



# Online Background Searching In Colorado—Part II

Part I of this article appeared in the May 2003 issue.<sup>1</sup> It covered such topics as locating basic contact information for a person, “Googling” (using Google and other search engines to locate Internet postings concerning the person), and conducting news article searches. It also contained a brief discussion of some of the federal laws that limit the accessibility of certain types of information, such as a person’s medical and financial records.

This Part II provides guidelines for obtaining comprehensive public records reports on a person, as well as for using free and fee-based online sources to collect specific types of information about Colorado residents, such as vital (birth, death, marriage, and divorce), asset, and occupation-related records. Part III, to be published in the November 2003 issue, will provide online sources for obtaining information about a person’s court and law enforcement records. Keep in mind that each state has different laws regarding the handling and release of public records, so the availability of similar records in other states may vary.

## Obtaining Comprehensive Public Records Reports

For researchers who need to gather as much information as possible about an individual, one of the best ways to start is by retrieving a comprehensive public records report on the person. These reports pull data from a number of public records databases into a single document.

Researchers using Lexis/Nexis™ can retrieve comprehensive public records reports on individuals or companies by using the SmartLinx™ product.<sup>2</sup> Those using Westlaw® can use the Dossier Report Manager product to obtain similar comprehensive reports on individuals and business entities.<sup>3</sup> Many other online information providers, including ChoicePoint and Accurint,<sup>4</sup> also offer comprehensive public records reports on individuals and companies.

Among the types of information that may be included in such reports are any name variations for a person (such as a married name, an alias, or misspelled versions of the name that appear in public records documents), past and current addresses, past and current telephone numbers, assets, bankruptcy information, judgments and liens, associated people, or business entities. It is important to note that the data provided in comprehensive reports offered by different companies may vary significantly, so researchers should be sure to investigate which types of public records will be included in the report before conducting a search.

Researchers who want to conduct a thorough background search also should enter the person’s name at <http://www.google.com> and conduct a search for any news articles mentioning the person. Collecting information from a variety of sources helps the researcher assess the validity of the information gathered. It is not uncommon to find inaccuracies in public records entries because of mistakes sometimes made during the data entry process.

## Locating Vital and Marital Information

In many cases, researchers may not need comprehensive information on an individual, but only a specific piece of information, such as the person’s birth date or marital status. The following sections provide sources for locating specific types of information.

### *Date of Birth*

Several online sources may provide a person’s date of birth. The Vital Records Section of the Colorado Department of Health and Environment (“CDHE”) provides a website containing information about ordering birth records for people born in Colorado from 1910 to the present: <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hs/birth.html>.

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However, there are limitations on who is eligible to receive a birth certificate. Under Colorado law, the person ordering the birth certificate must be able to demonstrate "a direct and tangible interest in the record."<sup>5</sup> Those who can demonstrate such an interest can order an official birth certificate online by clicking the "online" link on the above website.

If researchers are not eligible to receive a copy of the birth certificate, they should try searching the voter registration files in Lexis/Nexis to get the person's voter registration record, which provides the date of birth of the voter. A person's date of birth also may be included as part of the SmartLinx record in Lexis/Nexis or a Person Profile Report in Westlaw. If the person's date of birth cannot be found in the voter registration files in Lexis/Nexis, try checking the following website: <http://www.Anybirthday.com>. This is not an official or authoritative site, however, so any information found there should be verified through another source, if possible.

### ***Marriage and Divorce Information***

For those who need to locate the name of a person's spouse or ex-spouse, the CDHE provides a website where Colorado marriage and divorce/dissolution information can be searched free of charge: <http://www.sctc.state.co.us/marriages/default.aspx>. The marriage data cover the period from 1975 to the present, whereas the divorce/dissolution data cover the period from 1968 to the present. The search results for marriages include the name of the bride and the groom, the county in which the marriage license was issued, and the date that the marriage license was issued. The search results for divorces/dissolutions include the same information, as well as the decree type (divorce or dissolution) and the docket number for the court action.

When searching online public records databases, it is important to remember that online records are not considered "official" records. Researchers must obtain the official records by contacting the agency responsible for handling these records. For example, official Colorado marriage records are located at the clerk and recorder's office in the county in which the license was issued, whereas official divorce/dissolution records are located at the district court in which the divorce decree was finalized.

