- Public and university library websites
- Google Books (adv. search: [http://books.google.com/advanced\\_book\\_search](http://books.google.com/advanced_book_search) )
- Internet Archives (<https://archive.org/> )
- HathiTrust Digital Library (<http://www.hathitrust.org/> )

The site *Cities 101* provides general information about city governments and how they work. It is a public resource developed by the National League of Cities to introduce and explain municipal government in the United States. There are many ways cities are created, with considerable variation in their power, authority and record-keeping.

<http://www.nlc.org/build-skills-and-networks/resources/cities-101>

In Chicago, check the following repositories for these types of records:

- Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Municipal Collection
- The Newberry
- Chicago History Museum
- Illinois Regional Archives Depository (IRAD at Northeastern Illinois University)
- University of Illinois at Chicago, Daley Library