

MAGIC SYMBOLS IN ILLINOIS

TIP 1: If you are trying to find babies born in Cook County, Illinois, from 1871 to 1916, look out for ampersands – & – in the index column for middle initial.

TIP 2: When you are seeking surnames that have apostrophes or spaces in Illinois statewide death indexes from 1916 to 1950, watch out for the "at" symbol – @ – or other unusual characters stuck in place of the apostrophe or space.

As mentioned in previous Quirky Genealogy Tip Sheets (January and March 2017), agencies that collect or maintain vital records establish indexing procedures suitable for their purposes at the time—not for future researching by genealogists or the general public. Also, early computer programs used by an agency may have had delimited data fields and/or prohibited certain characters or a blank space from being used in an index. Two examples of this are in [Illinois vital records indexes](#).

QUIRK no. 1: The index to birth records of Cook County, Illinois, 1871-1916, sometimes lists a father's first name initial plus the mother's first name in the column designated for first name, then shows an ampersand (&) for the middle initial. Most likely, the original birth certificate or registration did not show a first name for the newborn. So, to compensate, the indexing system described above was developed to assist vital statistics clerks in finding the unnamed children.

Example 1 – Index to Birth Records, Cook County, Illinois, 1871-1916:

COOK COUNTY INDEX TO BIRTH RECORDS ILLINOIS BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS FROM 1871 TO 1916					
INDIVIDUALS NAME			--BIRTH DATE--		IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	INITIAL	MONTH	DAY	YEAR
WEST	GROVER	G	NOV	29	1908
WEST	H ALICE	&	APR	18	1887
WEST	H BERTHA	&	MAR	16	1905
WEST	H ELIZABET	&	OCT	04	1902
WEST	H LUCY	&	APR	04	1895
WEST	H MAGGIE	&	DEC	25	1894
WEST	H MARGARET	&	MAY	14	1890
WEST	H MARGERAT	&	FEB	28	1902
WEST	H MARGERET	&	JUL	02	1908
WEST	HALSEY	C	MAY	01	1902
WEST	HANNAH	L	MAY	25	1883

DETAIL:

H and Maggie/Margaret West appear to have been parents of at least four children born in Chicago.

FIRST NAME		INITIAL		--BIRTH DATE--	
				MONTH	DAY
GROVER		G		NOV	29
H ALICE		&		APR	18
H BERTHA		&		MAR	16
H ELIZABET		&		OCT	04
H LUCY		&		APR	04
H MAGGIE		&		DEC	25
H MARGARET		&		MAY	14
H MARGERAT		&		FEB	28
H MARGERET		&		JUL	02
HALSEY		C		MAY	01
HANNAH		L		MAY	25

Copies of birth records may be obtained from Cook County Clerk's Office in Chicago, or viewed at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City on microfilms, which may be rented and sent to a Family History Center or other institution that accepts orders through <https://familysearch.org>.

QUIRK no. 2: The Illinois Statewide Death Index, 1916-1950, online (www.cyberdrive.il.sos.com) and on microfiche (1916-1938), has unusual and inconsistent character substitutions for **surnames that have two capital letters** in them: names with apostrophes (D'Arcy, O'Neil, etc.), spaces between letters (Le Grande, Von Bank, etc.), or start with Mac or Mc. Various symbols, usually @, were sometimes used in place of the apostrophe or space. ----->

Examples – On Family History Library microfiche 6016862, no. 0125, page 23,884, the names in the illustration on the right were listed alphabetically *after* the surnames that start with the same letter but have a space in them:

Last Name	First Name	Middle
162 records are displayed. The maximum number displayed		
@@ROURKE	AGNES	
@@ROURKE	ALFRED	M
@@ROURKE	ANDREW	
@@ROURKE	ANDREW	
@@ROURKE	ANNA	
@@ROURKE	ANNA	
@@ROURKE	ANNIE	

When searching online, if at first you don't succeed, check the "Tips on Using the Database of Illinois Death Certificates, 1916-1950," on the website for details. An example of some of the results for one surname is shown on the left.



O TOOLE
 O TWINE
 O VERAEE
 O VERALL
 O WEARA
 O WEIR
 O WENS
 O ZANITH
 O<BRIEN
 OXCONNER
 OXCONOR
 OXCONOR
 O#BRIEN
 O#CALLAHAN
 O#CONNELL
 O#CONNOR
 O#NEILL
 O#TOOLE
 O@ DONNELL
 O@ REILLY
 O@ANDREA

BONUS SYMBOL MAGIC: Marriage and Death/Obituary Indexes in Newspapers

Most Cook County vital records were lost in the 1871 Chicago Fire. Fortunately, Sam Fink reviewed many of the extant Chicago newspapers for marriages, 1833-1871, as well as deaths, 1856-1889, and compiled an extensive index. His book, available on Family History Library microfilm 1321939, used symbols to identify the titles in which a notice appeared:

= Chicago Democrat/Press \$ = Chicago Evening Journal
 @ = Chicago Daily News % = Chicago Times * = Chicago Tribune

While not every marriage that took place in Chicago before 1872 was publicized in the papers, and foreign language publications were not included, this index is still a helpful guide for researchers of ancestors in the Windy City.

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Next Month: Loco Locales

This fact sheet is a public service to help people find records about their ancestors, particularly when the records have major errors and quirks that can mislead and disappoint researchers in their pursuits. Please feel free to share this with friends, fellow kin-seekers, and family history and genealogical organizations.

Kin Hunters is a genealogy and family history research service owned by Evelyn Roehl, who has been hunting for ancestors as a livelihood since 1995. She loves finding out where immigrant ancestors came from and provides research, translation, transcription, and data entry for individuals; heir searches for agencies and law firms; as well as presentations for genealogical societies and family reunions. She has been a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists for twenty years. Contact her by e-mail, kinhunters@gmail.com, or phone 206-634-1709.