### ***Death Information***

To verify that someone has died, researchers can check the Social Security Death Index ("SSDI") for a death record. The following website is a link to the RootsWeb portal for the SSDI, which offers free searching of these data: <http://ssdi.genealogy.rootsweb.com>. Other websites also provide access to the SSDI, but some of them charge fees for searching.

Official death certificates for Colorado residents can be obtained from the Vital Records section of the CDHE. As with birth certificates, there are restrictions on who is eligible to receive a death certificate.<sup>6</sup> For information about ordering an official death certificate, visit <http://www.cdph.state.co.us/hs/birth.html>.

### ***Locating Assets***

To locate a person's assets, researchers need to obtain access to real property and other property records. A few helpful tips follow.

### ***Real Property: Houses, Condominiums, Or Commercial Properties***

To locate information about properties owned by a person, researchers can use the files in Lexis/Nexis or Westlaw that contain real property records, such as mortgage, deed transfer, and tax assessor records. In addition to the address for the property, these files can provide information about the assessed value of the property and the price paid by the buyer, depending on which files the researcher uses.

These files do not provide coverage of real property data for all Colorado counties. Real property data for smaller, rural counties may not be included, so if researchers are trying to locate information about a property in a specific county, they should check the coverage of the file before conducting a search to make sure the county's real property data are included. Contact Lexis/Nexis or Westlaw for more information about the coverage of individual real property files.<sup>7</sup> Although real property files are available for individual U.S. states (including Colorado), if the person in question may own properties in more than one U.S. state, researchers may want to consider conducting a search in a combined real property file.

### ***Other Assets: Motor Vehicles, Airplanes, Boats***

Various assets files in Lexis/Nexis and Westlaw provide comprehensive information about a person's assets, including both real property and other assets. However, if researchers need to know only if the person owns a particular type of car, they should use the Division of Motor Vehicle files in Lexis/Nexis or Westlaw. Searching one of these files will be less expensive than searching in a comprehensive assets file.

Before searching a Division of Motor Vehicles file, researchers will be asked to acknowledge that they have a permissible use for this information because its use is restricted under the Driver's Privacy Protection Act.<sup>8</sup> Most practitioners will select the permissible use relating to legal proceedings or legal research. The person's motor vehicle registration should contain information about the year, model, type, and manufacturer of the vehicle, but it will not include license plate information for the vehicle.

Lexis/Nexis and Westlaw also have files that contain information about any airplanes or boats owned by an individual. Those files consist of boat registration records from the U.S. Coast Guard and airplane registration records from the Federal Aviation Administration.

### ***Locating Military and Occupational Information***

Researchers may need information on whether someone has served in the armed services, has a professional license, or is a registered agent or corporate officer. Also, finding out whether a person is a licensed attorney is a common research request. The following sections discuss these types of searches.

#### ***Military Records***

Researchers may need to find out whether someone has served in the military (or to verify military service claimed by a person). According to *Zimmerman's Research Guide*,<sup>9</sup> the National Personnel Record Center ("NPRC") maintains military service records for men and women who have served during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Those who want to obtain copies of the records can file an SF-180 Form (Request

Pertaining to Military Records) with the NPRC. Instructions for filing this form can be found at the following website: [http://www.archives.gov/research\\_room/obtain\\_copies/veterans\\_service\\_records.html](http://www.archives.gov/research_room/obtain_copies/veterans_service_records.html).

Researchers who do not have time to wait for an SF-180 Form to be processed can try calling the NPRC at (314) 801-0800 to request the information they need. For those who do not have time to do their own research, commercial services will retrieve copies of military records for a fee. A couple of these are Judgment Day Information Services, located at <http://www.militarysearch.org>, and MilitaryUSA.com, located at [http://www.militaryusa.com/us\\_locator.html](http://www.militaryusa.com/us_locator.html).

### Professional Licenses

If researchers suspect the person might have a professional license in a particular occupational field (or would like to verify that a person holds a particular license in Colorado), they can use the Automated Licensure Information System Online ("ALISON") database provided by the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies ("DORA"): <http://www.dora.state.co.us/library/databases3.htm>. This database provides information about people working in occupations licensed by DORA's Division of Registrations, which includes plumbers, pharmacists, nursing home administrators, veterinarians, social workers, architects, and many other professions. The DORA website also provides access to databases that contain information about insurance and real estate agents in Colorado.

### Registered Agents and Corporate Officers

To find out if a person is a registered agent for a Colorado business entity, researchers can run that person's name through the Colorado Secretary of State's registered agent database: <http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/business/main.htm>. If the person is an officer for a company (but not its registered agent), researchers may want to search for the person's name in the Lexis/Nexis or Westlaw files that contain information about Colorado business entities. In Lexis/Nexis, try searching the Colorado Corporation and Limited Partnership Information file. In Westlaw, try searching for the person's name in the Colorado Corporate Records & Business Registrations file.

### Attorney Licenses

To find out if a person is licensed to practice law in Colorado, researchers should check the Colorado Board of Law Examiners' searchable database of Colorado attorneys: <http://www.coloradosupremecourt.com/Search/AttSearch.asp>. If the person in question may be licensed to practice law in another state, researchers can find out which state by conducting a search of Martindale.com, a national directory of attorneys: <http://martindale.com/xp/Martindale/home.xml>.

### Conclusion

This is the second part of a three-part series on researching public records and other types of publicly available information (excluding court and law enforcement records). Part III of this

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article, which will appear in the November 2003 issue, will provide instructions for using online sources to obtain information about an individual's law enforcement and court records.

### NOTES

1. See Colorado Association of Law Libraries, "Online Background Searching in Colorado—Part I," 32 *Colorado Lawyer* 45 (May 2003).
2. LexisNexis, (800) 543-6862; SmartLinx, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/smartlinx/default.asp>.
3. Westlaw, (800) 937-8529; Dossier Report Manager (P-PROFILE for persons; CO-RECSCAN for company records), <http://west.thomson.com/documentation/westlaw/wlawdoc/wlres/prdoss02.pdf>.

4. For more information about background searching products available from ChoicePoint and Accurint, visit the following websites: <http://www.choicepointonline.com>; <http://www accurint.com>.

5. See Colorado's birth certificate law at CRS § 25-2-117 (2002).
6. See Colorado's death certificate law at CRS § 25-2-117 (2002).
7. See phone numbers for Lexis/Nexis and Westlaw, *supra*, notes 2 and 3.
8. Driver's Privacy Protection Act of 1994, 18 U.S.C. § 2721 (2000), amended by Act of Oct. 23, 2000, 18 U.S.C.A. § 2721 (West.Supp. 2003).
9. See "Military Records" at <http://www.llrx.com/guide-gen/4/614.html>. ■

### Reduced Hours for Eighteenth Judicial District Court Clerk's Offices (Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert, and Lincoln Counties) Effective July 2003

Below is a list of location and hours Eighteenth Judicial District Court Clerk's Offices are open to the public, Monday through Friday.

**Arapahoe County Judicial Center:** 8:00 A.M.—NOON; 1:15—4:00 P.M.

**Aurora County Courts:** *Counter*—8:00 A.M.—NOON; 1:15—4:00 P.M. • *Telephone*—8:00 A.M.—NOON; 1:30—4:00 P.M.

**Douglas County Combined Courts:** *Counter*—8:00 A.M.—NOON; 1:15—4:00 P.M.

*Telephone:* 8:30 A.M.—NOON; 1:30—4:00 P.M. • *File Retrieval:* 8:30 A.M.—NOON; 1:30—4:00 P.M.

**Littleton County Courts:** *Counter*—8:00 A.M.—NOON; 1:15—4:00 P.M. • *Telephone:* 8:00 A.M.—NOON; 1:30—4:00 P.M.

**Elbert/Lincoln County Combined Courts:** 8:00 A.M.—4 P.M.

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### University of Colorado Center of the American West Seeks Assistance With Colorado Legal History Project

The Center of the American West at the University of Colorado, Boulder ("CU"), in collaboration with the Department of History, CU School of Law, and the Faculty of Federal Advocates, is engaged in the "Colorado Legal History Project" ("Project"), an effort to identify and catalog existing historical resources related to the history of law and jurisprudence in the state of Colorado. At the nexus of the mountains, plains, and desert regions of the American West, Colorado continues to play a significant role in shaping and defining the larger legal trends in the region. Accordingly, the Project collaborators are undertaking a broad exploration of the legal history of Colorado that will enable lawyers and judges to practice better law, while helping legal scholars understand more fully the past development and future course of law and jurisprudence in the American West.

The Project collaborators are seeking the aid of Colorado Bar Association members in identifying resources and uncovering evidence and stories related to Colorado's legal past. For information on how to contribute or about the Project itself, please contact Tom Romero II, Western Legal Studies Fellow, Center of the American West, by phone: (303) 492-5131 or e-mail: [ttromero@colorado.edu](mailto:ttromero@colorado.edu).